

Innovations

Social Media and Elections in Nigeria: A Study of the South East, Reflection of the 2023 Abia State and Enugu State Governorship Election

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine how the South-East gubernatorial elections of 2023 were covered on social media, including in Abia and Enugu states. Primary as well as secondary sources were used to get the study data. Theoretical Framework for Agenda Setting: Applications and Rationale Theories were used in the appropriate literature has to examine a variety of phenomena. The study used survey design method of research. A basic random sampling technique was used in the study. The population comprises of registered voters who have their Permanent Voter Card (PVC) in Abia State and Enugu State with figures 2,120,808 and 2,122,793 respectively. The total figure of 4,243,601 was used for the study. The sample size of 366 voters used for the study were derived using Taro Yamane (1964) formulae. 188 registered voters in Abia South and 188 registered voters in Enugu South received the questionnaire in a proportionate manner thanks to the use of Bowley's formulas in the stratified sampling technique. The statistical program, SPSS Version 21, for Simple Regression Analysis was applied by the researcher to analyze the data. The researcher discovered that: there was a level of political awareness generated by social media in the recently concluded 2023 governorship elections; there is a frequency of social media coverage on the success of the recently concluded 2023 governorship election; Social media has an impact on a candidate's likelihood of winning the election since Nigerians are interested in and communicate about politics. The study suggested that the electoral statute be revised to set explicit rules for the use of social media in Nigeria's future elections.

Keyword: 1. Social media coverage, 2. 2023 governorship election, 3. South-East, governorship election.

Introduction

The development of the internet The early 1990s saw a sharp increase on the number of people who were linked to the Internet. The more connected populace has better access to information, more opportunities to speak in public, and a greater ability to work together. Social media has become an everyday reality for a lot of individuals which involves a wide range of users such as civil society, activists, NGOs, telecom companies, software developers, government agencies, and national governments. Social media has grown to be a significant instrument for citizens to discuss both locally and nationally significant topics [1]. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are not just 21st-century Internet innovations, but they are also rapidly evolving into powerful venues for influencing public opinion. User-generated content may be easily created and shared through the usage of social media, a category of web apps. The theoretical and technological foundations of Web 2.0 serve as its foundation." [2] state that. Social media services are a means to establish social networks.

These web-based social networking platforms give consumers a way to communicate online. Users of social networking websites can interact with one another by sharing ideas, photographs, posts, activities, events, and interests.[3], argued that social media entails online platforms that facilitate the production, diffusion, and exchange of user-generated content, allowing individuals and organizations to interact, communicate, and cooperate in virtual environments. In other words [4]stated that social media comprises online venues that enable the creation, sharing, and distribution of material created by users, enabling people and organizations to engage, communicate, and work together in virtual spaces. According to [4] A key component of contemporary representative democracies is elections, in which voters use their right to vote and choose representatives to act on their behalf.. [5] asserted that:elections is a crucial component of the democratic transition. [5] contends that:

elections are a crucial sign of a nation's democratic growth because they provide people the chance to select their leaders in a fair and competitive process.

The 2023 governorship elections, which served as the case study for this investigation, are what keep this study current and relevant because what happened during the election period highlighted the critical role social media platforms play in today's elections as well as the survival and maintenance of democracy on the multi-political and religiously conflicted African continent, from which Nigeria is not exempt. According to [6], letting the electorate decide who would lead there is the only way to establish a genuine government. It can only be accomplished by involvement, and social media is one avenue for being involved in one's country's political affairs. Taking this into consideration, this

research study examined the use of social media coverage and its impacts on Nigerian voters by using the 2023 gubernatorial elections in the states of Abia and Enugu

In the past, Nigerians had to cope with election irregularities, fraud, and involvement by incumbent administrations using federal resources and security to block the electorate's will. In a study of Nigerian elections over nearly 50 years published in 2011 said [7]:

"Election rigging in Nigeria has resulted in the imposition of corrupt and illegitimate leaders who have no regard for the principles of democracy, which are off-shoots of good governance, rule of law, constitutionalism, and fundamental human rights." And this disruption in the voting process sparked electoral fraud. Finding out more about social media's ability to produce a notable departure from the usual in study outcomes is one of the goals of the investigation, which sparked the researcher's interest in the topic.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the degree of political awareness sparked by social media during the just held 2023 gubernatorial race.
2. To ascertain how frequently the success of the just held 2023 gubernatorial election is covered on social media.
3. To find out if social media affects a candidate's likelihood of winning an election.
4. To find out whether social media foster political communication and interest among Nigerians.

