

**THE ROLE OF FACEBOOK AND X AS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ON VOTERS
BEHAVIOUR IN 2023 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL
TERRITORY, (FCT), NIGERIA**

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**Being a Dissertation Submitted to the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation title “The Role of Facebook and X as Social Media Platforms on Voters Behaviour in 2023 National Assembly Election In Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria”. It is an original work and no part of it has been presented for the award of any degree anywhere. All sources of information have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

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CERTIFICATION

The dissertation titled “The Role of Facebook and X as Social Media Platforms on Voters Behaviour in 2023 National Assembly Election In Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria” carried out by DADY Pondul Frank has satisfied the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Masters in Legislative Studies, National Institute for Legislative Studies/ University of Benin and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that this dissertation “The Role of Facebook and X as Social Media Platforms on Voters Behaviour in 2023 National Assembly Election In Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria” has been carried carefully supervised, read, assessed and approved as having met the necessary conditions for the award of Master Degree in Election and Party Politics (MEPP) in the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies/University of Benin (NILDS/UNIBEN) and is therefore approved for its contribution for knowledge.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the God Almighty for His enablement to accomplish this great feat.

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ABSTRACT

The advent of Facebook and X as social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political discourse globally.

One of the major problems is the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news through these social media platforms. Another critical issue is the increasing polarization of public opinion. Additionally, the digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable access to information. Furthermore, the overreliance on social media for political communication has led to the decline of traditional media engagement, which may result in a superficial understanding of political issues among users. Lastly, the security and privacy concerns associated with social media use during elections have also emerged as problems.

The primary objective of this study is to find out if Facebook and X influence voters' behavior in the 2023 National Assembly elections. It seeks to examine how Facebook and X were predominantly used in the 2023 National Assembly elections, and to identify the challenges faced by voters in the use of Facebook and X as social media platforms for democratic, participatory, and political systems.

The methodology employed was a mixed research method which combined primary sources of data (questionnaires) and secondary data. The study highlights the harmful effects of Facebook and X, contributing to the spread of misinformation, fostering polarization, and facilitating online harassment, thereby posing a threat to the fundamental principles of democracy.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The 1999 election under the Fourth Republic was a major milestone in the democracy of Nigeria, as it led to the emergence of over two decades of civilian rule in the country. With subsequent elections that were held on 19th April 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023, we can say that election is a component of any democratic state. They provide citizens with the opportunity to exercise their political rights in choosing persons to represent their interests.

Voters can be divided into three main campaign targets. The first are those who are already committed to a candidate or political party. No matter the situation, such voters would vote for the particular candidate or party. The second are those voters who have already made up their minds not to vote for any candidate or party. The third are the undecided voters who may vote eitherway and need to be convinced by the manifestos of the candidates and what their party has to offer. West (1995) argues that the third group constitutes the principal target of political campaigns.

The campaign strategies undertaken by candidates and political parties from 1999–2007 were mostly rallies organized at ward, local government, state, and national levels. Their venues and the extent of the programmes were determined by the positions being contested. In addition to the conventional face-to-face contact and door-to-door canvassing, the parties conducted their campaigns by means of public rallies and whistle-stop tours, media advertisement, and communication by interacting via mobile telephones, billboards, and banners.

The impulse to use social media to interact with the electorate, particularly the youth, originated from the 2008 presidential election campaign of the then Senator Barack Obama (Nnaane, 2014). In specific terms, Igbinidu, (2011) as cited in Alugbuo, (2018) said Barack Obama reached five million Americans on 15 different social media platforms, to the extent that as at November 2008, he had approximately 2.5 million Facebook supporters; 115,000 followers on Twitter and 50 million viewers of his YouTube Videos. Consequently, political parties in

Nigeria during election campaigns, adopt strategies such as the use of social media platforms not only to sell their programs and policies, but also to get the votes of the electorate. The pervasive access to social media has democratising effects as they offer citizens opportunities to engage and participate in political processes. Social media supports political participation by allowing citizens to monitor and influence government actions in a medium that is familiar to them (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020:1-5).

It is pertinent to note that before the adoption of the social media for political engagement, there has been one way channel of communication amongst the political stakeholders i.e. the political contestants, political parties, government and the electorate. The electorate especially had restricted or no means of interacting with the politicians. Okoro and Kenneth, (2013) as cited in Ufuophu-Biri, (2020) discloses that the voters were rather silenced and unable to give feedback to the political process. In addition, voters were mostly not contributing in the political discourse (Biswas, Ingle and Roy (2014) cited in Ufuophu-Biri, 2020). On a similar note, most forms of political engagements lean towards favouring those with the most wealth or access. However, social media gives voice to anyone with a phone. In an era when political power is associated with economic power, the form of collective action made possible by social media is giving more people a say in how the country is run. (Vromen, 2017:3).

The unique nature of social media, characterized by its immediacy, reach, and interactivity, has implications for voter behaviour, political communication, and the overall electoral process. Its influence on the political landscape has been profound, shaping the perceptions and choices of voters, candidates, and entire nations. The perception of social media's impact on elections is a double-edged sword. It simultaneously empowers and challenges the democratic process. It offers unprecedented opportunities for engagement, information dissemination, and mobilization, yet it also poses threats in the form of misinformation, polarization, and foreign interference (Godhy & Adeyefa 2023). With a focus on the already concluded 2023 general elections, it is crucial to examine the intricate interplay between social media, politics, and public perception within the specific electoral context of the National Assembly elections

1.2 Statement of the problem

Understanding the intricate interplay between the positive and negative aspects of social media's influence in politics is imperative for navigating the complexities inherent in contemporary electoral dynamics. FCT is arguably the most cosmopolitan of the six area councils in Abuja with 12 wards including the city centre of the Nigerian capital. The outcome of the 2023 election in Abuja is one of the most controversial in the history of Nigeria democratic process. Despite the large number of youth who are the social media users that participated in the 2023 election, the invincible hands of power of incumbency can be observed in the result of chairmanship election in Abuja Municipal Area Council FCT where the incumbent chairmen shared the local government equally. However, the game changed in the senatorial election where the incumbent senator lost to another candidate. It is not certain if the power of social media influences the perception of the electorate towards their decision at the poll in the national assembly election.

The study is prompted by the recognition of significant challenges and implications arising from the influence of social media on the electoral processes surrounding the 2023 National Assembly elections in Nigeria. The overarching problem encompasses the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms, potential impacts on the integrity of the electoral system, difficulties faced by political actors in effectively utilizing social media for campaigns, changes in voter behaviour, and the varying perceptions of social media's role in politics. The localized context of the Karu community adds a unique dimension to this inquiry, as the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the specific challenges and opportunities posed by social media within this electoral setting. Addressing these issues is crucial for developing informed strategies, policies, and interventions tailored to the distinctive dynamics of social media influence on elections in the FCT.

1. 2 Research Question

To achieve the stated objectives, this study will address the following questions.

- i. How did Facebook and x influence the voter during the 2023 National Assembly election in FCT, Nigeria?

- ii. Which social media platform between Facebook and x was predominantly utilized by voters during the 2023 National Assembly Election in FCT, Nigeria?
- iii. What challenges did individuals encounter when utilizing social media for political information within the context of election processes?

1.3 Research objectives

The primary objectives of this study is to assess the role of social media influence on voters in the National Assembly 2023 – Election in FCT, Nigeria

- i. To find out if Facebook and X influences voters behavior in 2023 National Assembly Election in FCT.
- ii. To examine between Facebook and x that was predominantly used in the 2023 National Assembly Election in FCT, Nigeria.
- iii. To identify the challenges associated with the use of social media in electoral processes

1.4 Significance of the study

The research enriches academic fields such as political science, communication studies, and social media studies by adding to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the role of social media in shaping electoral processes and outcomes, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. It contributes to media and information literacy efforts in Nigeria by shedding light on citizens' ability to critically evaluate political information on social media platforms.

This research can serve as a basis for evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at harnessing the positive aspects of social media in electoral contexts while mitigating its negative consequences. Given the increasing reliance on social media in political campaigns and communication, such recommendations have practical relevance for Nigerian electoral authorities and policymakers. The findings of the study will offer valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, electoral authorities, and political actors on effectively navigating the influence of social media in elections and enhancing electoral integrity.

Lastly, the case study of National Assembly Election in FCT Nigeria, offers a localized perspective that can be instructive for understanding broader national trends. It also highlights the diversity of electoral contexts within Nigeria, emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches to studying the role of social media in politics.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the study

The study is specifically restricted to the residents of FCT, who participated in 2023 National Assembly election.

The study focused on the voters that use Facebook and Twitter as social media for accessing information relating to the electioneering process and the influence on the role towards the National Assembly election.

It is important to note that the research is time-bound to the 2023 National Assembly Elections, and the findings should be interpreted within the confines of this specific electoral event. Some of these limitations can affect the accuracy, validity, and generalizability on the research findings especially in an election challenges such as: Data collections challenges particularly in an election access to making it difficult for researchers dealing with personal or sensitive information, Bias in data sources, Dynamics and rapid changes in political environment, Limited understanding of users behavior, Political sensitivity and censorship, Methodological limitations, Ethical and legal constraints, Resources and time constraints , Cultural and linguistic barriers and finally, Limited long term data availability.

1.6 Study Area

The Federal Capital Territory was created upon the promulgation of decree number 6 of 1976. It came into existence due to a need to find a replacement for the capital city of Lagos, which had become congested and had little space for expansion. The area chosen as the new capital was principally Gwari Land (the home of the tribes referred to as the Gbagyis, their language is referred to as Gwari) with high concentrations of Muslims and Christians and a high degree of neutrality from the dominant ethnic groups.

Decree 6 of 1976, gave the federal government rights over land within the territory. The population density prior to the takeover by the government was sparse with a population of 120,000 residents living in 840 villages and mostly of Gwari heritage. Inhabitants were relocated to nearby towns like Suleja in Niger state, and New Karshi in Nasarawa State on the outskirts of the territory.

The territory is located just north of the confluence of the Niger River and Benue River. It is bordered by the states of Niger to the west and north for 179 km, Kaduna to the northeast for 45 km, Nasarawa to the east and south for 156 km, and Kogi to the southwest for 17 km.

Lying between latitudes 8.25 and 9.20 north of the equator and longitudes 6.45 and 7.39 east of Greenwich Meridian, The Federal Capital Territory is geographically located at the center of the country.

The Federal Capital Territory has a landmass of approximately 7,315 km², and it is situated within the savannah region with moderate climatic conditions.

While the Federal Capital Territory minister administers the whole of the Federal Capital Territory, the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) specifically manages the construction and infrastructure development of the region.

The territory is currently made up of six local government areas, namely: Abaji,, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali

Languages of the Federal Capital Territory listed by local government area (LGA) are listed below:

Hausa language is widely spoken at the Federal Capital Territory.

Abaji: Bassa; Dibo, Gupa-Abawa, Ebira, Ganagana, **Municipal:** Bassa; Gade; Gbagyi, Gwandara, Nupe, Hausa, **Bwari:** Gwandara; Bassa; Ashe; Gbagyi, **Gwagwalada:** Bassa; Gbari, Egbira, Hausa, **Kuje:** Gade; Gbagyi, Bassa, **Kwali:** Bassa, Gwandara; Gbagyi; Ebira, Kami, Abawa, Ganagana, Nupe, Hausa

The two major religion in the Federal Capital territory is Christianity and Islam.

For the purpose of this research work, Abuja municipal Area Council is selected and Karu polling units is precisely selected for the research data collection due to the limitation of time and financial constraint.

1.7 Operational definition of terms

The operational definition of terms in this research work is just a brief explanations of terms used for the research work.

i. Social media

Social media are new medium technology that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of contents (such as ideas, interest and other forms of expression) amongst virtual communities and network.

Common features include:

Online platforms enable users to create and share content and participate in social networking.

User-generated content—such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through online interactions.

Service-specific profiles that are designed and maintained by the social media organization.

Social media helps the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups.

ii. Voters behavior

Voting behavior refers to how people decide how to vote. This decision is shaped by a complex interplay between an individual voter's attitudes as well as social factors. Voter attitudes include characteristics such as ideological predisposition, party identity, degree of satisfaction with the existing government, public policy leanings, and feelings about a candidate's personality traits. Social factors include race, religion and degree of religiosity, social and economic class, educational level, regional characteristics, gender and age.

iii. Election

An election is a formal group decision-making process whereby a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office.

Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. This process is also used in many other Standardized Associations, public businesses, and organizations , from clubs to voluntary association and corporations

iv. Political party

A political party is an organization that coordinates candidates to compete in elections and participate in governance. It is common for the members of a party to hold similar ideas about politics, and parties may promote specific ideological or policy goals.

v. Campaign

A political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making progress within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, by which representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the most high-profile political campaigns are focused on general elections and candidates for head of state or head of government, often a president or prime minister.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The proper understanding of the various concepts of the study will be elucidated in this chapter based on the previous empirical studies, research journals and online archival materials. Second section of this chapter will concentrate on the relevant theoretical frameworks and the underpinning theory is explained.

2.0 Conceptual Review

In recent years, the intersection of social media and politics has become a significant area of academic inquiry and societal concern. This conceptual review seeks to delve into the intricate relationship between social media and the popular perception of social media's role in elections, with a specific focus on the Nigerian context. It aims to elucidate key concepts, theories, and insights that underpin this evolving dynamic.

2.1.1 Role of Social Media in Elections in Nigeria

The advent of social media has brought about a profound transformation in communication on various fronts. It's participatory, interactive, and cost-effective nature has democratized mass communication, aligning with Marshal McLuhan's prophetic vision of a "global village," where worldwide events are instantaneously and universally recognized. Social media's potential is harnessed not only by individuals but also by organizations and nations across the globe, rallying millions to support their causes. It has evolved into a potent instrument for engaging and inspiring citizens to actively participate in political discourse and democratic processes. This resonates with Okoro and Dirim's (2009) assertion that media facilitates free participation in discussions concerning the common good.

The rise of social media has given politicians access to their supporters, the ability to assess their political acceptance and significance, and even the ability to heat up politics in order to realise their political goals or ideologies (Mamman, 2019). Social media is heavily utilised by Nigerian politicians, particularly during election and campaign seasons. The use of social media in elections appears to be considerably altering traditional electioneering practices. This rapidly spreading phenomenon is based

on the rapidly expanding access to the Internet and the rising availability of Internet-ready smart phones and other communication devices that are swiftly permeating most civilizations. This access allows individuals to exchange information with their peers at the same time, which spreads information faster than traditional media channels could.

The use of social media platforms by Nigerian voters, particularly the youth, who are gradually becoming highly energetic and tech-savvy, is the culmination of the increasing penetration of internet and telephone technologies. Nigerian politicians had no choice but to use the media platform via which they could be easily contacted in order to communicate with this target population (Alakali, Akpan, and Tarnongo, 2013).

Social media have achieved significant appeal around the world in terms of political communication, political marketing, the political campaigning process, and voter engagement in political election discourse. According to Arshad and Hassan (2014), many people around the world are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of social media in electioneering. In fact, they are heavily exposed to political communication via social media. Politicians have shifted from using traditional media such as print (newspapers) and electronic media (television and radio) during electioneering to using new media to achieve their political aims (Ekwueme and Folarin, 2017).

Politicians now have embraced the use of social media, to carry out their campaign goals. This was clearly demonstrated by the Obama campaign in 2008, which actively used social media sites and content (such as YouTube videos, Facebook fan pages, Twitter accounts, and so on) to mobilize millions of volunteers and voters, significantly contributing to the success of his 2008 presidential campaigns and eventual election as the United States' first black president. According to Biswas, Ingle, and Roy (2014), many people have become more exposed to social media after his election. Support this thought, research by Golan, Arceneaux, and Soule (2019), affirms that the majority of voters are exposed to political communication via social media. This has aroused the consciousness of more electorates to participate in elections.

Politics has undoubtedly changed dramatically in the previous decade as new technology has emerged. Politicians have increasingly resorted to social media to convey political messages and persuade voters. Nigeria experimented the use of this technology for political discourse during the 2011 general elections. The platform gave voice to many Nigerian politicians and electorates alike to make their voice heard in the electoral process. Regardless of the successes, many lapses were observed and many lessons abound for future elections in the country (Musa, 2018).

According to Ezeah and Gever (2015), both the electorate and the politicians have recognized the enormous opportunity social media provides in terms of exposing voters to the political messaging of the politicians as well as receiving feedback from the public on the politicians. The usage of social media has simplified, demystified, and democratized communication between politicians and voters. A study on social media use for expression of political views in Nigeria by Ugwuanyi, Olijó, and Gever (2019) found that many voters in Nigeria used social media to communicate with politicians and among themselves for electioneering purposes during the 2019 general election in Nigeria. Scholars including Adegbola and Gearhart (2019), Assibong and Oshanisi (2018), Ayeni and Esan (2018), and Kahnea and Middaugh (2012) found that politicians and the electorate are sufficiently exposed to political communication and discourse on social media.

Political parties, candidates, and government institutions used social media channels to campaign and raise awareness. The Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) took use of the chance to expand its communication channels and engage individuals via Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The INEC Situation Room was established, allowing anyone to contact the organisation directly to report wrongdoing and concerns about the election. During the three days of the presidential election, the Commission received around 4,000 tweets. Finally, Nigerians made use of social media "to improve the efficiency of election observation" (Apuke, Iyendo, 2017).

The hybrid nature of online media outlets, which grant politicians access to diverse target audiences, holds significant advantages for political actors in both developed and emerging democracies (Okoye & Oparaugo, 2019). The internet, as a medium, serves as a vital channel for reaching various segments of

society, with a particular emphasis on the politically aware youth demographic (Okoye and Oparaugo, 2019). During Nigeria's 2023 general elections, social media emerged as a pivotal tool for campaigning and mobilization, especially in closely contested races. Political factions harnessed the power of social media to craft misleading perceptions of support and launch attacks on opponents, often disseminating false information in the process. However, it also offered an essential platform for citizens to voice their opinions and ignite critical discussions surrounding the elections. Unfortunately, the authorities sometimes wielded the Cybercrimes Act to curtail online freedom of expression (Jimada, 2019).

In line with global trends, Nigerian politicians have increasingly embraced social media as a direct communication channel with their supporters. Social media has evolved into a standard means of political interaction, providing politicians with a real-time avenue to engage with their constituents and articulate their stances.

The popular perception of social media's role in elections underscores its significance in shaping democratic processes worldwide. As noted by Omojuwa (2015), while elections themselves may not be determined solely by social media, it wields a profound influence in shaping public perceptions and deepening democratic thinking across the globe. Africa, including Nigeria, has not remained immune to the sweeping impact of social media. The perception of social media's influence on elections, as observed globally and in the Nigerian context, is far from being a one-dimensional narrative. Social media's power to shape perceptions and influence political outcomes is a double-edged sword, with both positive and negative implications.

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a formidable force capable of moulding public perception with a mere click or share. As Dervish (2023) aptly notes, a single share on social media can create either a positive or negative perception. This underscores the concept of "information manipulation," where the direction and influence of information determine the constructed perception. While this manipulation can be used for various purposes, it becomes increasingly pertinent in the realm of politics. The pervasive influence of the social media landscape on our beliefs, behaviors, and reactions to information is undeniable (Coleman, 2010). In an era where individuals across the globe are turning

to social media platforms as primary sources of news and platforms for expressing their viewpoints, the realm of social media has transformed into a bustling public arena for engaging – often passionately – in discussions pertaining to political and societal matters.

According to recent findings by the Pew Research Centre (2022), many observers assert that social media plays a pivotal role in the deterioration of democratic health in nations worldwide. Hinton and Hjorth (2013) astutely observed that "social media have transformed our comprehension, experience, and utilization of 'online media.' They have metamorphosed into an indispensable facet of our daily existence, shaping our cognitive processes and our interactions with friends, family, colleagues, and even our involvement in the realm of politics. Undoubtedly, the capacity to connect individuals through interactive mediated channels like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, among others, has facilitated the dissemination of information. It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that the manner in which technology is wielded often hinges on the intended audience and the specific utilization in mind. In recent years, one of the pivotal roles of social media has been the mediation of political discourse and the electoral process.

In Nigeria, the surge in social media's role in shaping elections underscores a profound shift in how citizens perceive and engage with the electoral process. With a staggering 32.9 million active social media users, according to Statista, the country's political discourse and electoral processes have been significantly impacted. The 2015 general elections in Nigeria may have been the first time that digital tools really came to the fore. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) the then opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) launched 'The Broom' app, a social media platform for its supporters, and took advantage of the digital space that was largely unoccupied and uncontrolled by the ruling party. Before these pivotal elections, many Nigerians converged on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to voice their frustrations against government policies and actions, as highlighted by Omojua (2015). The collective pressure exerted by diverse social media users across Nigeria played a significant role in reshaping the country's political landscape at that critical juncture. Indeed, social media users harnessed their online presence to organize protests, such as the "Enough Is

Enough" movement in April 2010. This mobilization led to the elevation of then-Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to Acting President, subsequently triggering the "doctrine of necessity" that prompted the National Assembly to endorse his status as Acting President (Omojua, 2015).

On the positive side, social media has been a catalyst for transforming public discourse, revolutionizing political campaigns, fostering citizen engagement, and revitalizing the democratic process. However, its unregulated nature presents significant challenges, as it creates fertile ground for the proliferation of misinformation and the rapid dissemination of fake news. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria may be etched in memory for their unique relationship with technology. Social media platforms were inundated with various surveys and reports, offering a dynamic yet occasionally chaotic view of the political landscape. Nonetheless, the absence of stringent rules and oversight on these platforms has raised concerns about the unchecked spread of unverified information, exacerbating the problem of fake news. The two leading political parties All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) developed a noticeable and expanding internet presence in 2019, with coordinated disinformation tactics designed to sway public opinion and create clear distinctions between party members and political rivals. Experts projected that social media influence would play out in the 2023 elections since it makes spreading misinformation easier. Cross-posting on social networking sites, a function that makes it simpler to be heard or seen on several platforms at once, is another threat. This makes it possible for one to be seen and to reach multiple audiences at once (Garba, 2023).

In the previous elections, TikTok had not gained currency in Nigeria, and Twitter Spaces had not yet been introduced. Thus, experts predicted their role in the elections as they make disinformation easier to spread. This is especially true of TikTok, which has gained popularity during the 2023 election campaign despite having a modest user base (Garba, 2023). TikTok is now being used by politicians and their social media consultants, especially to attract new audiences. They frequently support offensive political music or stage challenges centred on the candidates or campaigns. People with low levels of knowledge in reading and writing may be able to relate to the visually appealing content. On the other side, Nigerian electoral politics make extensive use of Twitter spaces. All political parties hold

practically daily discussions that are moderated by paid social media influencers or party members in an effort to discredit other candidates, raise the visibility of their own, and encourage supporters and potential voters to cast a ballot (Premium Times, 2023). According to a statement by the Center for Democracy and Development:

“The oral nature of the discussions and the difficulty in moderating them means that they have become places where disinformation is rampant. But WhatsApp remains the medium through which all social media content really circulates widely through cross-posting and screenshots from other platforms. Furthermore, this is the application that facilitates the jump into offline spaces where non-smartphone users will begin debating and discussing news that has originated online,”

As Nigeria, embarks on its digital transformation, the significance of social media in shaping electoral outcomes and public sentiment has surged to the forefront. Social media in Nigeria possesses the potential to serve as both a catalyst for democracy and a potential barrier to authoritarianism. It offers political actors a platform for continuous engagement with the electorate, bridging the gap between elections and fostering direct, unmediated communication between leaders and the people. This phenomenon revitalizes the political environment. However, its ability to influence and predict voting behavior is a complex interplay of limitations and considerable impact. While it may not singularly determine election results, it undeniably shapes public discourse, influences perceptions, and contributes to the vibrancy of democracy (Nwokoma, 2023).

2.1.2 Role of Social Media Influence on 2023 Election

Society undergoes continual evolution, with change being the only constant. This constant change is a feature of human nature and endeavors. In recent times, the weapons of political combat, much like in wars, have undergone drastic transformations (Premium Times, 2022). The conventional media had always been the primary tool in politics, influencing and shaping public opinion for generations (Premium Times, 2022). However, change has come; social media is the new kid on the block, radically democratizing the public sphere (Premium Times, 2022). You can now start a political story that will have an unheard-of impact on society with just 100 naira in data on your smartphone. Any political

player who downplays the influence of social media does so at his or her own risk (Premium Times, 2022).

