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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to determine the impact of social media on voting behaviour in Nigeria. The study was guided by media system dependency theory. This study revealed that social media did have a positive influence on participation in the political and electoral process, especially in the 2019 and 2023 Nigerian general elections. Social media influenced peoples' choice of political candidate and party but, quite amazingly, did not actually guarantee their vote for any political candidate just because he or she has a social media account. The study also revealed that people regard social media as a credible medium for political discourse, and that social media influences political involvement and take advantage of social media to determine their voting pattern .In summary, social media as a whole is expected to enhanced voting behavior.

Keywords: Election, Leadership, Social Media, Voting, Voting Behaviour

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of internet and technology has exposed majority of the global population to different interactive platforms on which different kinds of information is exchanged which might significantly have effect on human behavior, decision and judgment (CES, 2012). Social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilizing interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. The emergence of the Internet as the new mass medium of the 21st century now changes mass media substantially. Hence information can be distributed at high speed, low cost, and broad scope and as a result, there is egalitarian access to the production and the consumption of news (Prat and Strömberg, 2011)

Today, globalization has made the world a “global village”, with the quick transfer of information overriding the challenges of time and distance (Friedman, 2007). globalization has gradually become one of the important means of influencing the society and this influence is based exclusively on its social aspects of interaction and participation. Social media has gain more popularity and scope, and its impact on voters’ political and cultural perceptions cannot be underestimated because social media practically influences the way users interact, communicate and make decisions on social, cultural, and political issues in today’s world.

Voting behavior is a form of political behavior exhibited by electorates which can

be influenced by a lot of factors ranging from emotional, ethnicity, and religion leading them to make certain decisions. Various factors such as gender, race, culture or religion go play a major role in affecting the way a voter behaves and the decision he makes as regards selection of a candidate of his choice. However, key external factors may also influence a voter’s behavior such as political socialization, socio-cultural views, tolerance of diverse political views and the media, internet inclusive. The impact of these influences on voting behavior is dependent on attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and the source of available information to the voter.

The social media has become a powerful medium which may affect voting behavior because of its potential to provide direct and cheap access to the production and consumption of current information at any part of the world without editorial filtering (Sunstein, 2001). Not only do social media provide information about political affiliations, candidates and their party manifestoes, it also provides a platform through which voters across cultural divides can relate and interact with themselves on issues about these candidates. Evidence by the recent February 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria, political parties, including the three prominent parties took to social media platforms such as facebook, instagramm, watsapp, twitters, mobile newspapers, news ads, etc. to campaign and mobilize not only youths but all class of internet users to vote for them, this brought about a variety of interesting news and drama

online providing opportunity for users to read, respond, interact, argue and trash out issues online. Twitter, facebook, blogs, online newspapers etc. became platforms for people to air their thoughts on various candidates, and sway others towards their line of thinking with various debates, hash tags and online campaigns.

Nearly every political party in the country used social media to campaign and advance its plans, message and manifestoes to supporters including advertising, mobilization and organizing in all the states of the federation, and even fundraising. Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter were used to allow voters understand how each party or particular candidate felt about important national issues ranging from security to power. Hence social media became powerful enough to influence voters' decisions and choices as many voters who had fixed their minds and conscience on voting a particular party or candidate began to change their decisions based on certain information or idea they got online about the party or candidate. Information gotten by a particular voter is also not static, as the same voter would use several internet tools and buttons to broadcast same message to other voters like him through medium such as blogs, facebook, chat rooms etc. in order to influence them

The gradual switch from traditional media to social media use in mobilizing and campaigning voters by politicians is a reality that has come to stay in today's modern world, and if taken advantage can open up

the possibility for politicians to structure their campaigns to address voters with different beliefs on a more personal level and consequently influence voter's attitude and behaviour offline. As social media use for political activities gradually increases in popularity and scope, it is of utmost importance to know if there are changes in voter attitudes and behaviour based on online information and interaction. It is also of necessity to investigate the influence of various political campaign sites and other social media sites over voters' political and cultural perceptions and the way that they communicate and act afterwards.