Literature Review

The term "social media" is interpreted differently by different users. For instance, social media is referred to as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the theoretical and technical foundations of Web 2.0 and that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content" [2]. It includes mobile and online technologies that are used to turn communication into dialogue among individuals, communities, and groups. Because social media is a "read-write Web," users may actively contribute to the information instead of only consuming it. The idea that social media is predicated upon user-generated engagement is one element linking the definitions of social media covered in this paper. Traditional media is distinguished from social media by a top-down news distribution model in that it allows for user-to-user contact [8]. Social media consumers differ from

conventional media in another sense because they have greater flexibility of choice. Through social media, users may access the content they are interested in learning about, eliminating the gatekeeper role of conventional media. Connecting with others who share similar interests and preferences is made possible by social media, which, on the one hand, lessens the sense of community that viewers of certain conventional media channels usually feel. Social networking sites and electronic messaging are two important technologies that have allowed people to engage and socialize online. More than half of kids and teenagers in America use email as well as social networking sites, and more than one-third of all internet users worldwide do the same [9]. Nigeria had 67,101,452 internet users in October 2014, accounting for 2.30% of all internet users worldwide (Internet Live Stats, 2014). This is a 16% rise over the 2013 data. Nigeria is also the third-most active African country on Twitter, according to [10]. The vast majority of social media users access these tools via computers and mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and personal computers. According to researchers, phone transactions will most likely be made utilizing internet networks rather than making calls in the next few years [11]. Politicians in Nigeria use social media to interact with their supporters because they see them as an important group that may change public opinion. As a result, rather than the traditional one-on-one discussion, phone conversations are gradually moving into one-to-many sharing. However, little is known about their activities or how this sort of media could influence engagement and turnout for votes in Nigeria's political process. Social media technology supports a wide range of media types, including podcasts, magazines, online forums, weblogs, social blogs, photos, and videos. [2] sought to organize social media into six distinct divisions to account for the variety of forms they might take:

1. Teamwork on projects (like Wikipedia)
2. Microblogs and blogs, such as Twitter
3. Content communities, like those on YouTube
4. Social media websites (like Facebook)
5. Online virtual environments (like World of Warcraft)
6. Virtual communities (like Second Life)

Blogs:In 1999, for example, the term "blog" first appeared as a mix of noun and verb, referring to an abbreviated form of "Web log" (Andrew, 2009). Bloggers are people who publish computer-readable online diaries called blogs, which frequently include text, images, information, and other content. Time is frequently used to arrange them. Blogs differ from portal websites and other types of websites in a few ways. Blog entries often feature a conversational writing style and tone. Bloggers usually have a theme in mind before beginning to write. The flexibility and reach of blogs allow for the creation of connections and references to other sources, giving readers and bloggers the option to relive past events. Blogs also facilitate online discourse and the formation of community groups by allowing comments and subscriptions.**Wikis:**Wikis are online platforms that let people work together to edit, add, or remove material [16]. Wikis frequently utilize a

database to log all changes, allowing users to compare them and return to previous versions. Wikis provide for the visibility and reversibility of each activity as well as the permanent preservation of all prior contributions [13]. Wikis' open-access authoring settings, in contrast to traditional printed encyclopedias, offer inconsistent content without a uniform style or structure. Thus, strict version control is necessary for wikis [14]. The most well-known wiki is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia founded in 2001. There are already over 4.5 million items, all in English, available in nine other languages [16].

Podcasts: The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a podcast as a program (such as music or discussion) made available in digital format for automatic download. [15] Users can subscribe to online-released music and video files. The subscription feature accurately captures the sociability and communal aspects of social media. Although music and video files may be uploaded to the internet for a long time, the subscription function lets users sell themselves independently by informing subscribers when new content is available. Everyone may now develop their own audiences and communities, which is how social media was originally intended. Although music and video files may be uploaded to the internet for a long time, the subscription function lets users sell themselves independently by informing subscribers when new content is available. Everyone may now develop their own audiences and communities, which is how social media was originally intended.

Forums: Community bulletin boards and message boards are common terms used to describe online forums. A forum is established when a group of people who share common interests or wish to talk about a certain topic join together. The longest type of social media available online is a forum. Unsurprisingly, thanks to one or more administrators who serve as moderators and delete offensive posts, the forum has a strong sense of community. The forum thread is the discourse in which numerous forum participants converse online, seek advice or assistance, etc. Admins do not always start threads, as opposed to blogs, which are owned and managed by bloggers. Instead, each forum user is free to share and discuss anything they choose with other users [16].

Content Communities: Consider content communities as a cross between social networking sites and podcasts. There are a number of characteristics between these two social networking sites. Within the content community, the sharing of specific types of content—like images, videos, music, and bookmarks—is highlighted [16]. Popular content communities include YouTube, Flickr, Instagram (which focuses on photo sharing), delicio.us (bookmarks), and Flickr.