Social media provides political candidates the channels to sensitize target audience segments and shape public perception of their candidature as better representatives of the people (Bossetta M, Schmøkel R. 2023). In fact, “it is through campaign communication that impulses to participate are energized, issues are defined, and choices for voting decisions are conveyed” McGregor SC (2020). The media, particularly social media become handy for construction of political messages to potential voters during political campaigns. “Historically, citizen’s participation in the political processes has been considered a fundamental element of an ideal democracy. Thus, participation represents a significant component in political communication and democratic institution” (Sahly, Shao & Kwon, 2019). “Over the last decade, there has been accelerated use of social media globally. This situation is occasioned by the extraordinary growth of information and communications technologies (ICTs), which ushered in the phenomenon of social media through the popularization of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Flickr, and YouTube” (Omotayo FO, Folorunso BM, 2020); and has introduced a new dimension to political communication wherein electioneering campaigns and scouting for votes by political office-seekers and political parties are done by utilizing the vast opportunities provided by social media.

The political theatre for most successful electioneering campaigns in today’s world is located on the social media and most electoral battles, nowadays, are fought and won through the social media. Access to social media is easy and could be done anywhere, in ones’ office, home, while waiting in the car, in the comfort of people’s bedroom, etc., using smart phones, laptops, and other forms of communication devices at the disposal of people” (Rao HN 2019).

“Consequently, an increase in the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google+ and Myspace, among others generally has seen a tremendous increase in use for political activism. More and more people get news via digital media, they increasingly access news via mobile

devices (especially smartphones), and rely on social media and other intermediaries in terms of how they access and find news” (Boulianne, 2015; Borah, 2016; David, Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Koppel & Uzan, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fountaine, 2017; Sweetser&Lariscy, 2008); (Rasmus KN et al 2016) suggesting that the prominence of social media, particularly in politics has the potential of positively influencing political participation (Kamp M, 2016) Khang, Ki & Ye, 2012; Stienglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013), and electoral process in general if properly utilized. Okolo, Ugonna, Nebo &Obikeze (2017) paint the scenario surrounding the effects of social media in the marketing of political candidates in Nigeria that the use of social media platforms are important tools within political communication campaigns to secure victory and encourage interaction between political parties/candidates and voters. “There is good evidence largely from the existing empirical literature to suggest that social media is now being used in political campaigns to circulate diverse campaign messages and ideological themes to various constituents who have interest in the political career and aspirations of a candidate” (Okoro &Kwafor, 2013; Sorah, 2016; Williams &Gulati, 2013). Indeed, there is a relationship between social media and politics (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013; Ender, 2013; Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010 [18-27] and through social media, political mobilization and support is sustainable (Kreiss, 2016) if effectively utilized. “The ubiquitous access of social media has no doubt, democratized electoral effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more engagement in the political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages”(Chinedu-Okeke CF, & Chinonye F, Obi.I. 2016).

Jacob S. S. et al (2023) while analysing the influence of social media on the 2023 general election in Nigeria discovered that social media majorly become a platform for users (political party members and supporters) to settle their political dissimilarities and discrepancies rather than engage in the promotion of the main manifestoes of their parties and candidates and that facebook was the dominant social media platforms used by voters and political parties during the election. During political campaigns, Jacob S. S. et al (2023) noted that rather than based on issues, social media political campaign ideological themes were used more to abuse, insult and defame the opponents. Hence, social media was also used to

spread hate speech, falsehoods, blame shifting, instill fear, anxiety and apathy into others and promote ethno-religious and cultural sentiments. This view was also shared by Alquraan. H et al (2017); Ansolabehere, S. et al (1995); Apuke OD and Tunca EA (2018) which implies that social media charted a path of insults, abuse, defamation of opponents; spreading hate speech, falsehoods, shifting blames, instilling fear, anxiety and apathy into others and promoting ethno- religious and cultural sentiments. According to Jacob S. S. et al (2023), In 2023 election, social media were instrumental to voting patterns and used for creation and diffusion of ideological themes of political campaigns in Nigeria to a great extent. Concerning the pattern of usage of social media in 2023 general election in Nigeria, most users used social media more to post election-related messages and political campaign messages, followed by sharing and commenting.

Data revealed that the ideological themes dominant in social media during political campaigns in the 2023 general election in Nigeria promoted negative rather than positive knowledge of voters towards the elections. ideology dominant in social media during campaigns did not, to a great extent, give potential voters justifiable reasons they should vote in or vote out a political candidate or party; rather, it was largely abuse of each other, blame- shifting, spread of falsehoods and fake news against each other, and the spread of distorted information which subsequently instilled fear in voters and promoted voter apathy (Ekhareafo OD, Akoseogasimhe IM. 2017); Institute for Media and Society(2018); Jamila MD, Yakubu O. (2018). This implies that the ideology dominant in social media during the 2023 political campaigns promotes voters' apathy rather than encouraging them to participate in the elections in Nigeria.

The ethical implications of utilizing social media in politics are evident, marking a distinct shift in the depth of political and public discourse. Akpore (2023) asserts that "the social media, true to type, is a mixed bag," attributing this observation to various factors.

The 2023 general/national assembly elections showcase a notable involvement of technology, accompanied by a multitude of polls—whether genuine or fraudulent—that saturated social media with

information about events nationwide (Akpore, 2023). Notably, not all information shared on social media platforms can be independently verified, given the absence of clear rules and government regulation in this open platform, allowing anyone to publish content (Akpore, 2023).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, and others may need to account for the prevalence of half-truths and falsehoods in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections (Akpore, 2023). Influencers, depending on the subjects they were engaged to handle and the sides they favoured, were actively shaping narratives to either shape or distort public opinions (Akpore, 2023). While social media spared no one, certain influencers assumed the role of spin doctors, adeptly articulating and manipulating stories to fit the demands of the situation (Akpore, 2023).

In the context of Nigeria, particularly on Twitter, social media has played a significant role in disseminating credible election-related news but has concurrently been a major source of disinformation and misinformation (Tukur, 2023). Leading up to the 2023 general/national assembly elections, a viral broadcast message on social media claimed that the Apex bank of Nigeria, CBN, would shut down all electronic banking networks to prevent vote buying (Azeez, 2023). Furthermore, other sources disseminated information falsely attributed to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), asserting that voters without Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) could still cast ballots by approaching election officials, claiming that the Bimodal Voter Accreditations System (BVAS) would verify them merely by presenting questionable identifications. INEC promptly refuted this claim, clarifying that only individuals with PVCs were eligible to vote. There were far too many lies disseminated by voices of persons and well-known figures concealed behind technology and artificial intelligence (Akpore, 2023).

The competitive nature of social media, as highlighted by Premium Times (2022), observed numerous political contenders vying for the attention of the same audience. This intense competition, coupled with innovative online crowdsourcing, appears to have played a role in influencing the outcomes of the 2023 elections. While social media undeniably plays a substantial role in shaping political narratives and information dissemination, its influence on elections carries a dual nature. Ethical considerations, the

prevalence of unverified information, and the active role of influencers contribute to a complex landscape, emphasizing the need for scrutiny and regulation to ensure the integrity of electoral processes.

2.2 Empirical Review

The impact of Social media on youth voting behavior, Namo, Innocent et al (2024 :1-5) that social media has connected people and issues across the globe and its increasing access to Nigerian youths for political discourse has a bearing in shaping voting behaviour during elections. The study examined the impact of social media on youth voting behaviour in Nigeria. It is anchored on Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory. Using a mixed methods design, 448 students of the Political Science Department, Federal University Wukari who voted in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were used as the target population. Findings show the youths utilize social media for political engagements, they connect credibility to political information accessed, their perceptions of political actors during elections are shaped by social media and it generally impacts their voting behaviour. Other factors besides social media were identified as influencing their voting behaviour. The study recommended that there be should efforts to promote digital literacy, contend with misinformation, and ensure transparency in algorithmic processes.

Anyanwu & Orji (2020) in their study established that social media platforms play fundamental roles in educating, persuading and mobilising citizens to participate in political activities in the South Eastern part of the country, through constant exposure and reportage of political developments, which then influence citizens participation in the political process. Namo et al (2024) equally established that social media influence voting behaviour among Nigerians. This was demonstrated during the 2011 presidential elections when Nigeria for the first time tested the use of social media in electioneering campaign Okoro & Santas, 2017).

The role of Social media in 2023 general election, Etido Aniedi Okon (2025:3) The 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a surge in political discourse on social media platforms. Analyzing the impact of social media on the voting process can shed light on the potential of digital platforms in bridging these divisions and promoting citizen involvement. Therefore, this study sought to guide

evidence-based decision-making, policy development, and the creation of media literacy campaigns to strengthen an inclusive democratic system in Nigeria. The diversity of social media channels used during the general elections for 2023 is compared in this paper. We modified the mass media's framing theory and the agenda-setting theory and chose the survey research approach. The results of this study indicate that social media political campaigns played a significant role in persuading voters in the 2023 general elections. The study also showed that social media political campaigns are quite successful, and Twitter in particular is a main avenue of political and electioneering communication

The study "Influence of Social Media on Electioneering and Youths' Political Participation during Nigeria's 2023 General Elections" was researched by Edith Ohaja et al (2023:1-16). The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the sample was 400 students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was chosen through a multi-stage sampling technique from eight departments in four faculties of the institution. The findings of the study showed, among other things, that social media were widely used in their campaigns by political parties and candidates for content sharing, holding discussions, directing supporters and interacting with voters; social media positively influenced political engagement and voter turnout among youths in the elections; and balancing freedom of speech and expression with curbing fake news and disinformation was identified as one of the major challenges of regulating the use of social media in the campaigns for the 2023 general elections. It was thus recommended that the youths should keep up and improve on their political participation as the drive for change and good governance must be sustained for it to bear fruit; broadening voter education and media literacy of citizens is essential to help them critically assess political information shared on social media; and political parties, candidates, and their supporters should use social media ethically and responsibly, while upholding the truth in their communications.

Okpala, C. et al (2023 :1-16) studied the Perception of the Influence of Social Media on the Mobilization of the Electorate in the 2023 Presidential Election in Awka Metropolis. 385 respondents were purposefully chosen from the whole population of the Awka metropolis for the survey research design. According to research, most people view social media contributions to 2023 political involvement procedures as having a progressive objective, while most people view political campaign messaging as

little more than political propaganda. The investigation suggested that Nigerian politicians should make every effort to match their words with necessary deeds once in office and that, despite social media's obvious negative effects on politics and politicking, Nigerian politicians should vigorously embrace social media in subsequent elections due to its interactive potential.

The Effect of Social Media on Elections: Evidence from the United States was investigated by (Thomas Fujiwara et al 2023 pg 1-45). The study focussed on how social media affects election outcomes in the United States. The researcher used variation in the number of Twitter users across counties induced by early adopters at the 2007 South by Southwest (SXSW) festival, a key event in Twitter's rise to popularity. We show that this variation is unrelated to observable county characteristics and electoral outcomes before the launch of Twitter. Our results indicate that Twitter lowered the Republican vote share in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, but had limited effects on Congressional elections and previous presidential elections. Evidence from survey data, primary elections, and text analysis of millions of tweets suggests that Twitter's relatively liberal content may have persuaded voters with moderate views to vote against Donald Trump.

Agbim, Kenneth et al (2023 :13) conducted empirical research on the impact of the Obedient movement on Twitter in the 2023 general election in Nigeria: an extrapolative analysis. The study highlighted that Twitter can be a powerful platform for political mobilization, it is one among many channels for engaging with voters. However, extrapolation on the Obedient Movement in the 2023 general election in Nigeria involves making predictions or projections based on existing trends or patterns. The study adopted the survey method and the area of study is Imo State. The population is 5,830,489 and a sample size of 384 was attained using Wimmer and Dominick calculator. The multistage/cluster sampling technique was adopted and a questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The mean and percentage descriptive statistics were used for data presentation. At a mean average of 2.8, there is a greater motivation behind the emergence of the Obidient Movement in Nigeria's 2023 election. The movement has had a significant impact on voter behaviour and electoral outcomes in the 2023 general election 2.5 (N=378). The study recommended that those in charge of the electoral process in Nigeria

must ensure readiness as there will be improved voter participation in subsequent elections in the country. furthermore, political movements must look at the broader political and social dynamics leading up to subsequent elections.

The influence of social media on political communication: a case study of Nigeria's 2023 general elections in Omu-Aran Kwara State was investigated by (Ojo, Joseph. I. et al 2023). The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of social media on political communication in Omu Aran during the elections. The study investigated the role of social media in shaping public opinion, voter mobilization, and candidate campaigns. It also conducts a case study of Omu Aran's political communication landscape and examines the benefits and drawbacks of social media in political communication. The study is situated within the framework of the Agenda-setting theory and the voting behaviour theory. The research methodology involved the use of both secondary and primary sources of data, including online sources, articles, journals, and textbooks, and administered questionnaires to the target participants. The study reveals that voter education programs facilitated by social media have contributed to increased election literacy, improved voter turnout, and reduced invalid ballots. The media's presence during the entire electoral process acts as a deterrent to fraudulent activities. The study recommended that Political parties and candidates need to strategically utilize social media platforms to shape public opinion and mobilize voters. However, challenges such as the spread of misinformation and online manipulation should be addressed through media literacy promotion and measures to combat misinformation.

