

Social media and political participation in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic: an empirical review of Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election

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Abstract

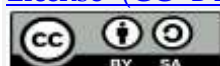
The study investigated the role of social media in Anambra gubernatorial election. Social media platforms such as, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn have completely changed our understanding of politics in the 21st century. Though its impacts are still evolving, but social media has rapidly proffered new ways to 'stimulate the masses engagement in political matters. Specifically, the aim of this study was to, verify the dominant social media platform used by the respondents during the election, to ascertain if the respondent's preferred political candidate was instigated by social media campaign and to find out if the respondent's derive gratification for using social media platform during the election. The study was hinged on Technological Determinism and Uses and Gratifications theory. The population of study was 2.5 million registered voters in Anambra state as of 2021 election. Krejcie and Morgan sample size table was used to rack up at sample size of 384. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed and purposive sampling method was used. The results indicate that WhatsApp, followed by Facebook was the respondent's most used social media platform during Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election, social media sites influenced the respondent's choice of candidate and majority of the respondents found social media sites very useful. The study recommends that the Nigerian government should provide a network in remote areas so that more citizens will join the online platform and the government should enforce credible monitoring on the increasing rate of fake news and abuse of social media platforms by citizen journalist.

Keywords: Anambra Gubernatorial Election, Covid-19, Political Participation, Social Media

1. Introduction

The utilization of emerging digital technologies to politics supports and transforms political participation. In mid-1990s, social media platforms have developed sites with more bilateral attributes thus, the public become more active with proffering and transmission of political content. Citizen journalists were eye witnesses to episode the mainstream journalist did not transmit and can record or post messages that could go viral and affect the course of events (Wallsten, 2010) The evolution of social media use in election was first utilized in 2008 during president Obama's crusade movement. Barack Obama's digital crusade scheme in the 2008 presidential election transformed the application of social media in an electoral process. Since then, sophisticated digital media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube as well as range of other sites that embodied on the inter communicating, liaising, and sensitization of the public's were used to create a

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political movement. Gil de Zuniga et al. (2010) suggested that availability of social media networks had an impressive effect on the masses sense of political effectiveness and inclination to participate in politics. Social media platforms allow people to proficiently organize and strengthen their collective interest and authority in a way that made political figure head more answerable and accountable because their activities are continuously observed and examined on social media.

Prior before the 2021 gubernatorial election in Anambra state on 6th November, the wind of controversy was blowing everywhere. First, were the aftermath of covid-19 lockdown and its restrictions that hindered social gathering; second, the issue of Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) that raised storm in the south Eastern part of Nigeria more especially in Anambra state whose gubernatorial election was around the corner. The scenario was like as if the state will come to an end or there might be a reason to declare state of emergency in Anambra. The fear was also heightened with IPOB lockdown on every Monday, demanding that Mr. Nnamdi Kanu (a democratic activist) must be brought to the court and released. The IPOB group also insist that election in Anambra State will not hold since they wanted to achieve Independent State of Biafra. The struggle involves all stakeholders in the country including the presidency, governors and more especially the South Eastern governors who were in a dilemma and do not know how to calm down the angry Biafran youths. The controversy also came with the uprising of a group called “unknown Gunmen” who had sworn to destabilize every political gathering, rally or manifesto during the election period. Because of the fear of the unknown, the masses developed cold feet towards attending political events that will require the aspirants to speak to them. It was at this point that what Marshal Luhan said that “the world has turned to a global village” became more obvious because, since anarchy and chaos hinders political gathering, the masses resorted to the media for political information. Social media platforms were used to perform the function of educating, surveillance, informing and persuading the eligible masses into voting for a particular candidate. During the 2021 gubernatorial election in Anambra State, all political parties and aspirants extensively made use of social media platforms in order to influence votes to their camp, thus, applications such as; WhatsApp, twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and among others are used as politically transformational communication machineries. Politicians use these medium to transmit political facts and interrelate with the voters, thus allows process of democracy achievable by enabling the people to know about the political aspirants at the comfort of their home.