It is a known fact that social media has significantly altered the accessibility and availability of information on political parties and candidates in recent times. Instead of gathering basic knowledge from news stories and websites, users of social media gather information, and at times, opinions, using interactive sites where communication is continuous between voters and politicians and where information flows directly from politicians' to voters' via Facebook and Twitter pages etc. It therefore remains a fact that most voters are likely to change their minds, beliefs and behavior based on information they get from these site.

The social media was able to propagate and mobilize the youths to think beyond voting as the only means of participation in governance. On social media, the fact cards representing the findings and years of the group were shared on various social media. The Non-too-young was also given support in

national legislative houses. The bill to the National Assembly which seeks to alter the Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In section 65, the Bill proposed that 30 years of age and 25 years should be the benchmark for contestants into the Senate and House of Representative respectively; and section 106 amendment proposed that 25 years should be the qualifying age for the House of Assembly; section 131 proposed that aspirants seeking the position of President should be at least 30 years old, while section 177 should also be amended to allow that those seeking the positions of Governors should be 30 years also. (The Nation 2018).

This study will focus on the opportunity created by social media and its power to affect the political aspect of Nigerians. The just concluded election of February 2023 has shown the extent at which the social media can change the mind set of people within a very short period of time, as the case was after the presidential election that opened the mind of Lagosians that voting non Yoruba may lead to hijacking of Lagos state by the easterners and campaign towards this was channelled through all the social media platforms and the southerners especially the Lagosians change their mind set of voting the youth to voting Yoruba candidates

The concept of voting behavior

Voting behavior pertains to action or inaction of citizens in respect of participating in the

election that takes place for members of the local, regional, or national government. The behavior results either in support for political candidate or parties or abstention from the voting procedure, the behavior of voters can be traced to the benefits or disadvantages to their quality of life that they perceive would be a consequence of their action (encyclopedia of quality of life well-being research)

The study of voting behavior can be divided into short term and long term influence. Long term influence includes race, gender, culture, religion, age etc. while short term influence includes political alignment, the performance of the governing party, the electoral campaign, the influence of mass media and political events

The recent 2023 election has shed a light on a need to understand the gap between what people say they might do and what they actually do in the privacy of the ballot box.

According to Bromhead (1960) as cited in Okolie (2004), voting denotes the means where by a number of persons are able to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a proposition, or their preferences as between two or more proposals or between two or more candidates for some office. Stokes (1963) cited also by Okolie (2004) also noted that voting is not the sole means of aggregating individual preferences, other means include market mechanism and process of informal interaction in many social and political groups. Voting in Nigeria has undergone a lot of transformation from secret

ballot system ,the electoral commission experimented open ballot system and modified secret/open ballot system(okolie 2004).The voting system differ from country to country but the most important thing to note is the intention to elect candidates with the participation of citizen.

Voting behavior is clearly shaped by short term and long term influences. Short term influences are specific to a particular election and do not allow conclusion to be drawn about voting pattern in general. The chief sort term influences is the state of the economy ,which reflect the fact that there is usually a link between government popularity and economic variables, such as unemployment, inflation and disposable income, Another short term influence on voting is the personality and public standing of party leaders ,this is particularly important because media exposure portray leaders as the brand image of their party (Heywood 2004)

The concept of social media

Studies on social media have identified Facebook, twitter, blogs, instant messengers, emails, Skype, whatsapp, to go, YouTube, and others as the means of communication, interaction, and education. While some of these allow for selective participation, others give room to universal participation through the unrestricted opportunities to share and duplicate received messages thereby making it available to many outside the confines of a group of friends and or followers.(Adebayo fasanwon 2019)

Qualman quoted by gancho(2017)refer to social media as the age of instant communication and transparency, calling it the glassline effect ,he define it as the tool to deal with excess information on the internet and a way to filter the information you actually searching for . he also explain that there are different type of social media 1,social news site, 2social networking site, 3 social book marking 4 social sharing site Social media provide an accessible platform for the birth of citizen journalism. However, he also noted that the use of social media platforms sidetracks regulated mainstream media and offers the opportunity of direct communication with the target audience. Ajayi and Adesote (2015) perceive the social media as transforming phenomena in information sharing and communication beyond borders between people all over the world.