Obi, Onyekachukwu G. and Etoamaihe, Nneka. P. (2023) studied the impact of Facebook and Twitter political messages on influencing the Nigerian youth's willingness to vote: a study of youths in Owerri municipal. The rationale was to ascertain why the Nigerian youth have a low interest in voting and how they utilize Facebook and Twitter and its influence on their voting behaviour. This study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory. To achieve this study, the mixed method was adopted using survey methods and in-depth interview methods. The population b demployed 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 questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire data was obtained from 385 youths in Owerri Municipal and interviews were granted to 25 respondents. Findings revealed that Facebook and Twitter political messages have a powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigerian youths to vote. These social media platforms also influenced youth participation in the 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 messages have a powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigerian youths to vote. 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.

Oberiri Destiny A and Ivo Nkasire A (2017) investigated Public perception of the role of Facebook usage in political campaigns in Nigeria was conducted in Taraba State Northern Nigeria. The study made use of a descriptive survey design with a questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The data was analysed using the 2016 Microsoft Excel statistical package with frequency counts and simple percentages presented in tables and graph. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics (Chi-square analysis at 0.05 level of significance). The study revealed that Facebook was used in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba and this influenced the electorate to vote a particular candidate. However, it is the perception of the respondent that there were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortion in the information about the opponent, abusive speech, distortion of facts about personal performance and misinformation as a strategy for influencing the Facebook pages of the electorates and the candidates. The study recommended that reliability (e.g. message must be clear, focused, well conveyed, believable, credible, and free from abusive speech and attacking opponents) should be an essential concept in the posted political messages or promises of politicians to draw more fans to themselves.

2.2.1 Gaps in Literature

Although the existing body of literature acknowledges the overarching role of social media in fostering

free, fair, and credible elections, both in Nigeria and on a global scale, there remains a noticeable gap in research that delves into the distinct dynamics and perceptions surrounding social media within the specific electoral context during the 2023 elections. Situated within the Abuja Municipal Area Council FCT. While there exist studies examining the influence and perception of social media on the electoral process in Nigeria, there is a notable absence of research focused on the influence and perceptions related to the National Assembly. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of literature addressing the viewpoints and attitudes of community residents within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This underscores the need for comprehensive research in these areas to better understand and enhance the democratic processes at various levels of governance in Nigeria.

The study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the nuanced ways in which social media influenced the electoral landscape in AMAC during this crucial political event. It seeks to explore not only the general benefits of social media, such as improved communication, connecting individuals, enhancing professional networks, and facilitating access to global information but also the distinct impact of social media on the perceptions and attitudes of voters, candidates, and other stakeholders within the AMAC during the 2023 National Assembly elections. By narrowing the focus to this specific locality and timeframe, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the role and popular perception of social media in a highly localized electoral context that has not yet been extensively studied in the existing literature.

2.3 Theoretical Review

There are several theories the research considers relevant to this study. The theories are Agenda-Setting Theory, Two-Step Flow Theory, Democratic Theory, and Social Identity Theory. This study however, builds on two of the stipulated theories; Agenda- Setting theory and Democratic theory.

2.3.1 The Agenda-Setting Theory:

The Agenda-Setting Theory, conceived by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts that media, whether traditional or social, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and priorities by determining which issues receive attention and prominence. It posits that the media has the power to define the salient and

important topics in the public's mind. Originally applicable to traditional mass media, the theory has evolved to encompass the influence of social media platforms.

In the context of the research on the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT, Nigeria, the Agenda-Setting Theory is applied to comprehend how social media platforms influence public perceptions and set the agenda for discourse. Social media, with its rapid information dissemination and vast user bases, has become a significant source of information for voters (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The theory is employed to explore how issues gain prominence on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. It acknowledges that the frequency and visibility of specific topics in users' feeds can influence their perceived importance during elections.

The theory is also applied to analyse the active role of political actors, including candidates, parties, and interest groups, in shaping the public agenda through strategic promotion of their preferred issues and narratives. Hashtags, viral campaigns, and influencer endorsements are identified as tools used to draw attention to specific topics (Zúñiga et al., 2015). Furthermore, the theory recognizes the empowering nature of social media, allowing ordinary users to set their own agendas through user-generated content and grassroots movements (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Movements like #EndSARS and #NigeriaDecides gained significant attention through user-generated content on social media.

The influence of algorithms on content curation and visibility is explored, acknowledging that these algorithms, like traditional media gatekeepers, can impact the salience of certain stories and topics (Tandoc et al., 2018). Social media allows for the framing of issues through the use of images, headlines, and captions, influencing how users perceive them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For instance, the framing of a political event as a "scandal" versus a "controversy" can lead to different public perceptions. This theory forms the basis for understanding how social media platforms set the agenda for public discourse and shaped popular perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT, Nigeria.

Some other theories that aligned with the research topic includes; Democratic Theory, Political Participation Theory and Political System Theory.

2.3 Justification of Theory

The selection of Agenda-Setting Theory and Democratic Theory as the foundational frameworks for this study is justified based on their theoretical robustness, applicability to the research context, and their capacity to provide comprehensive insights into the dynamics of social media perception in electoral contexts. Both theories align closely with the context of the study. The Agenda-Setting Theory is highly relevant because it explores how media, including social media, can influence public perception and priorities by determining which issues receive prominence. Given that social media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes, this theory provides a strong framework to analyze how social media platforms may have impacted the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT. The Agenda-Setting Theory allows for an in-depth exploration of the role of social media in shaping public agendas and perceptions and, helps researchers assess how certain issues gained traction and prominence during the election campaign, shedding light on the extent of social media's influence on voters' priorities.

Democratic Theory, on the other hand, is critical in understanding the role of information dissemination, citizen engagement, and participation in the democratic process.

Given that social media platforms democratize access to information and encourage civic engagement, this theory provides valuable insights into how citizens in FCT, were engaged in shaping the political process through social media.

Both theories also address challenges associated with media influence. The Agenda- Setting Theory can help identify how algorithms and content curation on social media platforms may have influenced the visibility and framing of political issues. Democratic Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to address challenges like misinformation, disinformation, and algorithmic biases to ensure a fair and informed electoral process. By combining these two theories, the research offers a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between social media, public perception, and the democratic process in the specific context of the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT Nigeria. This dual theoretical

framework allows for a multi-faceted examination of how social media both sets the agenda and influences citizen engagement in the electoral context.

Easton aspired to make politics a science, that is, working with highly abstract models that described the regularities of patterns and processes in political life in general. In his view, the highest level of abstraction could make scientific generalizations about politics possible. In sum, politics should be seen as a whole, not as a collection of different problems to be solved.

His main model was driven by an organic view of politics, as if it were a living object. His theory is a statement of what makes political systems adapt and survive. He describes politics in a constant flux, thereby rejecting the idea of "equilibrium", so prevalent in some other political theories (see institutionalism). Moreover, he rejects the idea that politics could be examined by looking at different levels of analysis. His abstractions could account for any group and demand at any given time. That is, interest group theory and elite theory can be subsumed in political systems analysis.^[3] His theory was and is highly influential in the pluralist tradition in political science. This document summarizes Gabriel Almond's model of structural functionalism. Almond believed that all political systems have certain structures (like parties, legislatures, judiciaries) that perform similar functions, even if the structures differ between developed and developing nations. He identified four key characteristics of all political systems: they have simple or complex structures; their structures perform similar functions; structures are specialized but multi-functional; and all cultures blend modern and traditional aspects. The document also outlines Almond's view that political systems have two types of functions: input functions like socialization, interest articulation and aggregation performed by non-government groups; and output functions like rule-making, adjudication and application performed by governments.

In summary, the Agenda-Setting Theory and Democratic Theory provide a robust foundation for exploring the impact of social media on popular perception in the 2023 National Assembly Elections. They help researchers delve into how social media platforms shape public agendas, influence citizen engagement, and contribute to the democratic process while considering potential challenges and

opportunities in the context of a local electoral event.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The systematic research process and procedure framework that guided the study as well as the justification for the adopted methodology remains the focus for this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

The research adopted a survey research design. Onwukwe (2011), as cited in Amdi (2014), underscores that survey research systematically collects data to describe and interpret various conditions, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and more. In this study, the survey method adopted aimed to systematically gather insights into the perceptions and attitudes of a specific population regarding the role of social media in the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT, Nigeria.

Survey design is particularly relevant for studying public sentiment, especially in developing or third-world nations like Nigeria. It has the capacity to capture people's opinions, often on a day-to-day basis, concerning government performance, policies, and issues of public interest. Survey methods encompass diverse data collection techniques, such as mailing questionnaires, making phone calls, or conducting face-to-face interviews with a sampled population. In this research, survey questionnaires and secondary data analysis were employed.

3.2 Population of Study

The strategic choice of Abuja Municipal Area Council as the study area within the Federal Capital territory is based on its unique position as a district encompassing both urban and traditional elements. Comprising sub-divisions like Jikwoyi, Karu site, and Karu Village, with 25 settlements within them, Karu mirrors a microcosm of broader societal landscapes.

Table 1: Population of the study

SN	LG	WARD	PU	DELIM	TOTAL
1	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I /CENTRAL PRIMARY SCH	37/06/10/001	2,736
2	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I / B. T. S. KARU	37/06/10/002	1772
3	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE / AGRICULTURAL EXT. OFFICE	37/06/10/003	2814
4	Municipal	Karu	UNG.GINAR / HEALTH CENTRE	37/06/10/004	2850
5	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA I / KARU VILLAGE JUNCTION	37/06/10/005	2501
6	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA II /OLD MARKET SQUARE	37/06/10/006	3150
7	Municipal	Karu	UNG. HAUSAWA III / AFTER SALASI RD. JUNCTION	37/06/10/007	2909
8	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE I/ MIN. OF IDUS QRTS	37/06/10/008	2496
9	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II/ OLD NEPA OFFICE JUNCTION	37/06/10/009	3482
10	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IIB / NEAR AREA COURT	37/06/10/010	3232
11	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II (F. H. A.) (CUSTOMS QUARTERS)	37/06/10/011	3105
12	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION I	37/06/10/012	3848
13	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION II	37/06/10/013	2125
14	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKOYI PRI. SCH.	37/06/10/014	6263
15	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI II/JIKOYI TOKKA VILLAGE	37/06/10/015	2905
16	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/UNG. GADE	37/06/10/016	2355
17	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKWOYI PHASE III	37/06/10/017	4348
18	Municipal	Karu	UNG PASHE/BESIDE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL	37/06/10/023	1067
19	Municipal	Karu	ALONG CITY COLLEGE ROAD BESIDE HEALTH CENTRE	37/06/10/033	1160
20	Municipal	Karu	KUGBO MECHANIC VILLAGE BESIDE SUVERAY FILLING STATION	37/06/10/065	1,525
Total population of Karu community Abuja Municipal Area Council(AMAC) Voters					56,643

Sources: <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FCT-PUs-above-3000-voters>

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Sampling involves the selection of a number of study units from a defined study population or universe. A sample is therefore a smaller representation of a large whole or population. When the population is too large that the researcher may find it difficult to finish at a time; a portion of the population may be studied. Thus the sample of the study is the selected portion of an entire population to be studied on the basis of which conclusions are drawn on the entire population.

For the purpose of this study, the purposive sampling technique was adopted. Purposive random sampling was applicable because it's practically impossible to gather the voters and sampling their opinion. Hence, the respondents' opinion are randomly sampled based on their consent, readiness and interest to take part in the survey. The researcher moved to the next polling unit after completing the expected sampled respondents in a particular polling unit.

Therefore, Yamane Formula was adopted for the computation of sample size. Yamane (1967) formula for calculation of sample size was used to determine the sample size According to him, for a 90% confidence level and $p = 0.1$, size of the sample should be:

$$n = N / [1 + N (e^2)]$$

Whereas,

n = Sample size desired

N = Known

population size

Always constant

e = Error Margin

$$n = 56,643 / [1 + 56,643 (0.1^2)] = 99.8 \text{ approximated to } 100$$

The study used Probability Proportional to size (PPS) to allocate sample to each polling unit to give a fair representation of the results. Hence, the sample respondents were allocated below.