Researchers over time had carried out studies to verify the impact of social media in electoral process across the globe. Morah, Udeze and Ekwenchi (2019) established that majority of respondents (67.9%) reacted positively to the 2015 election results disseminated through Facebook in Nigeria. The preceding demonstrates a firm reliance on social media for political engagement. Kushin & Yamamoto (2010) also argued that the heightening of internet political behavior has aided new reciprocal, effective and instantaneous media websites. Social media transformation initiated by new media in the political environment has globally impacted substantially on political campaigning by stimulating move towards a more interactive form of campaigning with politicians being in direct contact with constituents via different platforms of social media. Haynes (2008) found out that new media are presently the leading innovation for presidential candidates, just like radio and television and computerised databases revolutionised the election process in earlier decades. Cary (2010) was of the view that internet restructures how Americans do everything, including electing their leaders. However, from the ongoing, though researchers had carried out studies on social media and political communication in diverse areas, but areas of their interest were different from this present study. Hence, the researcher’s were motivated to carry out this study which investigates social media and Political Participation in the Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Review of Anambra 2021 Gubernatorial Election.

2. Research objectives

The objectives of this research were as follows. To;

1. Ascertain the respondents most used social media platform during the election.
2. Determine if the respondent’s choice of political candidate is influenced by social media campaign.
3. Find out if the respondent’s derive gratification for using social media platform during the just concluded election

3. Literature survey

3.1. Political history of Anambra State

The present Anambra State came into existence on 27 August 1991. But before now, in 1976 during the reign of General Murtala Muhammed, Anambra was formally created from East Central State with capital at Enugu. A further creation divided the state into two; Anambra and Enugu State and the capital of present Anambra State is in Awka. Anambra State is popularly known as 'Light of the Nation'. Anambra political history can be described as varied. Since before now, it has been from one military regime starting from John Atom Kpera who took office in March 1976 and left in July 1978, and then Col. Datti Sadiq Abubakar took office from July, 1978 and left in October, 1979. Then Jim Nwobodo took office under NPP - civilian rule on October, 1979 and left on October 1983, NPN candidate (Christian Onho) took office in October 1983 and left in December, 1983. Then the military took over again until the last administrator under military rule by name, Emmanuel Ukaegbu who took office in 6th August, 1998 and left in 29th May, 1999. From 1999 till date, Anambra has been under civilian rule. It started from Chinweoke Mbadinuju of PDP party, who took office from 29th May 1999 to 29th May, 2003. Before Mbadinuju rule, secondary education has been free of charge. But he imposed a tuition fee of 3,000Naira per term for all secondary schools which led to massive demonstration by the secondary school students from all over the state. However, one thing led to another, the issue of withholding of teacher's salaries which led to ten (10) months in all the government schools in Anambra State marred his administration with deep problems. Christ Ngige of PDP party ruled from 29th May, 2003 to 17th March 2006. He was removed from office because Peter Obi filled charges against him for electoral malpractice. The court of Appeal in Enugu asserted that Ngige's apparent victory in the 2003 election was fraudulent and ordered him to leave the seat. Then Peter Obi took office under APGA in 17th March, 2006 to 3rd November, 2006 then Virginia Etiaba who was the deputy governor took office in 3rd November, 2006 to 9th February, 2007 due to some controversies that led to the impeachment of Peter Obi. Then Obi came back to the office on 9th February 2007 to 17th March 2014. Peter Obi ruled second tenure. It is important to note that on 27th May, 2007, Emmanuel Nnamdi Uba (Andy Uba) was voted for and installed in as the governor of Anambra state, but he was expunged by Supreme Court resolution on 14th June, 2007. He ruled the state for 14 days only. Then Willy Obiano of APGA took office from 17 March, 2014 to 17th March 2022. He ruled second term, **Charles Chukwuma Soludo** of APGA was the governor elect till date. Other three leading candidates who emerged from the 18 INEC registered aspirants were; Val Ozigbo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Andy Uba of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and Ifeanyi Ubah of the Young Progressives Party (YPP) (Nigeria Galleria, 2021).