Micro Blogs: The idea behind microblogs is to be smaller versions of blogs. But micro-blogging is more than just regular blogging. It combines the basic elements of blogs with the social networking and instant messaging capabilities present on other social media platforms. With more than 200 million active users, Twitter is unquestionably the industry leader for blogs. Messages transmitted by users via SMS, mobile apps, and Twitter websites are called tweets. The primary feature of a microblog is the character limit of 140 characters for messages. Despite the fact that following celebrities has recently become a popular Twitter pastime, the primary goal is to keep in touch with one's own networks and engage in conversation or opinion exchange.

Key Features of Social Media

[19] stated that the following are the characteristics of social media: They include:

Networking and Connectivity: Social media platforms are effective instruments for networking and building relationships with people in communities. Users may create relationships, broaden their networks, and interact professionally using social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. These relationships provide chances for cooperation, information exchange, and personal development. [17].

Information Sharing and Dissemination: The emergence of social media has revolutionized the way individuals communicate and share information. News, articles, videos, and views may be quickly shared on social media sites and reach a huge audience. Its speed and scope have affected politics, the media, and activism by enabling the global dissemination of various points of view.

Multimedia Content Creation. The growth of social media has simplified the process of creating and disseminating multimedia content. On platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, users may showcase their artistic abilities through photos, videos, and short-form content. This has resulted in new forms of entertainment, storytelling, and creative expression, empowering individuals to become content creators [17].

Community Building and Engagement: Social media facilitates the development of virtual communities based on common interests, pastimes, or causes. Groups, forums, and communities on platforms such as Reddit and Discord enable like-minded people to interact, exchange knowledge, and participate in debates. This sense of belonging strengthens cooperation, support, and group efforts [17]. Social media's core attributes and traits have completely changed how we interact, communicate, and obtain information. User-generated content, interaction, global reach, customization, networking, information distribution, multimedia content production, and community building are some of the distinguishing features of social media. As society continues to adapt to the ever-changing world of social media, it is crucial to understand its possible benefits and drawbacks, ensuring proper and mindful usage [19].

The Emergence of Social Media in Nigerian Politics

Nigerian politics has seen a paradigm shift as a result of the growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These platforms have given people a new forum for political participation, enabling them to voice their opinions, rally support, and demand transparency from political leaders [20]. As social media emerged as a major platform for political communication, voter mobilization, and election-related information exchange, the 2019 and 2023 gubernatorial elections were important turning points. During the 2023 Nigerian gubernatorial election, the hashtag #Nigeria Decides went viral on Twitter, serving as a central forum for voters to engage in discourse, exchange up-to-date information, and voice their thoughts. Notably, people used social media to report instances of voter intimidation and anomalies, which raised awareness of accountability and transparency [21], demonstrating that local influencers and bloggers had an important role in creating the narrative around the elections. Stella Dimoko Korkus, a renowned Nigerian blogger, used her platform to enlighten and engage her fans on

election concerns, thereby increasing voter knowledge and engagement. Social media's influence on Nigeria's elections goes beyond voter participation. Political parties, politicians, and other stakeholders acknowledge the enormous potential of these platforms to influence public opinion. Candidates and parties have set up official social media profiles to engage with voters, discuss policy suggestions, and rebut opponents' narratives. This direct communication has allowed for a more intimate relationship between politicians and citizens, however, with both beneficial and negative implications. Conventional media channels have also included social media in their coverage methods for the election. To supplement their reporting, they rely on internet debates, real-time updates, and information created by citizens. This partnership has expanded the reach and complexity of election coverage, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the political landscape. While social media's rise during Nigeria's elections has been largely beneficial, concerns have also been raised regarding fake news, misleading information, and the potential for polarizing discourse. Because information spreads quickly on social media, voters' decisions may be impacted by the rapid dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information. Helping people acquire media literacy and critical thinking abilities is so crucial. [22].