The employment of social media platforms in politics among youths has also been observed Rainie et al., (2012) to increase significantly. Thus, the youths employ social media for obtaining political information, and expression of opinions on political issues. In addition, the social media is being used for posting, sharing and liking views that pertain to politics. social networking sites can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interaction (Trusov et al.2009) online social network have completely change the spreading of information by making it easy to share and digest information on the internet.(Akrimi &Khemakhem 2012).

(Aindrila et al.2014) hold the belief that social media plays a valuable roles throughout an election process which goes a long way in swaying voters opinion, belief and attitudes

The social media and voting

Social media is a part of the process by which voters are talking about their ballot selections , especially the young voters ,it has also become a notable venue for people to try to convince their friends to vote . Currently, the number of active social media in Nigeria has risen from 27million in 2019 to 36million in the just concluded 2023 elections .given the challenge of prevailing misinformation and disinformation on the social media and the way such disinformation can permeate to the social media ,more generally the greater access to online information does not neccesarilly create more informed citizen. In fact in Nigeria, it has confused citizenry while entrenching pre-existing cloud based on ethnicity and religion

The relationship between social media and politics is rooted in the desire for political change. Today the public at large is using the online information and networking access to find solutions to many challenges. Civil society with its rising frustration over political apathy, is trying to use social media for a change. This online revolution may be less about technology and more about the gradually changing human behavior.

Social media like facebook ,instagramm , watsapp, twitters ,youtube and twitter connects people and gets them talking with

the enabling of content sharing.It also becomes more meaningful because it allows politicians to interact with voters and listen to their views, suggestions and opinions. The social media has an immense impact on its target audience, with the creation of an enabling environment for people to participate. When some of these users actively engage in political debates, they become great tools in spreading the word and influencing other people's opinion. More and more Nigerians are getting on the social media bandwagon, and this will increase with time, According to the Nigerian Communications Commission NCC, the number of Internet users on the Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) networks in Nigeria had reached 81 million in January 2019. This implies that Nigerians are gradually embracing the use of social media as a powerful tool to manage their lives and stay in touch with happenings around them in different aspects of the economy, politics inclusive. This came into play in the recently conducted 2023 polls in the country where a lot of internet users participated in several online polls to select candidates, with a lot of political parties sponsoring online ads, campaigns and interactive for debate

The role of social media in influencing the fairness of the 2015 presidential election of Muhammadu Buhari has been hailed internationally. The historical transfer of power in 2015 in Nigeria was achieved though social media, which had a major influence on the fairness of the election. Social media allowed for greater participation and immediacy. News and information

surrounding the elections were provided for the first time in the history of Nigeria's electoral process. Such media aided voters' sense of empowerment and ability to share information easily. Social media platforms complemented the roles of traditional media to share information with the people. People are becoming more interconnected through the internet; Facebook launched internet.org, an initiative that provides global access to the most remote parts of society.

Political movements use social media as a recruitment tool. Rather than getting brand messages via traditional medias' one-way communication systems, social media allows for recommendations in the form of re-shares, thus de-commercializing political messaging. It is that space which uses different tools to help raise the voices of average Nigerians. Social media played a significant role in what was arguably the most competitive election process in Nigerian history. The growth of information and communication technology is constantly bringing different interactive platforms to the people. These platforms are providing opportunities for sharing information across societies, which, in turn, have the capability to effect change on an individual's behavior, decision-making, and judgment (CES, 2012). By their very interactive nature, social media platforms are using user-produced content to build and maintain different kinds of relationships. According to Eugene (2015), there is a growing popularity in the use of social media to get news about every aspect of life. A 2014 study showed that about 62% of internet users depend on Facebook for political news and

information. This allows for information, whether true or false, to spread quickly and easily, especially among peer networks and across demographics. Many social media sites are enhancing participation in political activities at different levels .