3.2. Political communication/participation: An overview

Communication taken as a whole is incomprehensible without reference to its political dimension; however, politics has an indissoluble relationship with communication. (MacBride et al., 1980: 18) MacBride in this note explained that the relationship between communication and politics is that through communication, the authorities exercise power and the masses exercise their freedom. Though the degree of exercise of this power and freedom varies from country to country but the bottom line is that communication is integral at any level. The essence of politics is talk or interaction and is defined by many people in different ways. Some sees politics as institution of state, some sees it as a conflict resolution and exercise of power and others sees it as social and political activity. Generally, politics is a process that makes possible the coexistence of difference. It means living together with those whose ideas are different from our own without trying to convince or force them to become like us or them trying to convince or force us to become like them (Castle, 1998)

Political communication refers to skillful practices and a multifaceted area of study centered on the synergy between the media, politics and the masses. Political communication is a sub-field of political science and communication and it has been defined by different scholars based on their own point of view. Some scholars see political communication as an efficient political technology that regard election crusade as the fundamental issue of investigation in electioneering / political process. Another group of researchers sees political communication as that body that ensures effective correlation between its other constituents. While other scholars agree that political communication allows the subjects to monopolize political control creation and circulation of socio - political concept of their time. Specifically, Grishin (2012: 4) defines political communication as a system of producing, disseminating and sharing of information which can

influence the achievement of political authority. Here, information dissemination starts from political aspirants, parties to the public's using the various medium of the mass media. Margolis and Resnick (2000) sees Political communication as annexing communication scheme that instigate the functioning of all the stake holders such as; legislative, executive, political parties, interest groups and law abiding bodies that are involve in political activities. In a nutshell, every act of political communication is geared towards informing and influencing the citizen.

Political participation is described as optional and un-forceful participation of an individual in the political activities of their nation. (Pateman, 2021) The implication is that political involvement encompasses activities such as; vote casting, attending rally, petitioning, donation of money, right to be voted for, right to party membership which does not require the use of coercion. Uhlaner (2001) cited in Lamprianou (2013) sees political participation as political commitment. While Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) admitted that political participation involves properly coordinated civic and political undertaking. It incorporates any task that moulds or influence the political field. Verbar et al. (1995) defines political participation as a pursuit that can affect government action either directly or indirectly by influencing the appointment of people who make those blueprints. Social scientist defines political participation as an action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political process. However, different forms of political participation are bound and one has knowingly or unknowingly engaged in some of them at different occasion. Various forms of political participation according to Verba and Neir (1972) include the following.

1. **Voting:** In a constitutional society, vote casting certifies that politicians are appointed by the masses, rather than being apportion to the position of power through rigging.
2. **Protest:** public agitation makes your belief and point of view known in a very apparent clear way, with the hope that your view point's will affect or stimulate change in specific area of corrupt political process.
3. **Public consultations:** public deliberation which is also known as town hall meetings grants citizens the opportunity to negotiate with the politician or elected official in order to make their plights known.
4. **Jury duty:** Jury duty ensures that people who are charged with a crime are judged by people like them, rather than allowing the outcome to depend entirely on a single person, such as a judge.

3.3. Effect of COVID-19 lockdown on political participation during Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election

COVID-19 is a complex global public health emergency that emerged from Wuhan China in 2019. Since the incidence, there is a lot of infodemics around the world about the sickness; its mode of transmission, treatment and prevention. Due to diverse and un imaginable news about Covid-19 both from credible and un credible sources, the world came to a conclusion that there will be a lock down that will affect virtually all activities that involves people coming together. Thus social gathering was highly restricted and the government came up with modes of conduct that prohibits the masses from going to markets, schools, offices and even place of worship. Unfortunately, during the period, Anambra state was at the verge of conducting their 2021 gubernatorial election. The state was in a dilemma because they were facing two major problems; first was the issue of unknown gunmen that insisted that the election will not hold and second was the law of social distance / gathering that prohibits the masses from assembling as a group. This made the political aspirants, political parties and the politicians to give premium to social media platforms. Different political parties depend on whatsapp, facebook, text messages and other social media platforms to disseminate political messages to the electorates since visual gathering was prohibited. However, some of the effects of COVID-19 lock down on political participation were as follows:

- Majority of the public's were afraid of contacting the disease, because of it, did not participate in the voting process.
- Due to law mandating people to always put on face mask, some people who have allergy to nose mask do not like joining social gathering.