Role of Social Media in Nigerian Politics

The influence of social media on Nigerian elections is definitely revolutionary. The impact of social media on political discussion, public involvement, and openness cannot be overstated as the country continues its democratic path. Local examples, such as the #Nigeria Decides campaign and the involvement of influencers and bloggers, highlight the issue's dynamic nature. Moving forward, parties must work together to solve the issues posed by disinformation, while also using the power of social media to stimulate informed civic involvement and enhance democratic processes [23]. Social media platforms have developed into effective instruments for influencing global public opinion and energizing individuals. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and a vibrant democracy, has seen an increasing impact of social media on its political scene. This article investigates the varied role of social media in Nigerian politics, focusing on political awareness, citizen involvement, information transmission, and political activity. This essay seeks to offer a thorough grasp of the topic through an examination of academic publications and reports [24].

i. Political Awareness and Engagement

a. Nigerians are now more politically savvy thanks to social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Users may get news updates, real-time information, and a variety of viewpoints on political matters. Public media is an important source of political knowledge for Nigerian young, resulting in greater political involvement.

b. Nigerian residents may express themselves, discuss political issues, and engage in online political debates, developing a sense of political involvement and citizenship. Through social media, Nigerians are now better able to participate in political discourse and openly voice their opinions.

ii. Information Dissemination

a. Social media has democratized the flow of information, allowing individuals to receive news and updates outside of established media outlets [31]. Social media platforms have posed a threat to the conventional media's monopoly by increasing information accessibility and encouraging political openness [31].

b. Social media platforms have shown to be effective in exposing corruption, human rights violations, and political malpractices, as well as holding politicians responsible [7]. He also cites examples of social media activism sparking public uproar and prompting inquiries into unethical behavior.

iii. Political Mobilization and Activism

a. Social media platforms have played a crucial role in mobilizing Nigerian citizens during political campaigns, protests, and elections (Olukotun, 2018). Social media tools have allowed politicians to mobilize supporters, coordinate campaign efforts, and galvanize grassroots movements (Olukotun, 2018).

b. As evidenced by the 2020 #End SARS movement, social media may be used to organize massive protests against police violence or to advocate for legislative changes. An example of how social media was used as a platform for mobilization is provided by Adesokan & Alli (2021), who raise the voices of young Nigerians and spark meaningful demonstrations.

Social Media and Political Participation: New Insights

According to a plethora of research, new technology will increase political participation and strengthen democracy. For example, [26] identified the potential of the cable network to strengthen local democracy in the 1980s, whilst Bertholdt Brecht viewed the radio as a communication instrument for democratization in the 1920s [25]. Many people thought that the Internet's unique attributes and introduction would lead to democratization. The Internet is often acknowledged for its capacity to augment public engagement, an idea that was previously believed to foster more equity and a diminished social hierarchy. The Internet's architecture promotes direct and quick connection and engagement among people from various backgrounds, allowing for egalitarian and instantaneous interaction for everyone [29]. Social media platforms are Internet services as well. Thus, it's possible that they will encourage participation and conversation. According to experts, this social media phenomena is mostly caused by the integration of mass and personal media forms as well as inclusion [29]. Social media is a vehicle for advancing inclusion, according to [18]. Social media sites such as Facebook provide incredibly different groups for individuals to engage with one other. People from different social strata, educational backgrounds, faiths, and racial and ethnic backgrounds are all included in this. A

characteristic of social media that fosters freedom of expression is the absence of a distinct hierarchy, placing users in close proximity to others from many backgrounds, including friends, relatives, and colleagues. new coworkers and previous classmates, or what [18] refers to as "collapsed contexts." Social media's capacity to provide anonymity to its users, resulting in the common use of aliases or nicknames by individuals who post and react, demonstrates its inclusive aspect [29]. Talking about sensitive topics can occasionally result in information being generated, even when anonymity is maintained. The diversity of roles that users play, how they connect with one another, and the creative ability to mix various types of recorded information in extremely flexible ways all contribute to the potential and extension of inclusion. According to [29], attempts to limit social media content are futile because conventional regulatory structures that promote diversity are severely insufficient. As a result, social media has grown to be a very popular medium for interacting with others. As a result, it may be something similar to a Habermasian public sphere where democratic speech is feasible. Combining personal and public media: Social media offers several crucial elements for media integration. [30] claims that social media combines features of both mass media and private media and is used for both public and private purposes. In addition to being intimate and symmetrical, social media is also institutional and symmetrical. Private conversations might take place between personal friendships However, this exchange may also be seen as mass communication because it might be public. Similar to how individual users communicate on social media, institutional and professional users can also use these platforms to connect asymmetrically with the general public. [30] According to [30], social media upends conventional interaction patterns by fusing several media types. Social media's inclusion and integration of media are major characteristics that might have a substantial impact on political engagement and discussion in a variety of ways. [30] highlights the three possible effects of social media on the political process as follows:i. First, social media may inspire more people to participate since it is more accessible to everyone and incorporates a variety of media formats, lowering the barrier to involvement. As a result, gathering information, expressing feelings, and interacting with a large number of individuals become easy and possible. Political parties, politicians, and other political players appreciate social media platforms because of this, which helps to explain how they have developed into useful instruments for mobilization during political campaigns. Anambra 2017 and the country's national elections in 2015 serve as instances..ii. Second, social media may facilitate deliberation among a larger number of individuals. Decreasing the distance between information source and recipient suggests that citizens can communicate directly with authorities and with one other, as well as voice their thoughts. Evidence abounds that during the most recent gubernatorial race, common citizens candidly shared information about each other on social media, conversed with one another, and expressed their thoughts to these two political contestants. People on the street have also commented and kept INEC, the umpire, informed of developments in various wards as they evolve and oppose unfair voting practices they notice in their own polling areasIn this regard, Moog (2000) previously stated that the internet creates new opportunities for direct access to politically relevant information, allowing direct connection between political organizations and prospective members, as well as participatory conversation within national societies, as access becomes more widely