Table 2: Sample Distribution

SN	LG	WARD	PU	TOTAL	Sample Allocation (PPS)
1	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I /CENTRAL PRIMARY SCH	2,736	5
2	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I / B. T. S. KARU	1772	3
3	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE / AGRICULTURAL EXT. OFFICE	2814	5
4	Municipal	Karu	UNG.GINAR / HEALTH CENTRE	2850	5
5	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA I / KARU VILLAGE JUNCTION	2501	4
6	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA II /OLD MARKET SQUARE	3150	6
7	Municipal	Karu	UNG. HAUSAWA III / AFTER SALASI RD. JUNCTION	2909	5
8	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE I/ MIN. OF IDUS QRTS	2496	4

9	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II/ OLD NEPA OFFICE JUNCTION	3482	6
10	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IIB / NEAR AREA COURT	3232	6
11	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II (F. H. A.) (CUSTOMS QUARTERS)	3105	5
12	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION I	3848	7
13	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION II	2125	4
14	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKOYI PRI. SCH.	6263	11
15	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI II/JIKOYI TOKKA VILLAGE	2905	5
16	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/UNG. GADE	2355	4
17	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKWOYI PHASE III	4348	7
18	Municipal	Karu	UNG PASHE/BESIDE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL	1067	2
19	Municipal	Karu	ALONG CITY COLLEGE ROAD BESIDE HEALTH CENTRE	1160	3
20	Municipal	Karu	KUGBO MECHANIC VILLAGE BESIDE SUVERAY FILLING STATION	1,525	3
				56,643	100

Source: Author Nov. 2023

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The research employed a comprehensive approach that combines both primary and secondary data sources to effectively address the study objectives. A structured questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of respondents from the Karu district. The questionnaire captured demographic variables and explores respondents' opinions on the impact of social media on the 2023 National Assembly Elections.

In addition, document analysis is used to gather and analyse relevant documents and official electoral materials related to the 2023 National Assembly. This approach complements primary data collection methods, allowing for a comprehensive view of the electoral process. The holistic approach aims to explore the role of social media in shaping popular perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT, Nigeria, while ensuring a thorough examination of research questions considering data availability and limitations.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The data for this study was generated from primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data

was generated using the questionnaire. The secondary sources of data basically consisted of second hand information collected from studies of relevant books, journal articles, media reports, newspapers, and relevant websites.

The data collected in the course of this study was presented using descriptive statistic. The descriptive method deals with the presentation of the variables of the study (in relation to the subject) such as the profiles of respondents. The descriptive method is employed to explain responses obtained from the questionnaires presented to respondents.

The data gathered for this research utilized Microsoft Excel as the primary tool for analysing the gathered data due to its versatility and powerful analytical capabilities. The analysis covered descriptive statistics and percentages were employed to present a clear and insightful portrayal of the data concerning the "Perception of Social Media Influence on the 2023 Election: A Study of the 2023 National Assembly Elections in, FCT, Nigeria."

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

At this section, the data that was collected for the study will be summarised, analysed and interpreted.

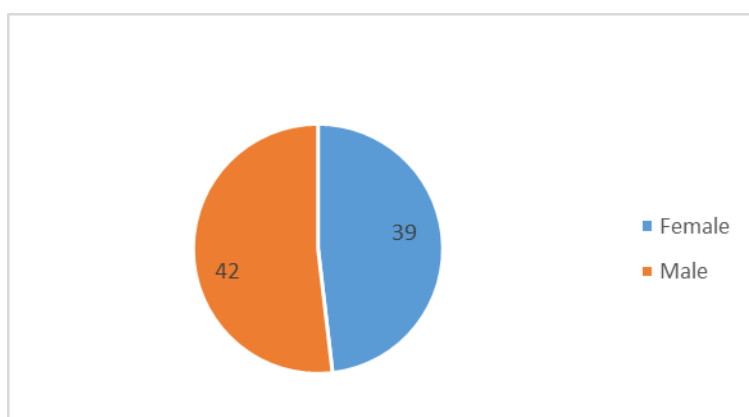
4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presentation of the survey questionnaire utilized Microsoft Excel charts, and the subsequent analysis relied on straightforward percentage calculations. This approach aimed at ensuring objectivity and clarity in the interpretation of the collected data. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed online via WhatsApp and email to residents and workers within the Karu district of the Federal Capital Territory. Out of these, 100 completed questionnaires were considered valid for the subsequent data analysis, contributing to the overall reliability and relevance of the study's findings.

4.1.1 Section A: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics of the respondents are important to survey findings. This is because the way each person views a phenomenon is different from the other. This study's demographics were on the respondents' sex, age and level of education. Below are the tabular analyses in simple percentage.

Figure 4.1 Demography



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Table 4.1: Gender

Variable	Frequency	%
Female	39	48
Male	42	52
Total	81	100

Analysis: In figure 1 above, the provided chart illustrates that among the respondents, 52% were identified as male, while 48% were identified as female.

Figure 4.2: Age Group

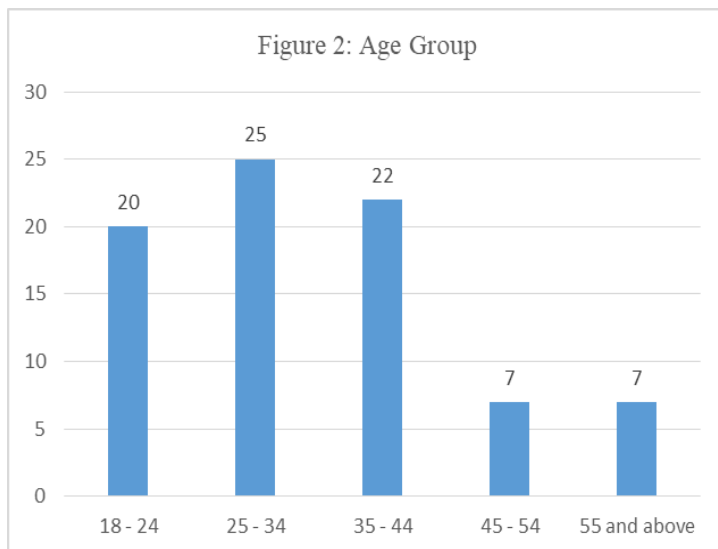


Table 4.2: Age Group

Variable	Frequency	%
18 - 24	20	25
25 - 34	25	31
35 - 44	22	27
45 - 54	7	9
55 and above	7	9
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: The chart in figure 2 above shows respondent characteristics by age. Most respondents, 31%, are aged 25-34, followed by 27% in the 35-44 age group. Those aged 18-24 make up 25% of the total. This analysis suggests that individuals active on social media are mostly between 18 and 44 years old.

Figure 4.3: Educational Qualification

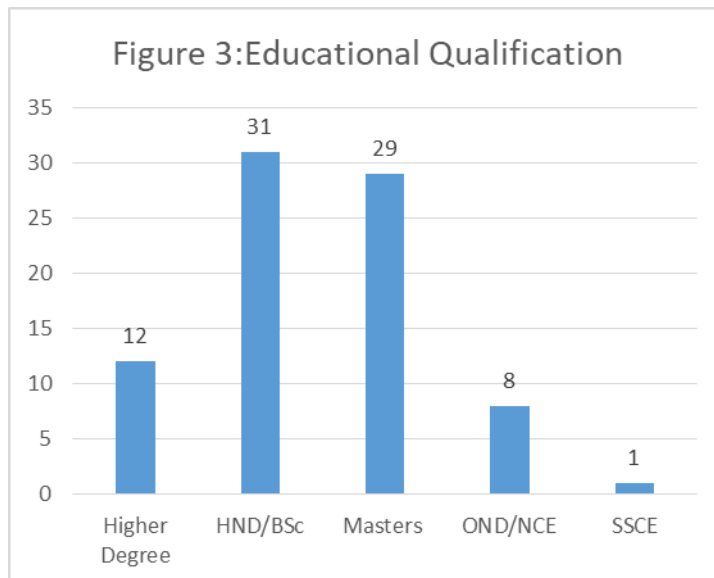


Table 4.3: Educational Qualification

Variable	Frequency	%
Higher Degree	12	15
HND/BSc	31	38
Masters	29	36
OND/NCE	8	10
SSCE	1	1
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov. 2023

Analysis: The findings in figure 3 above reveals a diverse educational background among respondents. The largest group, at 38%, has HND/BSc qualifications. Following closely, 36% hold Masters Degrees, while 15% have Higher Degrees. OND/NCE credentials make up 10%, and the smallest group, with 1%, has SSCE qualifications. The data highlights a varied educational profile within the surveyed population, showcasing a range of qualifications from undergraduate to postgraduate levels.

4.2. Section B: Objective by Objective Analysis

4.2.1. Examination of the role of social media platforms in the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT Nigeria.

Social media has emerged as a pivotal element in Nigeria's electoral landscape, as highlighted by Ibrahim (2023). With a substantial 32.9 million active users in Nigeria, according to Statista (Nwokoma, 2023), these platforms play a crucial role in the 2023 Elections. Ordinary citizens leverage social media to provide daily reports and updates on election-related developments. This has empowered Nigerians to monitor real-time electoral situations nationwide, engaging with relevant entities such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, news channels, international organizations,

and more, prompting swift action (Luckscheiter, 2022). This objective aims to understand the potential impact of social media platforms specifically within the context of the 2023 National Assembly Elections in the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria.

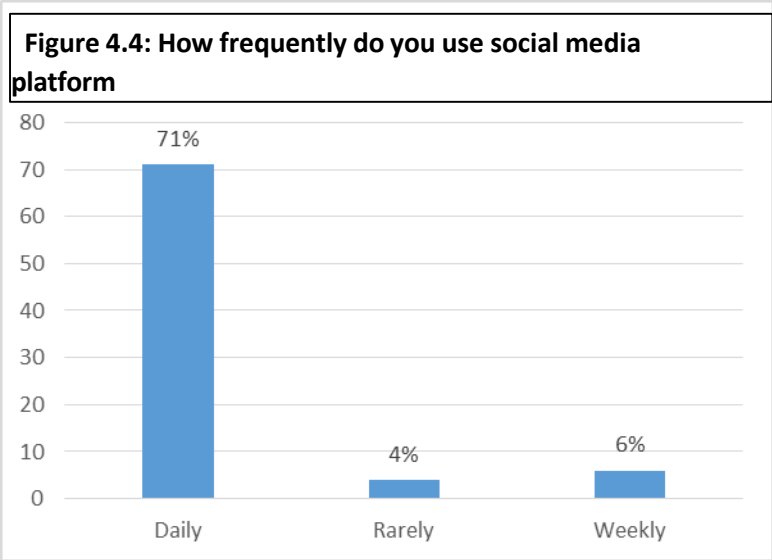


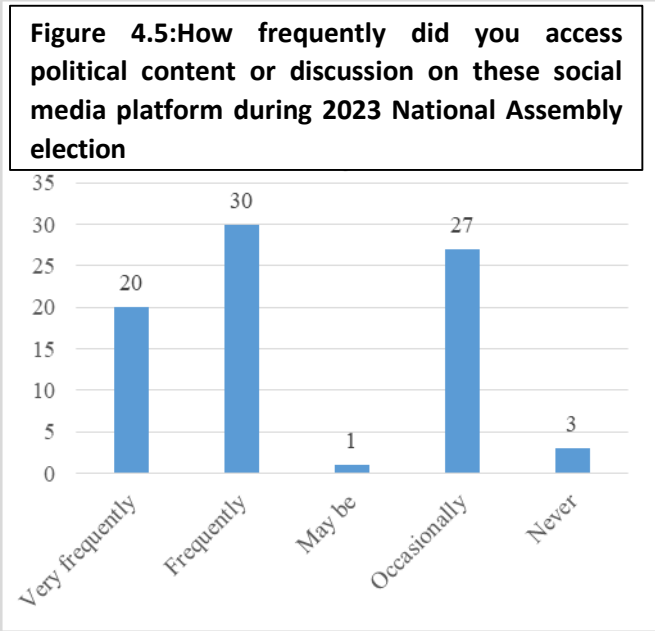
Table 4.4: frequently of use of social media platform

Variable	Frequency	%
Daily	71	88
Rarely	4	5
Weekly	6	7
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov. 2023

Analysis: The data reveals the frequency of social media platform usage among respondents. A substantial 88% of the surveyed individuals reported using social media on a daily basis, indicating a prevalent and regular engagement with these platforms in their daily lives. On the other hand, a small percentage, representing 5%, reported rare usage of social media. Additionally, 7% of respondents stated a weekly frequency of social media usage. This analysis highlights the extensive and daily use of social media within the surveyed population, underscoring its integral role in their daily routines. The notable percentage of respondents engaging with social media daily suggests a substantial influence of these platforms in their lives, potentially shaping their involvement and viewpoints during the elections.