- Covid-19 mode of conduct restricted social gathering to only fifteen (15) persons, this made political campaign, rally and manifesto to be very difficult because the aspirants were not given the opportunity to assemble or co-ordinate the masses in a group to address them.

The above-mentioned points sincerely restricted political communication and participation during the period since not all the electorates are educated to read or have access to social media applications for political updates.

3.4. Role of social media in Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election

Social media uprising in Nigerian political arena is emerging speedily. Thus, people are increasingly using these platforms such as, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Telegram, Facebook messenger, Snapchat and among others to express their views on different topics. Igwenagu (2021) Leading social media platforms in Nigeria found out that WhatsApp with about 94% is the eminently utilized social media platform in Nigeria. Closely following WhatsApp is Facebook with 76%, Twitter is ranked third with about 61% users, this is followed by Instagram with about 58% users, the next is YouTube with about 54% users, and then Facebook Messenger with about 50% users, Telegram has about 43% users, TikTok with about 37% users, Snapchat with about 21% users, and LinkedIn with about 13% users. Politicians use social media as an efficient mechanism of publicity and identity modification. Social media applications allows users to encounter politics at interpersonal level and it is a feasible way to network with people and circulate news through videos and content sharing which has the capacity of relaying message without subjecting to gate keeping function of the media. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) Some scholars were of the view that new media are bridging the gap between mainstream journalists and the citizen journalist by giving recognition to the voiceless (Duggan & Smith, 2016). The import is that new media applications have the ability to supply news which can anonymously reach unconcerned spectators who are apolitical in nature. In view of the above, politicians turned to new media to circumvent the mainstream press control over the news agenda, thus, political candidates enjoys a friendlier venue for presenting themselves to the public than mainstream outlet (Moy et al., 2009).

Due to innovation in the emerging technologies, the public's responds positively to social media applications which are more accessible, provides an opportunity for calling inn to political talk programs and participating in online town hall meetings. (Davis & Owen, 1998). Mayfield (2008) defines these information technologies as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness". The implication is that, Social media platforms enable political parties to create their own chat room / database, micro blogs, instagram, Facebook and twitter accounts which they update regularly for influencing and keeping their audience informed.

Nevertheless, although we have numerous advantages of social media in new era political dispensation, but it is pertinent to highlight some of the political risk posed by the use of social media gadgets in our society. Some of the risk includes;

- Spreading of unverified news by citizen journalist; Citizen Journalism involves the dissemination of news by unprofessional who did not know the ethics and laws obtainable in journalism. They usually spread unverified fake news simply because they have social media gadgets that enable them to transmit messages instantaneously.
- Causing chaos in the society; sometimes, there are some news that need to pass through gate keeping function of the media before getting to the general public. Gate keeping function allows media professionals to sieve out irrelevances or items that might infringe on people right from the news. But citizen unprofessional journalist who is not informed might transmit unfiltered news through social media thereby causes instability and confusion in the society.
- Exposure of official secret document; some individuals use their social media gadget to disseminate classified document which are not meant to be exposed to the general publics'. This therefore posse's difficulty about what to believe.

3.5. Empirical review

The following empirical studies were reviewed for this study;

Anyanwu and Orji (2020): Social Media and Political Participation among Residents of South-East Nigeria. The researchers specifically examined the influence social media has on political participation in

south-Eastern state of Nigeria. Technological Determinism Theory was adopted as theoretical framework, survey research design was employed and the population of study was 385 respondents. The study reveals that social media has influenced residents of south-East up to 70% positively. The study therefore suggest that stake holders, non-governmental organizations, INEC, politicians and communication experts should consistently use social media for political mobilization during and after election.