available globally. Third, because of the blending of communication modes and the disintegrating social situations, such involvement and concerns can be complicated. People are concerned about how they seem in social environments and highlight specific characteristics in various social situations. argues for "maximalist democracy," a strategy that stresses participation and representation in both institutional politics and the social realm of politics ([28]). This approach integrates the design of new media, including social media, with the corpus of existing research on political participation and discourse. The notion that new media can make it possible for common people to participate in politics both in formal institutions and in informal settings is the foundation of the belief that these platforms have the power to democratize society. More maximalist involvement and a more robust democracy may result from this [25][28]. Moving on to the past, we will analyze how social media may have played an important part in strengthening democracy in Nigeria's political and electoral institutions.

Power of Social Media in Political Communication

Social media platforms have transformed the way Global political landscapes are greatly impacted by the dissemination and consumption of information. This article investigates the influence of social media in covering the 2023 gubernatorial election in Nigeria's South East area. Through investigating the use of social media platforms, their influence on political discourse, and the difficulties encountered, we may gain a clearer understanding of the evolving nature of the relationship between social media and Nigerian politics.

[27]a. **Social media as a Platform for Political Information Dissemination.** The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has made it easier for political actors to transmit their thoughts to a large audience. Candidates and political parties use social media to communicate their campaign pledges, interact with voters, and rally support. [27]b. **Amplification of Political Discourse**

The following, according to [27], are examples of how political discourses are amplified:

- i. Social media platforms allow individuals to join in political conversations, voice their thoughts, and engage in arguments.

- ii. The public conversation around the election is shaped in part by hashtags, popular subjects, and user-generated material.

- iii. Because of social media's scope and speed, news and information can be disseminated quickly, giving citizens with immediate updates.

Social Media Platforms and User Behaviour

Social media platforms have completely changed how individuals engage, communicate, and obtain information. With billions of users globally, these platforms have had a profound effect on user behavior in addition to changing societal dynamics. This article investigates the link between social media platforms and user behavior, specifically how platforms affect self-presentation, social relationships, information intake, and psychological well-being. This article seeks to clarify the intricate relationship between

social media platforms and user behavior by drawing on academic research and studies (Pew Research Center, 2020).

1. Self-Presentation and Identity

a. Social media platforms enable users to display themselves in certain ways, resulting in an online identity that may differ from their actual persona. People have a tendency to overly highlight the good parts of their life on social media, which is known as self-presentation bias, according to research by Toma and Hancock (2012).

b. Because social media self-presentation is curative, impression management—where users purposefully alter their online persona in an effort to win approval from others—may result from this. Goffman (1959) created the notion of impression management, which is relevant to how people show themselves on social media sites.

2. Social Interactions and Relationships

a. Social media platforms make it easier to communicate with others both online and offline, which affects the quality and number of relationships. According to Valkenburg & Peter (2007), using social media can strengthen current bonds and create new ones.

However, overusing social media can result in fewer in-person encounters and a feeling of social isolation, which can negatively impact users' general wellbeing.

3. Information Consumption and News Engagement

a. Social media platforms have evolved into essential providers of news and information for many users, affecting their attitudes and understanding. A sizable fraction of social media users, according to Pew Research Center (2020), rely on these sites to consume news.

b. The algorithmic structure of social broadcasting platforms might result in filter bubbles, where consumers are mostly exposed to content that reflects their present beliefs and interests, potentially leading to information echo chambers.

4. Psychological Well-being

a. Social media use has been associated with both positive and negative impacts on users' mental health and well-being. Kross (2013) discovered that although active use—interacting with others—had beneficial impacts, passive use—browsing Facebook without engaging—led to lower well-being.

b. Excessive social media use has been related to increased anxiety, sadness, and feelings of social comparison and inadequacy. Lin, Sidani, and Shensa (2016) conducted a study that found that increasing time spent on social media may contribute to mental health difficulties. While these platforms offer opportunities for self-expression and connection, it is crucial to be mindful of their potential drawbacks. Users should be aware of the curated nature of self-presentation, strive for balanced online and offline interactions, critically evaluate the information they consume, and practice responsible social media use. Moreover, further investigation is needed to explore the long-term effects of social media on user behavior and develop strategies for mental health issues.