Table 4.5: frequently of access to political content or discussion on social media platform during 2023 National Assembly election



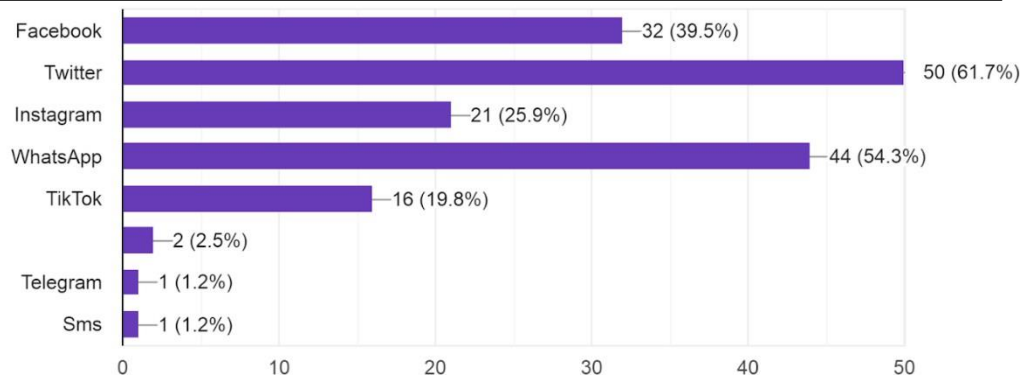
Variable	Frequency	%
Very Frequently	20	25
Frequently	30	37
Maybe	01	01
Occasionally	27	33
Never	03	4
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: Figure 5 above analyses how frequently respondents accessed political content or participated in discussions on social media platforms during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. A substantial 37% of the surveyed population reported frequent engagement with political content or discussions, indicating a significant and regular involvement. Conversely, a mere 1% mentioned that they never accessed such content during the election period.

A considerable portion, constituting 33%, occasional engagement characterized their interaction with political content on social media. This suggests a moderate level of involvement. A smaller percentage, 4%, reported rare interactions with political content or discussions on these platforms. On the flip side, a notable 25% of respondents expressed very frequent engagement, indicating a considerable and consistent involvement with political content during the 2023 National Assembly Elections.

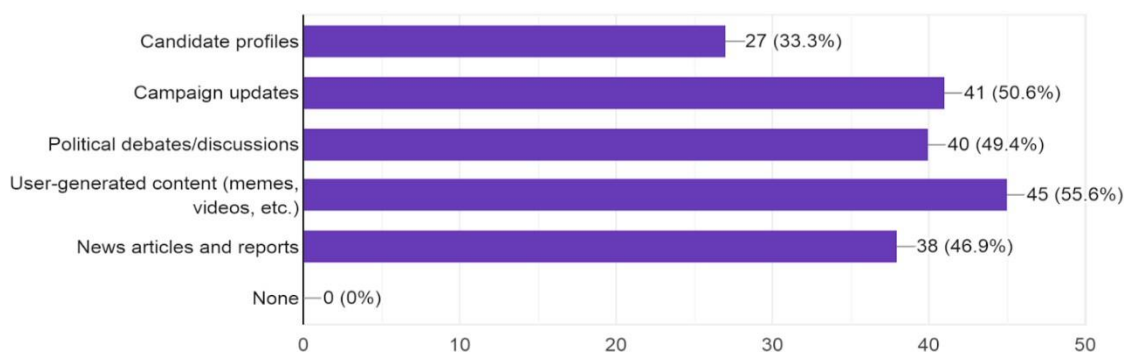
Figure 4.6: On which social media platforms did you primarily access election related information



Source: Field survey, Nov. 2023

Analysis: In Figure 6 above, respondents had the flexibility to choose multiple platforms for accessing election-related information during the 2023 National Assembly elections. The chart illustrates that Twitter emerged as the primary social media platform for election information, with a majority at 61.7%. Following closely are WhatsApp and Facebook, with percentages of 54.3% and 39.5%, respectively. Instagram and TikTok recorded 25.9% and 19.8%, respectively. Other sources, namely Telegram and SMS, each accounted for 1.2%.

Figure 4.7: What type of political content did you encounter on social media during the 2003 National Assembly Election (Check all apply)

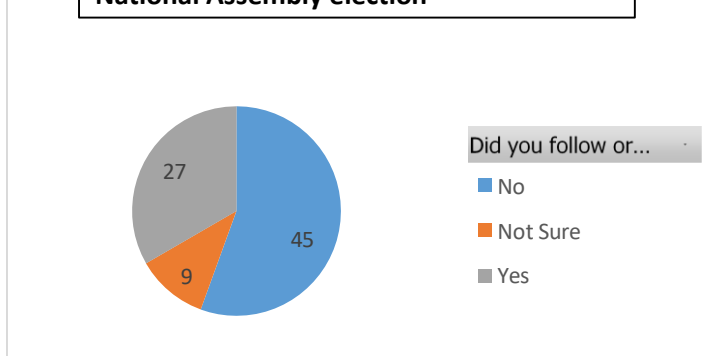


Source: Field survey, Nov. 2023

Analysis: Respondents were given the flexibility to select multiple content types accessed on social media platforms. Notably, the most frequently accessed category was user-generated

content, with a significant access rate of 55.6%. The high access rate to user-generated content indicates an active involvement of citizens in generating and sharing political content. This suggests a democratization of information dissemination, where individuals play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative and expressing their opinions. Following closely, campaign updates and political debates/discussions were accessed by 50.6% and 49.4% of respondents, respectively. The popularity of campaign updates, political debates, and discussions highlights the role of social media as a real-time information source. Voters are actively seeking and participating in discussions, staying informed about the latest developments in political campaigns and debates. News articles and reports had a 46.9% access rate, while candidate profiles were accessed by 33.3% of the respondents. This finding underscores the transformative role of social media in democratizing political discourse, providing real-time updates, and influencing voter preferences. It reflects a dynamic and interactive approach to political engagement, reshaping the traditional landscape of electoral communication.

Figure 4.6: Did you follow or engage political candidate of political parties on social media platforms during 2023 National Assembly election



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Table 4.8: Did you follow or engage with political candidates of political parties on social media during the 2003 National Assembly Election?

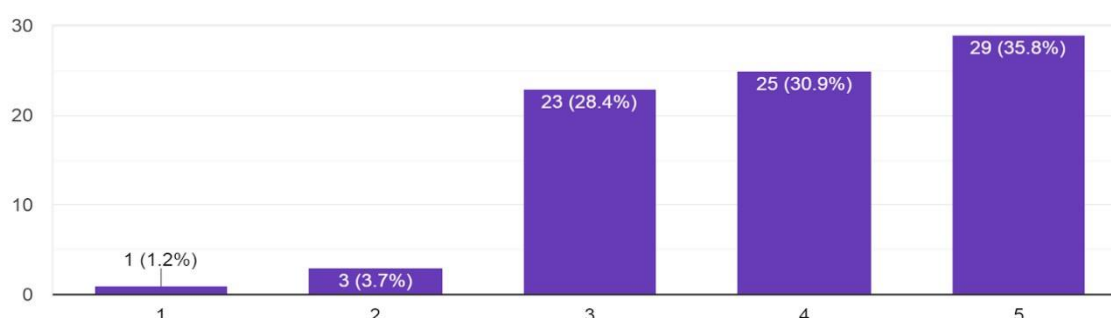
Variable	Frequency	%
No	45	56
Not Sure	9	33
Yes	27	11
Total	81	100

Analysis: This data provided in figure 8 gives insights into respondents' interaction with political candidates or parties on social media during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. A majority, constituting 56% of respondents, reported not actively following or engaging with political entities on social media during this electoral period. A significant portion, 33%, expressed uncertainty about their engagement status, indicating a lack of clarity or awareness regarding their involvement with political content on social media. In contrast, a minority, accounting for 11%, confirmed that they did indeed follow or engage with political candidates or parties on social media.

4.2.2. Examination of the influence of social media role of voters during the 2023 National Assembly election in Federal Capital Territory?

According to Sunstein (2001), as cited by Gabriel, Agaku, & Clayton (2022), social media has evolved into a potent tool capable of influencing voting behavior. Its strength lies in the ability to offer direct and cost-effective access to the production and consumption of real-time information globally, without editorial filtering. Social media goes beyond presenting details about political affiliations, candidates, and their party manifestoes; it serves as a platform for voters to engage and interact with one another on issues related to the candidates. Virtually every political party in the country utilizes social media for campaigning and conveying their plans to supporters. This objective aims to assess and comprehend the impact of social media on voter behavior during the 2023 National Assembly Elections.

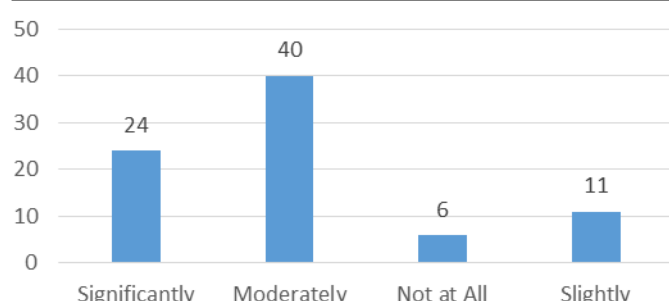
Figure 4.9: To what extent did social media influence your political opinions and role during the 2023 National Assembly Election?



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: In assessing the effectiveness of social media in disseminating election-related information, 35.8% of respondents view it as highly effective, while only 1.2% consider it not effective at all. A significant portion, comprising 30.9%, perceives it as somewhat effective, and 28.4% maintain a neutral stance. A smaller proportion, 3.7%, deems it somewhat not effective. The combined acknowledgment of social media as effective by 66.7% (35.8% highly effective and 30.9% somewhat effective) highlights its significance as a powerful tool for information dissemination in the electoral context. This recognition suggests that social media plays a crucial role in shaping opinions, fostering engagement, and potentially influencing voter decisions within the Federal Capital Territory

Figure 4.10: To what extent did social media influence your political opinions and role during the 2023 National Assembly Election?



Variable	Frequency	%
significantly	24	30
Moderately	40	49
Slightly	11	14
Not at all	06	07
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: assessing the influence of social media on political opinions of respondents, the data in figure 10 explains the extent to which social media played a role in shaping respondents' political opinions and perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. A substantial portion, constituting 49% of respondents, expressed that social media had a moderate influence on their political opinions. This indicates a significant impact, suggesting that social media played a noteworthy role in shaping their perspectives during the elections. Contrastingly, a small percentage, accounting for 7%, asserted that social media had no influence on their political opinions. This group maintained a stance of unaffected political perspectives in relation to their social media engagement. On the other hand, a noteworthy 30% of respondents indicated that social media significantly influenced their political opinions. This suggests a considerable impact on shaping their viewpoints and perceptions related to the 2023 National Assembly Elections. A moderate 14% reported a slight influence of social media on their political opinions. While not as pronounced as the significant or moderate influence categories, this group still acknowledged a discernible impact of social media on their political perspectives.

Figure 4.11: Did social media influence your voting decision during the 2023 National Assembly

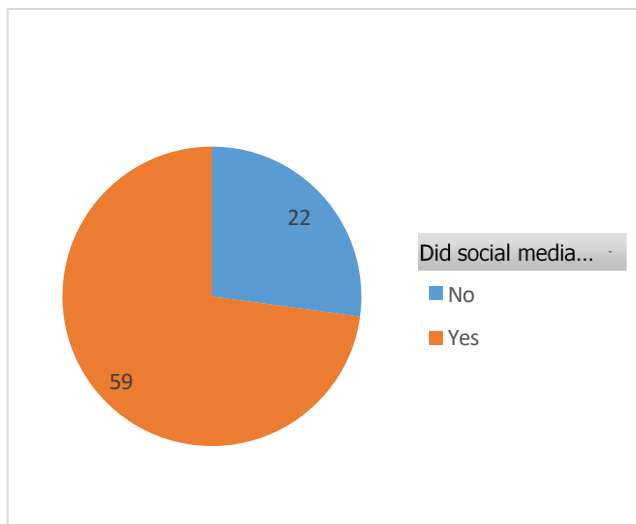


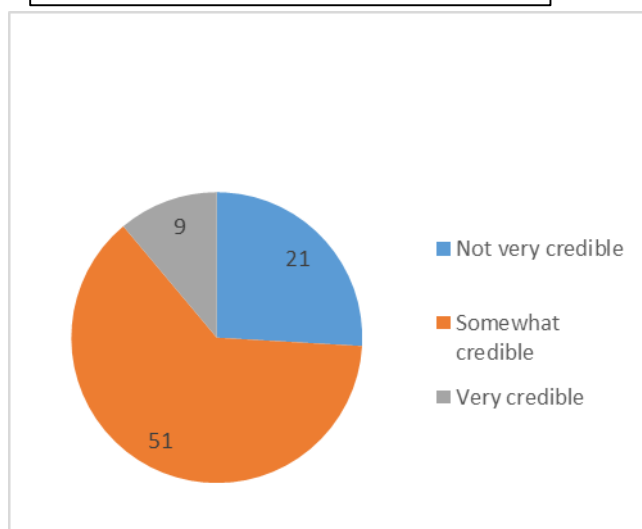
Table 11: Social media influence on voting decision during the 2023 National Assembly Election.