Morah and Uzochukwu (2020): Social Media Use and Political Communication Challenges among Selected Entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The survey investigated how entrepreneurs are using social media to engage in governance activity. The population of study was 200 and the study was hinged on Technological Determinism theory and Agenda setting theory. The major findings reveals that social media especially facebook, whatsapp and twitter augment interest, participation, interaction and socialization among artisans and traders to great extent.

Younghwan and Hsuan (2016): Social Media and Online Political Participation: The Mediating Role of Exposure to Cross – Cutting and Like-Minded Perspectives. The study examined how social media influences individual's online political engagement. Evidence from field study indicated that social media network sites (SNSs) and web bloggers undoubtedly utilize online political participation both to cross-cutting and like-minded perspectives.

Olubunmi and Folorounso (2020): Use of Social Media for Political Participation by Youths. The specific objectives were to find out, variety of social media platforms employed by the respondents, mode of activities and factors affecting use of social media for political engagement. The study adopted survey research method with population of 322 respondents. The major findings revealed that facebook (98.8%), followed by whatsapp (93.8%), instagram (60.2%) and Twitter (55.3%) and among others were proficiently used by the youths for political participation.

Abraham and Tibebe (2019): The Role of Social Media in Citizens Political Participation. The study examined citizen's engagement in politics using social media. Qualitative research design was adopted. Major findings revealed that social media has apparently displaced traditional media, since it encourages political participation; heighten strategic synergy that can affect governmental political policies.

Morah, Omojola and Uzochukwu (2016): Trends in Social Media Adoptions in Nigeria: Evaluating Youths Participation in 2015 Presidential Election. The specific objectives of the study were to find out how politically alert the respondents were with respect to their social media appearance as examined on mobile technologies. 600 youths was sampled, while the study was anchored on Diffusion of Innovation and Technological Acceptance Model. Outcome of the study shows that uncountable SMS messages and updates sent by politicians in the course of campaigns affect voting choices with slight effect.

Conclusively, based on the above literatures reviewed, though some of the empirical studies have one or two variables in common with this present study, but since none of the studies looked at; Social Media and Political Participation in the Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Review of Anambra 2021 Gubernatorial Election, thus, the need for this study.

3.6. Technology determinism

McLuhan's (1962) Technology Determinism theory assert that media technology moulds how individuals in a society think, feel and act. Marshall McLuhan maintained that the form of a medium is the message. The implication is that we learn and think the way we do because of the information we receive through an available technology. For example, radio helps us to listen and develop sense of hearing, while television engages both our hearing and visual senses. We therefore develop these into our everyday lives. Therefore, technological revolution in term of communication which transfers messages, changes human and the society in the way that it unites people, motivate participation, broaden the scale of impact and enhance engagement at a very low price. Thus, grants the ability of messages to go viral and influence general public. McLuhan (1964) also argued that mediated technologies ensure religious and culture diffusion in a society which in turn changes human behaviour. He insisted, we shape our tools, and they in turn shape us and these mediated gargets have turned the world into a global village. Though some critics might argue that; "if a new technology is invented and nothing changes" The theorist insists that as the medium changes so do society's way of communicating. People can only use the medium for which it was meant for. For example, phone for communicating over the lines or electronic mail for interacting through the computer. Hence, if the medium is impersonal (television) then the message will be impersonal. In relation to this study, Technological Determinism therefore implies that, people will quickly adopt social media technologies

which are in vogue in today's politics as it enhances connectivity, speed interactivity and more democratic participation.

3.7. Use and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratification theory explains why and how people diligently search out distinct media to satisfy particular needs. UGT is an audience-centered avenue to understanding mass communication. Katz Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) first initiate the Uses and Gratification Approach, when he came up with the opinion that people use the media to augment their interest. The implication is that they actively seek out particular media and content to realize certain outcome or gratifications that please their unique and private needs. They will not only meet a given need but enhance knowledge, attitude and practice on political, economic, health and social issues. It showed that members of the audience are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Katz et al. (1974) summarized it as:

- I. The social and psychological origins of
- II. Needs which generate
- III. Expectations of
- IV. The mass media or other sources which lead to
- V. Differential patterns of media exposure (engagement in other activities) resulting in
- VI. Need gratifications and
- VII. Other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

It is a theory that is audience centered, asking what people do with media rather than what the media do to people. In this study, people can use a particular media out let that satisfies their intention which might be relaxation, tension reduction, social integration, self and personal identity and information acquisition. The implication is that people go for social media platform they found most convenient and useful.