Impacts and Challenges of Social Media Coverage

[35] The way that people connect, learn, and consume news in 2023 has been profoundly changed by social media platforms. The rise of social media means that traditional media outlets are no longer the only ones who determine what information is relevant. Stories about the news may now be shared and altered thanks to social media coverage, resulting in both favorable results and major obstacles. This research looked at the influence of social media on elections in Nigeria, namely in the southeast, with a focus on the 2023 Abia State and Enugu State gubernatorial elections, as well as their impact on information dissemination, public opinion, and activism. It also looks at the challenges posed by social media's quick speed, the spread of misleading information, and privacy concerns.

I. Impacts of Social Media Coverage

According to [35] the following are the impact of Impacts on Social Media Coverage. They are:

- a. Information Dissemination** Social media platforms have completely changed the way that news is shared. With billions of users globally, shares, retweets, and viral postings may swiftly spread news articles to a large audience. Today's users have more access to news sources outside of conventional media, as well as a variety of viewpoints. The democratization of information makes it possible to comprehend events and problems on a larger scale.
- [35]: [36]**b. Public Opinion:** Social media coverage has the ability to alter public opinion and debate. It gives a forum for people to express themselves, participate in debates, and interact with others. Hashtags and popular subjects have developed into effective instruments for energizing societies, initiating dialogues, and increasing consciousness on significant societal concerns. [26]
- c. Activism and Social Movements:** Coverage of social media has been essential in advancing social movements and activism. Twitter and Facebook are examples of platforms that have been useful in coordinating actions, planning protests, and bringing underrepresented perspectives to a wider audience. In order to bring about social change, activists can gather support, collect money, and highlight social injustices.

II. Challenges of Social Media Coverage Pennycook & Rand (2019), stated the following as the challenges of social media coverage. They are:

- a. Spread of Misinformation:** One of the biggest issues with social media coverage is the rapid dissemination of misinformation. Quickly spreading rumors, conspiracy theories, and false information led to generalized mistrust and bewilderment. The absence of gatekeeping and fact-checking procedures on social media platforms poses a significant danger to accurate information [32].
- b. Privacy Concerns:** Regarding privacy and data protection, social media coverage poses questions. Users on these platforms are exposed to data breaches, spying, and exploitation since they often exchange personal information. The collection and use of personal information by social media corporations raises ethical and legal concerns about privacy rights. [33][17] said that social media coverage had revolutionized public opinion, sparked social transformation, and had far-reaching effects on society. It also comes with a number of serious drawbacks, such as the dissemination of false information and privacy

issues. Recognizing and resolving these issues is crucial to maximizing social media coverage's potential benefits and minimizing its drawbacks.

2023 Nigerian Gubernatorial Elections

In 2023, 31 of Nigeria's 36 states had governorship elections. All but three polls—Imo State, Kogi State, and Bayelsa State—were held on March 18 in conjunction with elections to every state house of assembly, three weeks after the presidential and National Assembly elections. The last three elections will take held on November 11. The most current regular elections for governor were held in 2019 in every state. Given that each state permits only two terms for governors, eighteen of the current governors are disqualified from seeking re-election. The implementation of term limits has resulted in a situation where several incumbent governors are unable to run for office once again. Among them, nine governors from the APC (All Progressives Congress) party have had their terms limited, while the remaining nine APC governors who are currently in office are eligible for re-election. On the other hand, eight governors from the PDP (People's Democratic Party) have reached their term limits, and four of them are ineligible for re-election. In the upcoming elections, a total of twelve out of the fourteen PDP-led states and eighteen out of the twenty APC-led states will be holding elections. In the March elections, both the PDP and the APC secured victories in two governorship positions each: the PDP in Plateau and Zamfara, and the APC in Benue and Sokoto..