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The model in figure above indicate that social media is an independent variable while voting behavior is the dependent variable .Element considered under social media Facebook,Instagramm,whattzapp,youtube,twitter which are expected to influenced or determine voting behavior .The model also shows that each element of independent variable has relative contribution to voting behavior ,that is, citizen take advantage of social media to determine their voting pattern .In summary ,social media as a whole is expected to enhanced voting behavior

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research study is situated within the limit of Media Systems Dependency Theory .

Media Systems Dependency Theory

Considering the impact of social media on the public and the public's relationship with social media, it becomes clear that social media have become a part of the way we talk, socialize and spend our time; social media begun to take precedence over other communication and traditional media outlets due to its heightened accessibility and usability. Hence, dependence on social media to provide individuals with rewarding interactions has become greater over the

years. This makes social media a particularly effective communication tool, enabling succinct communication with individuals who have already expressed an interest. More importantly it enables public figures “to build deeper relationships” with the public on a more personal level (Comm, 2009) with clients, partners and individuals, creating an easy, far-reaching campaign tactic for modern day politicians.

This study focus on Media system dependency theory (MSD), developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976 which is a theory grounded in classical sociological literature which posits that media and their audiences should be studied in the context of larger social systems (Wikipedia.com, 2015). MSD ties together the interrelations of broad social systems, mass media, and the individual into a comprehensive explanation of media effects. According to Baran and Davis, the media systems dependency theory posits that “the more an individual depends on having needs gratified by media use, the more important the media’s role in the person’s life, and therefore the more influence on his or her attitude and behaviour” (Baran & Davis, 2006).

This dependency on media emerges from three major relationships (Andreadis & Chadjipadelis, 2005)

1. Relationship between society and the media; in this relationship, media access and availability are regarded as the preceding factor to an

individual’s experience with the media. The kind of media dependence on societal systems widely varies and cuts across political, economic, and cultural strata.

2. Relationship between media and the audience; This relationship constitutes the key variable in this theory because it affects how the public might use a mass medium and this relationship varies across media systems. The more significant the information needs are, the stronger the motivation to seek for related information hence greater dependency on the medium of sourcing for the information. Thus, the more likelihood for the media to affect the audience.
3. Relationship between society and the audience; every society influences consumers’ needs and motives for media use; and provide norms, values, knowledge, and laws for its members. Social systems can function as an alternative to the media by performing roles of the media.

Figure 2.1;

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur suggested that the cognitive, behavioral and affective consequences of media use are based on characteristics of both the individuals and their immediate social environment (Ladd & Lenz, 2011). There are five types of cognitive

effects that can be exerted on an audience, first is the creation and resolution of ambiguity. Ambiguity occurs when audiences receive inadequate or incomplete information about their immediate social world. High level of ambiguity creates and audiences more likely to turn to mass media to resolve ambiguity. Ambiguity tends to be prevalent during times of major social change or conflict such as election periods.

Agenda-setting which is the second effect is another reason why dependency theory is often referred to as a “comprehensive” theory of media effects. This is because it incorporates the entire theory of agenda-setting within its theoretical framework. Like any other effect, media agenda-setting effects are heightened during times when the audience’s needs and dependency on media are high.

Third is attitude formation. Media generally exposes the audience to completely new people and new ideas, such as political figures and celebrities, physical objects such as car safety mechanisms etc that the audience will /eventually come to form attitudes about. Dependency does not suggest that the media is rigidly fixed or set in its ability to influence attitudes, but the theory argues that media plays a role in selecting objects and people for which the audience eventually form attitudes about. If an individual is experiencing greater media dependency, it is therefore expected that such person will form more complex attitudes about these people objects etc, than

individuals with low media dependency (Ladd & Lenz, 2011).