4. Problem statement

In the 21st century, the advancement in communication technology which Marshal McLuhan tagged "global village" has speed up the concept of instantaneous global news flow and has made the use of social media platform to become paramount in the area of electioneering. Obama's presidential crusade in 2008 emerged incontestable as the principal online election conducted at of that moment. Since then, scholars over time have embarked on studying the use of emerging technologies by political aspirants and the electorate in a way that has sprout up a new social movement which has changed political attitude, construction and presentation of political messages. Generally, scholars believed that the emerging technology has advanced the emergence of "new public sphere" (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1997). Social media sites undoubtedly have enhanced timely messaging between the political aspirants and the masses, thus providing an atmosphere of interconnectivity and mutual understanding through sharing of party programmes, granting of interviews, speech presentation and sharing videos related to bureaucratic activities. Nevertheless, social media has been credited as a lead pressure in the wake of political change and exploratory / investigational studies generally submitted that social media platforms influence the citizenry (Morah, Udeze & Ekwenchi, 2019; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Cary, 2010). However, despite the above advantages of social media during election, it remains uncertain if social media platforms can indeed coax the electorates and influence the democratic elections polls to the extent of gaining a strong positive result. Since there was no literature on social media use in just concluded Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election, the researchers' therefore consider this as a major gap in knowledge that motivated this present study.

5. Research methodology

To efficiently assess the influence of social media on political participation in Anambra 2021, November, 6th election, the researchers' adopted survey research design. Population of study comprises of all the registered voters in Anambra state at of 2021, November 6th gubernatorial election. There about 2.5 million registered voters according to independent electoral commission INEC (2021). The reason for using the

registered voters is to make sure that the respondents are up to 18 years and above to qualify them to vote and to be voted for according to Nigerian constitution.

Sample size of 384 was derived from population of 2.5 million, using Krejcie and Morgan sample size table. Measuring instrument used in this study was questionnaire which was employed to create quantitative data. Both open and close-ended questions were empoled because it enhances response categorization and analysis.

5.1. Sampling technology

The researchers’ used multi stage sampling technique. For the purpose of this study, a combination of the probability and non-probability (convenience or opportunity) sampling methods was used. The reason for using opportunity sampling is because you cannot readily be sure of where you can meet a respondent that will be useful to you. On the other hand, convenience sampling was used based on accessibility and availability of the respondents. Therefore, the combination of simple random sampling, convenient sampling and purposive sampling method was used to administer questionnaire to the respondents in each quarter. It is important to note that the researchers purposively sampled respondents who had at least, secondary education qualification since this group can confidently assess information from online sources. The first stage of selection involved choosing three (3) local governments from each of the three (3) senatorial zones in Anambra state. In doing this, the researchers used random sampling. Here, the names of all the senatorial districts were listed in a piece of paper and was placed in a container according to the three senatorial districts and were shuffled very well. Then, three pieces of paper were picked from each of the container. After the exercise, nine (9) local governments were selected.

The second stage involved the determination of the towns in each Local Government Area. The names of the towns under each Local Government were written in pieces of paper and put in a container meant for each town in each of the senatorial districts. The pieces of paper were shuffled very well and one paper was randomly selected from each of the containers. After the whole exercise, the following towns were selected; Onitsha North, Atani, Inoma, Nibo, Ukpo, Oba, Ufuma, Ozubuluand Amichi. See table.1. for details.