Social Media Coverage of the Nigeria 2023 Governorship Election: Pre-Election Phase, Election Day Coverage, and Post-Election Phase

In recent years, social media platforms have transformed into powerful tools for political dialogue and information transmission. The pre-election period, election day coverage, and real-time updates have all been made possible by social media. and post-election phase. The Nigeria 2023 Governorship Election is no exception. In this essay, the effect and consequences on social media coverage on each stage of the election are examined, with an emphasis on both the benefits and the drawbacks. [36].**I. Pre-Election Phase: Information Sharing and Campaigning**

In the word of [36], during the pre-election phase, social media platforms serve as a key battleground for political parties and candidates to engage with voters. These platforms facilitate the spread of information, campaign messages, and policy proposals to a vast audience, allowing political actors to connect with voters at a more personal level. For instance, candidates can use social media to share their vision, rally supporters, and engage in direct conversations with constituents. Furthermore, users can actively participate by sharing and discussing campaign-related content, enhancing the democratization of political discourse [37]. However, there are difficulties with the social media campaigning period. The electoral process may be severely impacted by the distribution of false information and fake news. Voters might be misled by false narratives and propaganda efforts, which can also damage candidates' credibility. Now order to prevent the dissemination of false information, social media platforms must incorporate effective fact-checking methods and enforce policies (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

1. Election Day Coverage: Real-Time Updates and Citizen Journalism

Thanks to social media platforms' real-time information on election day, anyone may keep track of the Nigerian gubernatorial election in 2023. People may basically engage in citizen journalism at voting sites by sharing their tales, uploading images, and reporting events [38]. This democratization of election reporting encourages openness and allows for a greater range of opinions. The instantaneous and accessible nature of social media may increase voter turnout. Undecided voters may opt to cast a ballot if they receive real-time updates on long lines, irregularities, or favorable experiences at the polls. **2. Post-Election Phase: Analysis and Reflection** After the Nigeria 2023 Governorship Election, social media platforms continue to play a vital role in analyzing the outcome and shaping public opinion. Users can engage in post-election discussions, debate policy implications, and hold elected officials accountable. Social media provides a space for critical analysis and reflection, allowing citizens to express their satisfaction or discontent with the election results [37]. But political divisiveness and misinformation can also thrive in the post-election social media period. Intense arguments between supporters of various candidates, the construction of echo chambers, and the spread of false information could all serve to undermine the results of the election [38]. Users of social media should communicate respectfully, critically evaluate content, and promote meaningful conversation. An excellent illustration of how social media affects every facet of the voting process is the 2023 Nigerian Governorship Election. These platforms offer opportunities for political participation, information exchange, and analysis from the pre-election period to election day coverage and the post-election period. However, in order to ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of social media reporting, concerns such as the spread of incorrect information and the political divide must be addressed. Social media may aid Nigeria's democratic processes by establishing fact-checking procedures and encouraging ethical online behavior.

2.1. Social Media Coverage on 2023 Nigeria Governorship Election Results and Winners

STATES	APC	LP	NNPP	PDP	WINNER
Abia	24,091	175,467		88,529	Alex Otti (LP)
Adamawa					
A'ibom	129,602	4,746	12,509	354,348	Umo Eno (PDP)
Bauchi	432,275		60,496	525,280	Bala Mohammed (PDP)
Benue	473,933			223,913	Fr. Hycinth Alia (APC)
Borno	545, 542			82,147	Babagana Zulum (APC)
C'River	258,619	5,957		179,636	Bassey Edet Otu (APC)
Delta	240,229	48,027		350,234	Sheriff Oborewori (PDP)
Ebonyi	199,131			80,191	Francis Nwifuru (APC)
Enugu	14,575	157,552		160,895	Peter Mbah (PDP)

Gombe	342,82			233,131	Inuwa Yahaya (APC)
Jigawa	618,449	965	37,156	368,726	Umar Namadi (APC)
Kaduna	730,002	58,283	21,405	719,196	Uba Sani (APC)
Kano	890,705		1,019,602	15,957	Abba Yusuf (NNPP)
Katsina	859,892	560	8,263	486,620	Dikko Radda (APC)
Kebbi	409,225			360,940	Nasiru Idris (APC)
Kwara	273,424	1,647	4,398	155,490	Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq(APC)
Lagos	762,134	312,329	1,583	62,449	Babajide Sanwo-Olu (APC)
Nasarawa	347,209			283,016	Abdullahi Sule (APC)
Niger	469,896	3,415	3,378	387,476	Umar Mohammed Bago (APC)
Ogun	276,298		1394	262,383	Dapo Abiodun (APC)
Oyo	256, 685	1,500		563, 756	Seyi Makinde (PDP)
Plateau	481,370	60,310		525,299	Caleb Mutfwang (PDP)
Rivers	95,274	22,224	335	302,614	Siminalayi Fubara (PDP)
Sokoto	453,661			404,632	Ahmed Aliyu (APC)
Taraba			202,278	257,926	Col. Kefas Agbu (PDP)
Yobe	317,113			124,259	Mai Mala Buni (APC)
Zamfara	311,976			377,726	Dauda Lawal-Dare (PDP)