The media also has the potential cognitive effect of expanding people's belief systems over time. Media creates a kind of "expansion" of citizen's beliefs by disseminating information about other people, places, and things. Enlargement of people’s belief systems implies a broadening or enlarging of individual beliefs in a certain category or aspect of the society. These beliefs eventually meet with and are incorporated into an already existing value system regarding religion, free enterprise, work, ecology, patriotism, recreation, and even family values.

Lastly, is value clarification and conflict by the media. The media clarify values such as equality, freedom, honesty, forgiveness etc, often by precipitating information about value conflicts. When conflicts play out in the mass media, the value conflicts are identified, resulting in the audience forming their own value positions and beliefs. Such a position may be painful to articulate because it can force a choice between mutually incompatible goals and the means for obtaining them. However, in the process of trying to decide which is more important in a particular case, general value priorities can become clarified.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur mentions several possible effective media effects that are more likely to occur during times of heightened dependency (Panagopoulos, 2010). First is desensitization, which posits that prolonged exposure to violent content on the media can

have a "numbing" effect on audiences, promoting insensitivity or the lack of desire toward helping others when violent encounters happen in real life.

Second, exposure to news messages or TV dramas that portray crime-ridden cities can increase people's fear or anxiety about living in or even traveling to the particular city. Media can also have effects on morale and feelings of alienation. The degree of positive or negative mass media depictions of social groups can cause fluctuations in people's sense of morale in belonging to that group or in their sense of alienation from that group.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur identified two broad categories of behavioral effects of the media on the audience (Putman et al, 2010). The first broad category is referred to as the "activation" effects, which implies instances in which media audiences do something they would not otherwise have done as a consequence of receiving media messages on a particular issue or event. Behavioral effects are largely thought to work through cognitive and affective effects. For instance, a woman who read a news story about sexism in the workplace might form an attitude toward sexism which will create a negative emotional state, eventually resulting in her joining a women's rights march in her local community.

The second broad category of behavioral effects is referred to as "deactivation," and refers to instances in which audiences would have otherwise done something, but don't do it as a consequence of media messages

received. For instance, primary presidential campaigns are usually longer and have increasingly used more media including social media to target the audience. As such, primary campaigns might elicit negative attitudes toward the electoral process and negative affective states such as boredom or disgust that in turn might make the electorates not turn out to vote.

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CONCLUSION

We live in an age which is characterized by the widespread use of various channels of communication. These include traditional mass media and the internet for a broad range of political and other purposes. Traversing the political landscape of any country reveals that electorate are getting more and more enlightened. What is wholly or in part responsible for this are the social media.

Whatever may be the contributions of other entities such as civil societies, Idiong (2010) argues, the fact remains that the social media carry the greater responsibility for providing awareness and education about our pluralist political life.

They are effective means of enlightening electorate on the qualities of individual candidates, political parties and their programmes and the entire election process at all times. From the analysis and interpretation it is clear that social media play a significant impact on voting behavior of voters. Political parties will be successful in influencing the people of the metros city like Lagos State and semi urban cities. Social media is replacing the traditional media but in remote areas traditional media still has significant impact in creating awareness among people. Social media provides platform to the people to get connected to parties they favour. It became an important marketing tool to reach to target audience in minimum time and within less cost. Online banners adds and other form of advertising has a significant impact on young voter specially students which not only influence them but also help in shaping their behavior. People use social media platform to keep track of political development, technology play a vital role in giving first-hand information in less time.