Table: 1: Indicating the selected Area studied

S/N	Senatorial Zone	Selected LGA In Each Zone	Selected Town in Each Local Government
1	Anambra North Senatorial Zone	Onitsha North Ogbaru Anambra West	Onitsha North Atani Inoma
2	Anambra Central Senatorial Zone	Akwa South Dunukofia Idemili South	Nibo Ukpo Oba
3	Anambra South Senatorial Zone	Orumba North Ekwusigo Nnewi South	Ufuma Ozubulu Amichi

The last procedure of the sampling process was the allocation of the proportional questionnaire to the selected towns. In doing this, the researchers’ divided the sample size by the number of selected local government under study. The reason for doing it this way was because the researchers could not get the accurate number of the registered voters in each of the quarters selected.

6. Data analysis and discussion

Data for analysis was collated from a sample of 384 respondents in Awka metropolis who are of voting age, that is, 18 years and above and who has a phone and is connected to any social media platform. Out of 384 questionnaires shared, 370 copies were properly completed and recovered. The demographic data presented indicated that, out of the sampled population for the study, 14.6% were of 18-24 age bracket, 22.4% were of 25-34 age bracket, 26.8% were of 35-44 age bracket 18.4% were of 45-54 age bracket, 13.0% were of 55-66 age bracket, and 4.0% were of 66- above age bracket.

Age distribution of respondents indicated that, 67% were male, while 33% were female. This finding aligns with a popular view that women are mostly apolitical in nature and thus, may not have interest in politics.

RQ1: what is the respondents most used social media platform during 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election?

Question two (2) in the questionnaire was used to answer this question: Out of the below listed social media platforms, which among them do gives you authentic news on political updates about the aspirants during the just concluded 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election.

Table 2: Responses for Research question one

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM	RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
YouTube	49	13%
WhatsApp	106	29%
Twitter	64	17%
Instagram	56	15%
Facebook	95	26%
TOTAL	370	100%

Response in table 2 indicated that WhatsApp with 106 (29%) was the respondents most used social media platform. This is followed by Facebook with 95 (26%), Twitter with 64 (17%), Instagram with 56 (15%) and YouTube with 49 (13%). The implication is that the respondents mostly used WhatsApp during the just concluded election.

RQ2: Do social media campaign influence the respondent's choice of political candidate?

Question six (6) in the questionnaire was used to answer this question: Do social media campaign influence your choice of candidate in just concluded Anambra 2021 gubernatorial election?

Table 3: Responses for Research question two

	Responses	Percentage %
YES	246	66%
NO	124	34 %
TOTAL	370	100%

Response from the above table 3 indicated that 246 (66%) of the respondents admitted that social media campaign influences their choice of candidate in just concluded election. While 124 (34%) of the respondents said the social media platform did not influence their choice of candidate.

RQ3: Do the respondent's derive gratification for using social media platform during the election?

Question nine (9) in the questionnaire was used to answer this question: How would you perceive social media use in just concluded Anambra gubernatorial election?

Table 4: Responses for Research question three

	Responses	Percentage %
VERY USEFUL	276	75%
NOT USEFUL	94	25 %
TOTAL	370	100%

From the responses, 276 (75%) of the respondents derive gratification for using social media platforms during the just conclude election, While 94 (25%) found social media platforms not useful.

6.1. Discussion of findings

The survey responses provided valuable facts and details regarding the use of social media in Anambra gubernatorial election. From the responses, one can infer that the respondents use social media platforms to strengthen their knowledge as regards to the choice of candidates to vote for during the election.

RQ1: what is the respondents most used social media platform during 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election? In answering this question, item 3 in the questionnaire was used. From the responses, WhatsApp with 106 (29%) was the respondents most used social media platform. This is followed by Facebook with 95 (26%), Twitter with 64 (17%), Instagram with 56 (15%) and YouTube with 49 (13%). This finding is in line

with the outcome of Igwenagu (2021) Leading social media platforms in Nigeria. He found out that WhatsApp with about 94% is the most frequently social media platform used in Nigeria. Closely following WhatsApp is Facebook with 76%, Twitter is ranked third with about 61% users, this is followed by Instagram with about 58% users, the next is YouTube with about 54% users, and then Facebook Messenger with about 50% users, Telegram has about 43% users, TikTok with about 37% users, Snapchat with about 21% users, and LinkedIn with about 13% users. The implication is that Politicians use social media platforms as an efficient tool of creating awareness and the masses equally use social media sites while searching for information. In response to the open-ended question, the participants said that they use the social networking sites multiple times to get new updates.