Source: Social Media via Facebook, 2023

1. Methodology

This study used a survey research design. For the simple reason that it gives the researcher a better understanding of the issues at hand by precisely depicting the event as it occurs. It also concentrates on asking another group of individuals questions in person and receiving their answers in order to learn more about their beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. The prepared questionnaire served as the major data collection instrument. Voters in Enugu South and Abia South who possess a Permanent Voters Card (PVC) were issued this. A population, according to the Population of the Study [39], is composed of all units that have a certain set of traits in common. Considering that social media's impact on Nigerian elections is the primary topic of the study, The participants in the study are state-registered voters from Abia and Enugu. Random sampling with stratification was used in this investigation. The stratified selection process was used to pick two (2) states from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, each representing a geographical and political territory in the country's core southeast. The states of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Abia comprise it. A simple random sampling procedure was used to choose two states. To collect data for this study, 335 (91%) of the 366 questionnaires issued to the company's clients were recovered, while 31 (9%) were lost. Additionally, 11 (3%) of the 335 copies

that were recovered were incorrectly filled and were discarded. 324 (97%) of the copies, however, were fully completed and deemed useful for studies. As a result, further analyses in this study relied on the 324 copies that were located and proved to be helpful. The data gathered from questionnaire respondents was categorized, tabulated, and evaluated using percentages. The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis: To analyze the results from the questionnaire and perform a critical evaluation of the four hypotheses, SPSS Version 21 was employed. To test the hypotheses, simple regression was used

Results

The study's findings are presented in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses that served as its compass.

Research question one: To what extent do social media influence a candidate’s chances of winning the elections?

Table 1: Responses on the extent to which social media influences a candidate’s chances of winning the election

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
(a)	The candidate has been able to build a substantial and engaged following on social media, indicating a strong base of support.	226	84	2	8	4	324
(b)	Successful candidates have been leveraging social media to mobilize supporters and encourage voter turnout, as evidenced by their active participation and sharing of campaign content.	182	130	4	6	2	324
(c)	Candidates have effectively utilized social media platforms to engage with voters and convey their campaign message.	172	136	6	4	6	324
(d)	Sentiment and overall perception of the candidate on social media platforms, based on the analysis of comments, likes, shares,	104	186	4	8	2	324

	and mentions? Are they receiving predominantly positive or negative feedback?						
(e)	Social media played a significant role in shaping public opinion during the State 2023 governorship election.	188	124	6	2	4	324
	Total	872	660	22	28	18	1620
	Average Total	174	132	4	6	4	324
	Percentage	54	41	1	2	1	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The goal is to determine whether social media may have an impact on a candidate's likelihood of winning the election. Table 1 above illustrates that, on average, 174 (54%) voters, 132 (41%) voters, 4 (1%), 6 (2%), and 4 (1%) voters selected SA, A, UD, D, and SD, respectively, indicating that social media affects a candidate's chances of winning the election.

Research Question Two: Has social media fostered political communication and interest among Nigerians?

Table 2: Responses on whether social media foster political communication and interest among Nigerians indicated in table 2

1. Methods

This study used a survey research design. For the simple reason that it gives the researcher a better understanding of the issues at hand by precisely depicting the event as it occurs. It also concentrates on asking another group of individuals questions in person and receiving their answers in order to learn more about their beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. The prepared questionnaire served as the major data collection instrument. Voters in Enugu South and Abia South who possess a Permanent Voters Card (PVC) were issued this. A population, according to the Population of the Study [39], is composed of all units that have a certain set of traits in common. Considering that social media's impact on Nigerian elections is the primary topic of the study, The participants in the study are state-registered voters from Abia and Enugu. Random sampling with stratification was used in this investigation. The stratified selection process was used to pick two (2) states from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, each representing a geographical and political territory in the country's core southeast. The states of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Abia comprise it. A simple random sampling procedure was used to choose two states. To

collect data for this study, 335 (91%) of the 366 questionnaires issued to the company's clients were recovered, while 31 (9%) were lost. Additionally, 11 (3%) of the 335 copies that were recovered were incorrectly filled and were discarded. 324 (97%) of the copies, however, were fully completed and deemed useful for studies. As a result, further analyses in this study relied on the 324 copies that were located and proved to be helpful. The data gathered from questionnaire respondents was categorized, tabulated, and evaluated using percentages. The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis: To analyze the results from the questionnaire and perform a critical evaluation of the four hypotheses, SPSS Version 21 was employed. To test the hypotheses, simple regression was used.

Results

The study's findings are presented in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses that served as its compass.

Research question one: To what extent do social media influence a candidate’s chances of winning the elections? Table 1: Responses on the extent to which social media influences a candidate’s chances of winning the election

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
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