Variable	Frequency	%
No	22	27%
Yes	59	73%
Total	81	100

Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: the chart in figure 11 explores the impact of social media on respondents' voting decisions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. A substantial majority, comprising 73% of respondents, acknowledged that social media played a role in shaping their voting decisions. This suggests a significant influence of social media in guiding voters' choices and decisions during the electoral process. In contrast, a notable but smaller portion, accounting for 27%, reported that social media did not influence their voting decisions. This group maintained a stance of independence from social media's sway in determining their choices during the elections.

Figure 4.12: In your own opinion how credible are political messages and information shared on social media?



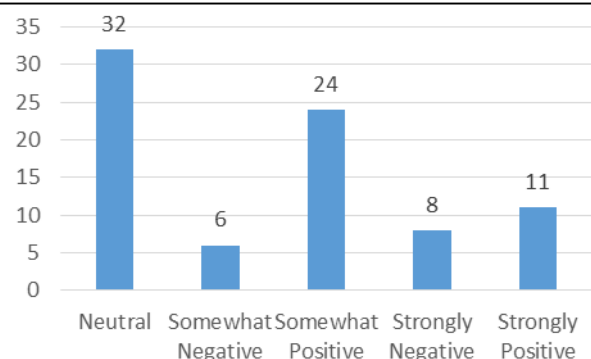
Source: Field survey, Nov. 2023

Table 4.12: In your own opinion how credible are political messages and information shared on social media?

Variable	Frequency	
Not very credible	21	26
Somewhat credible	51	63
Very credible	9	11
Total	81	100

Analysis: The chart in figure 12 explores respondents' perceptions of the credibility of political messages and information on social media. The majority, constituting 63%, sees these messages as somewhat credible, reflecting a basic level of trust with some reservations. In contrast, a significant but smaller portion, 26%, expresses scepticism, deeming political content on social media as not very credible. A minority, representing 11%, holds an optimistic view, considering these messages as very credible. This nuanced understanding underscores the diverse range of opinions among respondents regarding the reliability of political information shared on social media platforms.

Figure 4.13: Please indicate your role of how the use of social media affected the overall electoral atmosphere in Federal Capital Territory during the 2023 National



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Table 4.13: Role of the use of social media on the overall electoral atmosphere in Federal Capital Territory during the 2023 National Assembly Election

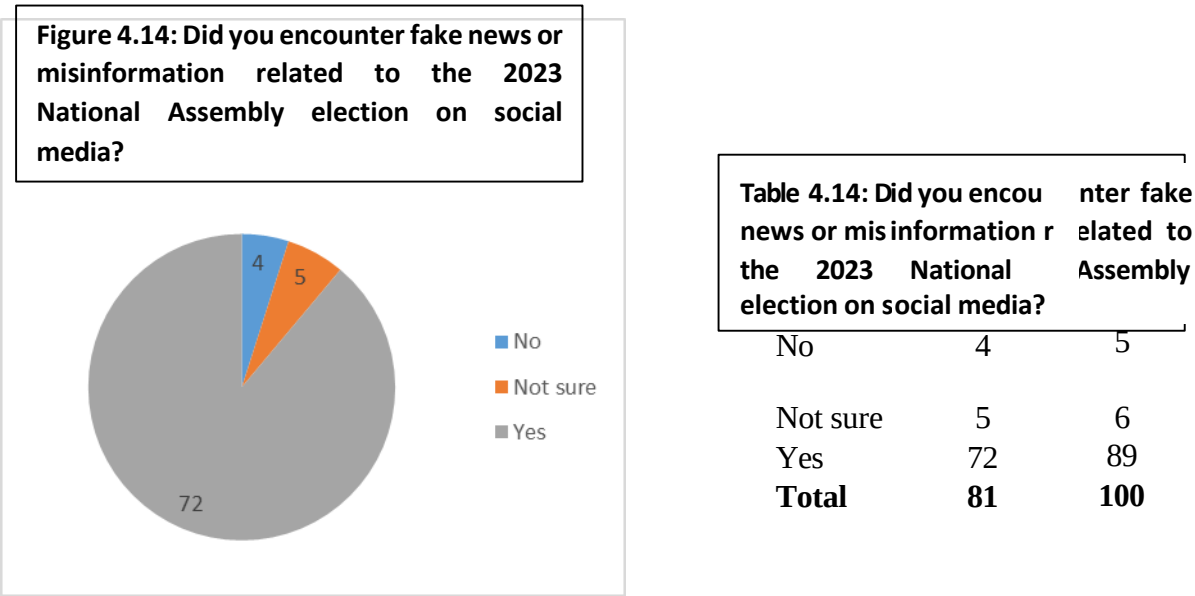
Variable	Frequency	%
Strongly Positive	11	14
Somewhat Positive	24	30
Neutral	32	40
Somewhat Negative	24	30
Strongly Negative	8	10
Total	81	100

Analysis: A considerable 40% of respondents hold a neutral view on how social media affected the overall electoral atmosphere during the 2023 National Assembly elections. This suggests a balanced perspective without a strong inclination toward positive or negative effects. A smaller but noteworthy 7% of respondents see the influence of social media as somewhat negative, indicating a degree of concern or negativity associated with its impact on the electoral atmosphere. On the positive side, a significant 30% of respondents view the impact of social media as somewhat positive, acknowledging positive influences with some reservations. A minority of 10% strongly feels that the use of social media had a negative impact on the overall electoral atmosphere, indicating a more pronounced negative perception within this group. In addition, 14% express a strongly positive view, suggesting a heightened positive impact attributed to the use of social media during the elections.

4.2.3. Examination of the challenges associated with the use of social media in electoral processes

The integration of social media into electoral processes has introduced a myriad of challenges, influencing the fairness and credibility of elections. As candidates and voters navigate the digital landscape, several key issues have emerged, shaping the discourse

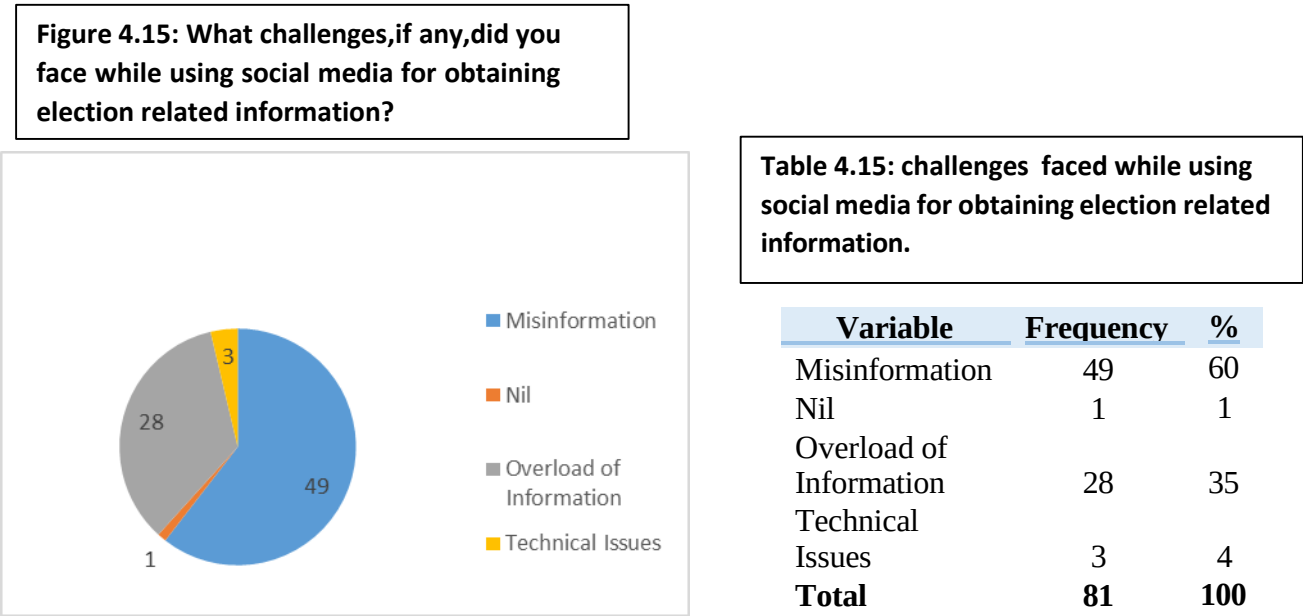
Surrounding the role of social media in democratic practices. From the rapid dissemination of misinformation to concerns about privacy and cyber threats, the impact of social media on electoral processes extends beyond its potential benefits. This objective explores the multifaceted challenges associated with the use of social media in elections, shedding light on the complexities that arise as these platforms become integral components of political landscapes.



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: Figure 14 indicates that 89% of respondents’ encountered fake news or misinformation related to the 2023 National Assembly elections on social media, highlighting widespread exposure to deceptive information during the electoral period. In contrast, 5% reported not encountering such content, suggesting a limited number of individuals who either avoided or were not exposed to deceptive information. Additionally, 6% expressed uncertainty about encountering fake news or misinformation, indicating some ambiguity among respondents regarding the authenticity of information on social media during the elections.

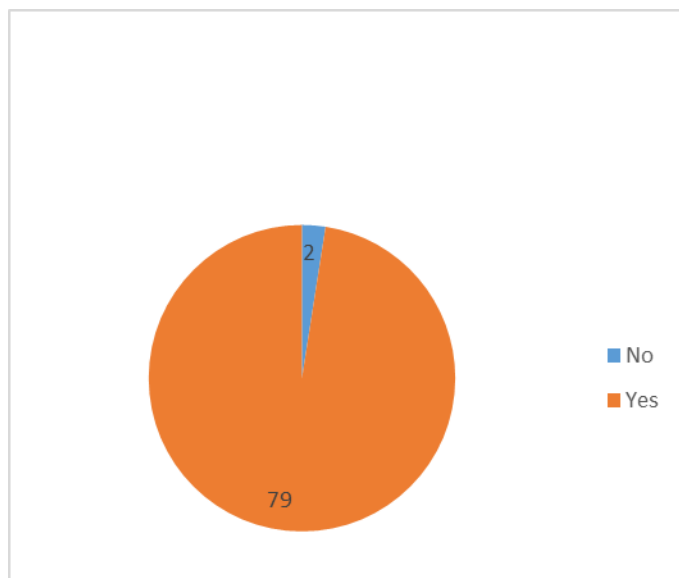
Overall, the majority acknowledged their exposure to fake news and misinformation on social media during the 2023 National Assembly elections.



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Analysis: Figure 15 provides insights into the challenges respondents encountered while using social media for obtaining election-related information. The majority, accounting for 60%, reported facing issues linked to misinformation, emphasizing a widespread problem with deceptive or inaccurate content during their social media engagement. A minimal 1% of respondents indicated no challenges (Nil), signifying a small percentage that did not encounter obstacles in accessing election-related information on social media. Additionally, 35% of respondents mentioned challenges associated with information overload on social media, indicating a considerable portion struggling to navigate through the extensive election-related content available on these platforms. A small percentage, 4%, identified technical issues as a challenge, pointing to a limited number of respondents who faced difficulties related to the technical aspects of social media platforms.