RQ2: Do social media campaign influence the respondent's choice of political candidate? In answering this research question, item 6 in questionnaire was used. Response from the respondents indicate that 246 (66%) admitted that social media campaign influences their choice of candidate in just concluded election. While 124 (34%) of the respondents said the social media platform did not influence their choice of candidate. When asked "if Yes, why", majority of the respondents who said 'yes' voiced out that; they virtually get every information they needed about a political figure from social media. Hence, social media motivates them to vote for the political aspirant. While those who said "No" that social media did not affect their choice of candidate said in an open-ended question that; some political aspirants usually lie, fake and forge most information on social media. However, since 246 (66%) said that social media platform influences their choice of political candidate and this number is more than 124 (34%) who said 'No' that social media platforms did not influence their choice of political aspirant; the implication is that social media platforms was found as a veritable tool for influencing the respondent's choice of political candidate. The result is in line with findings of YOUNGHUAN & HSUAN (2016) which indicated that both blog and social media network sites (SNSs) use are undoubtedly used to enhance online political participation. Also, MORAH, UDEZE and EKWENCHI (2019) establish that preponderance respondents (67.9%) reacted positively to the 2015 election results disseminated through Facebook in Nigeria. The preceding demonstrates a firm reliance on social media for political engagement.

RQ3: Do the respondent's derive gratification for using social media platform during the just concluded election? In answering this research question, item 9 in the questionnaire was used. From the responses, 276 (75%) of the respondents found social media platforms very useful during the just conclude election, while 94 (25%) found social media platforms not useful. When asked "if Yes, why?" the respondents in an open-ended question admitted that most information from social media platforms came from authentic sources since fake and unverified information can mar or make the political figure. So they are very careful before giving out any information. The findings are in line with MORAH and UZOUCHUKWU (2019) who found out that social media play functional and remarkable roles in mobilizing, integrating, organizing and delivering campaign messages to voters at a very low cost. The findings are also in line with the outcome of ANYANWU and ORJI (2020) study which revelled that social media has influenced residents of South-East up to 70% positively. This implies that, the respondents derive gratification for selective exposure, attention and retention of political campaign messages from social media platforms.

However, the theoretical conception of **Technological Determinism** supports the outcome of this study. Since; 246 (66%) of the respondents admitted that social media campaign influences their choice of candidate and 276 (75%) of the respondents found social media platforms very useful during the just conclude election. The implication is that, people will quickly adopt social media platforms which are in vogue in today's political communication / participation as it enhances connectivity, speed and interactivity. In the other hand, **Uses and Gratification theory** also supports the findings of the objective of the study, since it attempts to explain how media users seek for media outlet that will not only meet a given need but enhance knowledge, attitude and practice on political, economic and social issues. The outcome of the study indicated that most of the participants opted for social media platforms during the election and also found the platform very useful in 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election. The implication is that utilization of social media platforms during the election was obviously high due to the speed and comfort it gives while searching for information.

7. Research implication

Due to high rate of election rigging in politics, using social media gadgets to mornitor and participate in electroneering will enable the government to achieve 100% free, fair and participatory democracy.

8. Contribution to scientific community and future research

The research contributed to updating existing literature on political participation and proffered recommendations on how to incorporate citizens residing remote areas into online political participation. The study will stimulate provoking thoughts for future scholars, especially, on areas of political communication / participation where the researchers' were not able to cover.

9. Conclusion

The study concludes that the selected respondents in the study use social media for political decision making and the media has influenced apolitical citizens in liking political discourse. In 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election, social media platforms were effectively used by the voters by way of posting regularly the outcome of voting exercise in different polling units in Anambra state. Thus, keeping people informed about the collation of the election result. Social media platforms have established new ways for commitment that helps the masses to associate and join modern method of political participation. The study therefore, recommends that the Nigerian government formulates and enforce laws regulation to control the abuse of social media in the country and also reduce the high price of tariff to enable more citizen participate actively online political participation.

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