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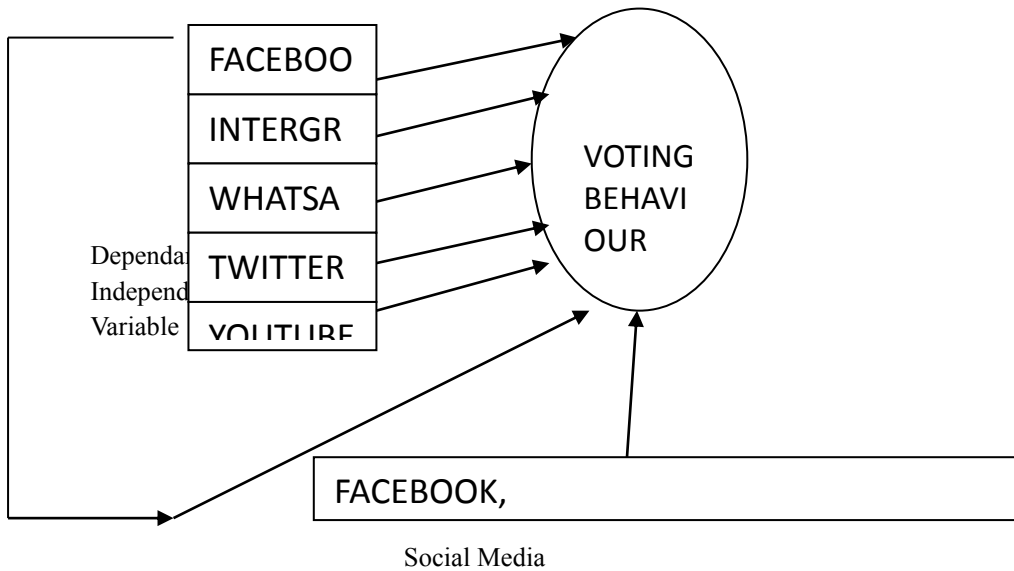
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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



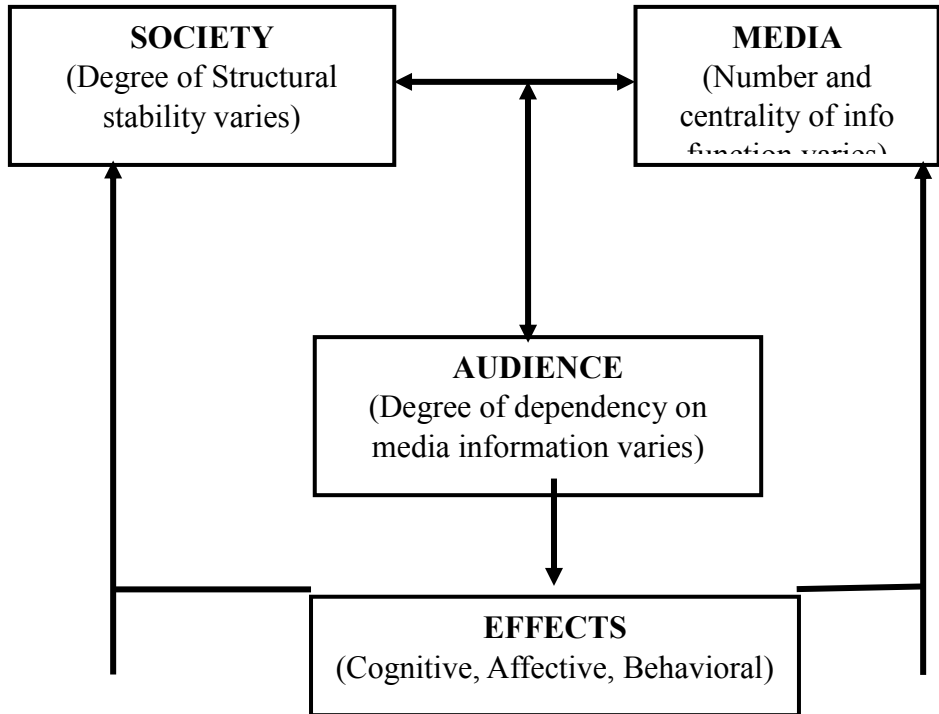


Figure 2.1;