Figure 4.16: Role of social media in spreading fake news or misinformation during the 2023 National Assembly Election



Source: Field survey, Nov 2023

Table 4.16: Do you believe that social media played a role in spreading fake news or misinformation during the 2023 National Assembly Election

Variable	Frequency	%
No	2	2
Yes	79	98
Total	81	100

Analysis: The data in figure 16 reveals a strong consensus among respondents regarding the role of social media in spreading fake news or misinformation during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. An overwhelming 98% of respondents believe that social media played a role in disseminating deceptive or inaccurate information during the electoral period. This widespread acknowledgment contrasts with a minimal 2% who do not attribute the spread of fake news or misinformation to social media platforms during the elections. Overall, the majority of respondents share the belief that social media significantly contributed to the dissemination of deceptive information during the 2023 National Assembly Elections.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

The advent of the digital age has ushered in notable transformations in the dissemination and consumption of political information, with social media platforms assuming a central role in influencing political discourse. This investigation into the role of social media influence on the 2023 election, specifically focusing on the National Assembly elections in the

Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria, underscores the crucial role these platforms play in shaping the role and exerting influence within the political sphere.

The study identified a notable segment of respondents, falling within the 25-44 age bracket that actively participated on social media platforms, indicating a demographic concentration in this age range. This corresponds with statistics from Statista.com, indicating that active social media users are predominantly aged between 18 and 35 years. The study supported the notion of Okpala, (2023), who in his study discovered that social media is widely used by Nigerians, particularly young Nigerians. This is because everyone who responded acknowledged using social media. The respondents acknowledged to use social media to some extent on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, with the majority of them agreeing to do so on daily basis.

In examining the role of social media platforms in the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria, the study identified the use of multiple social media platforms in accessing political information with Twitter and Facebook taking the lead. This highlights their relevance as a primary source of political news and discussions. This aligns with a 2015 study by Demos, a UK-based market research firm, which revealed that Twitter was ten times more active during the 2015 election period in Nigeria than in normal times. (Luckscheiter, 2022). The same scenario unfolded in the build-up to the 2023 general elections Igbinedion, O., & Ajisebiyawo, A. (2023).

Nigerian politicians and political figures are actively leveraging social media platforms to share political messages and information, a strategy that reflects their recognition of the influential power wielded by these platforms. This acknowledgment is substantiated by the unanimous response from every respondent, affirming that they have encountered political content on social media, with a significant portion reporting frequent exposure. This high engagement rate in political discourse illustrates the interactive nature of social media, empowering citizens to actively participate in political discussions. This study has shown that

social media platforms provide a unique space for the formation of political information. Citizens use these platforms to access a wide range of perspectives, breaking down traditional information gatekeepers. Social media allows for the rapid sharing of news articles, opinion pieces, and user-generated content, enabling users to engage with political discourse in real-time. These findings collectively emphasize the multifaceted role of social media in shaping political engagement, influencing information dissemination, and impacting voter perception during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria.

While assessing how social media influenced the role of voters during the 2023 National Assembly election in Federal Capital Territory, the findings reveal that the impact of social media platforms on voter perceptions in this election is both varied and complex. Respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of social media in disseminating election-related information, emphasizing its significance as a potent tool for shaping opinions, fostering engagement, and potentially influencing decisions. The study uncovered a substantial impact on political opinions, indicated by various influence indicators. A notable proportion attributed social media influence at a moderate level, signifying its potential to shape perspectives related to the elections. Social media emerged as a critical player in voters' decision-making processes, with a majority acknowledging its influence in shaping their voting decisions.

Diverse perspectives on the credibility of political messages on social media indicate a nuanced understanding among participants, with a majority viewing them as somewhat credible. Regarding the overall electoral atmosphere, a considerable segment of participants maintained a neutral stance, while a significant percentage perceived the impact as somewhat positive. These varied perspectives highlight the intricate interplay of social media in influencing perceptions, shaping opinions, and contributing to the electoral atmosphere during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. These findings align with the idea

that social media platforms create a democratized space for political engagement, allowing individuals to access diverse perspectives and participate in meaningful discussions.

The role of social media in disseminating misinformation, fostering polarization, and facilitating online harassment poses a threat to the foundations of a healthy democracy. Regarding challenges related to social media use in electoral processes, a significant percentage of respondents encountered fake news or misinformation concerning the 2023 National Assembly elections on these platforms. Misinformation emerged as the predominant challenge, affecting 60% of respondents, while 35% and 4% reported issues related to information overload and technical problems, respectively.

The rapid spread of false information on social media challenges traditional fact-checking mechanisms, potentially influencing public opinion before corrections can be made. While these platforms enable swift information dissemination, they also serve as conduits for misinformation and disinformation, exposing the public to deceptive content during electoral periods. This aligns with previous studies by Fenton & Barassi (2011), Okoro & Nwafor (2013), and Apuke & Appollos (2017), which highlighted how online communication tools can breed political cynicism and other detrimental political outcomes. False stories, manipulated images, and misleading narratives can quickly gain traction, impacting voter perceptions and electoral outcomes. The absence of stringent fact-checking mechanisms on social media exacerbates the spread of such content, emphasizing the critical need for vigilance and fact-checking during electoral periods to address the challenges posed by misinformation on these platforms.

In conclusion, social media has become a pivotal element in Nigeria's electoral landscape, as highlighted by Luckscheiter in 2022. The widespread adoption of social media platforms has ushered in a transformative shift in how people access information, communicate, and express their opinions. This evolution extends to the political sphere, where social media platforms

serve as influential tools for political communication, engagement, and mobilization, as emphasized by Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo in 2023. Social media has redefined the dynamics of political campaigns, influenced voter preferences, and shaped how citizens exercise their electoral rights (Igbinedion & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). This aligns with the assertions of Ufuophu- Biri & Ojoboh (2017) and Okoro and Nwafor (2013) that social media facilitates easy expression of opinions about the government, empowers citizens to act as checks and balances on public officers, enables the demand for probity, transparency, and accountability, and stimulates increased political participation among users, often referred to as 'netizens' (Igbinedion & Ajisebiyawo, 2023).

The study findings suggest that while social media plays a crucial role in shaping opinions and influencing perceptions, challenges such as misinformation and information overload pose significant hurdles. Understanding and addressing these challenges are essential for harnessing the potential of social media as a positive force in electoral processes.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes, highlights the main findings of the study as was providing the recommendations.

5.1 Summary of findings

The study assesses the role of social media influence on the 2023 elections with a focus on the National Assembly elections in Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria. The study found that Nigerians, particularly the youth, widely utilize social media, as affirmed by the study. The findings indicate that respondents use social media regularly—whether daily, weekly, or monthly— with the majority engaging on a daily basis. The study also highlighted the prevalent use of various platforms, with Twitter and Facebook taking the lead. This underscores their importance as primary sources for political information and discussions.

Social media play a crucial role in influencing voters' decision-making processes, and participants held diverse perspectives on the credibility of political messages on these platforms. Respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of social media in disseminating election-related information, highlighting its role in shaping opinions and potentially influencing decisions. The study identified a substantial impact on political opinions, with a notable proportion attributing social media influence at a moderate level. Regarding the overall electoral atmosphere, varied role were observed, with some maintaining a neutral stance and others perceiving the impact as somewhat positive. These results highlight how social media influences the role, opinions, and contributes to the electoral atmosphere during the 2023 National Assembly Elections. This aligns with the notion that these platforms offer a democratized space for political engagement and diverse discussions. The study highlight the harmful effects of social media, contributing to the spread of misinformation, fostering polarization, and facilitating online harassment, thereby posing a threat to the fundamental principles of a healthy democracy. A significant challenge identified in utilizing social media for electoral processes was the prevalence of misinformation related to the 2023 National Assembly elections. While these platforms

enable rapid information dissemination, they also serve as conduits for misinformation and disinformation during electoral periods. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the adverse political outcomes associated with online communication tools, underscoring the critical necessity for vigilance and fact-checking to address the challenges posed by misinformation on social media during electoral periods.

5.2 Conclusion

In the evolving landscape of contemporary politics, the impact of social media has become increasingly pronounced, reshaping the flow of information and influencing individual choices. The 2023 Nigerian presidential elections served as a pivotal moment where technology, communication, and democracy converged. This study sought to investigate the influence of social media role on the 2023 elections, specifically focusing on the National Assembly elections.

The research uncovered a substantial impact of social media platforms in disseminating political information, moulding voters' perspectives, and contributing to the democratization of the electoral process. As Nigeria advances in its democratic journey, the study underscores the necessity of developing a nuanced understanding of how social media shapes political narratives. This understanding is essential for comprehending the evolving dynamics of the nation's democracy and assessing its potential implications for the future.

5.3 Recommendations

In the wake of this study into the influence of social media on the 2023 National Assembly Elections in FCT Nigeria, several key recommendations emerge to enhance the role of social media in electoral processes and address associated challenges.

Firstly, addressing the urgent need for enhancing civic education and media literacy programs is crucial. Initiatives should be developed to empower social media users with the skills required to critically evaluate information, fostering a more informed electorate capable of discerning between credible and deceptive content. Simultaneously, taking a proactive approach to strengthen political

engagement on social media is vital. Political candidates and parties should be encouraged to actively interact with citizens on these platforms, fostering a more participatory and informed voter base. Implementing awareness campaigns could be instrumental in conveying the advantages of engaging with political content on social media, thereby promoting active involvement in discussions related to political affairs. Promoting transparency and accountability in political communication on social media is crucial. It involves encouraging candidates and parties to provide accurate information and establishing mechanisms to report and address misinformation. Tailoring social media campaigns to reach diverse age groups is also important, considering the varied preferences across demographics. Additionally, implementing effective fact-checking mechanisms directly on social media platforms can swiftly identify and label misinformation, contributing to a more accurate information environment.

Dealing with information overload on social media platforms is crucial. Exploring tools to help users manage this overload will lead to a more focused consumption of election-related content. Investing in technical infrastructure to tackle issues like misinformation and technical glitches is vital. This investment ensures a smoother user experience during elections, reducing potential challenges related to the technical aspects of social media platforms.

Regularly reviewing and updating policies on social media platforms is crucial for their relevance and effectiveness in combating misinformation and encouraging a healthy political discourse. Collaborating with government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders is encouraged to collectively tackle challenges and promote responsible social media use during elections. Implementing these recommendations collectively aims to improve the positive impact of social media in the electoral process while effectively addressing associated challenges.

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APPENDIX I

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this study focused on understanding the influence of social media on voter perceptions and decision-making during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in the Karu community, FCT, Nigeria. Your insights are invaluable. Please respond to the following questions candidly and with the provided options.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1.1 Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

1.2 Age Group:

☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55 and above

1.3 Educational Background:

☐ Primary/FSLC ☐ SSCE ☐ OND/NCE
☐ HND/BSc ☐ Higher Degree

Section 2: Role of Social Media Platforms in Elections

2.1 How frequently do you use social media platforms?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly
☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2.2 On which social media platforms did you primarily access election-related information?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram ☐ WhatsApp
☐ Tik Tok ☐ Others (please specify): _____

2.3 How frequently did you access political content or discussions on these social media platforms during the 2023 National Assembly Elections?

☐ Very frequently ☐ Frequently ☐ Occasionally
☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2.4. What types of political content did you encounter on social media during the 2023 National Assembly Elections? (Check all that apply)

☐ Candidate profiles ☐ Campaign updates ☐ Political debates/discussions
☐ User-generated content (memes, videos, etc.) ☐ News articles and reports
☐ None

2.5. Did you follow or engage with political candidates or political parties on social media during the 2023 National Assembly Elections?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

2.6. Rate the effectiveness of social media platforms in disseminating election-related information on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being highly effective and 1 being not effective at all.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Section 3: Impact on Voter Behaviour

3.1 To what extent did social media influence your political opinions and perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections?

☐ Significantly ☐ Moderately

☐ Slightly ☐ Not at All

3.2 Did social media influence your voting decision during the 2023 National Assembly Election?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3.3. In your opinion, how credible are the political messages and information shared on social media?

☐ Very credible ☐ Somewhat credible

☐ Not very credible ☐ Not credible at all

3.4. Did you encounter fake news or misinformation related to the 2023 National Assembly elections on social media?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

3.5. On a Scale of 1 to 5, please indicate your perception of how the use of social media affected the overall electoral atmosphere in Karu Community during the 2023 National Assembly elections:

☐ Strongly Negative ☐ Somewhat Negative ☐ Neutral

☐ Somewhat Positive ☐ Strongly Positive

Section 4: Challenges Associated with Social Media in Electoral Processes

4.1 What challenges, if any, did you face while using social media for obtaining election-related information?

☐ Misinformation ☐ Overload of Information

☐ Technical Issues ☐ Other (please specify): _____

4.2 Do you believe that social media played a role in spreading fake news or misinformation during the 2023 National Assembly Elections?

☐ Yes ☐ No