



Social Media, Civic Vitality and Nigeria's 2019 General Elections

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Abstract

This paper explores civic vitality in Nigeria in the build-up to and after the country's 2019 elections. This study was motivated by widening the research trajectory, especially in citizens' political expression, voter education, electioneering, and mobilization. It investigates *Facebook* and *Twitter* subscribers from the cyber-ethnographic standpoint via the qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings show that while social media platforms enhance these civic vitality areas, this performance does not translate to real-time political participation in any significant way. The assertion is therefore confirmed: online activities are no good predictors of election undertakings or outcomes.

Keywords: Social Media, Elections, Politics, Mobilization, Education, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has a vibrant democracy characterized by grassroots lobbying, energetic campaigning, thoughtful scholarly and artistic expressions, and widespread social media engagement. *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp*, and blogs have become popular platforms for socio-political activities. These activities including voter education, online polling, political campaigns, and election monitoring. Citizen journalism has further democratized the process. Anyone who wields an internet-enabled device can report a scene or share opinions with thousands or perhaps millions of users across vast spaces. This paper examines how Nigerian citizens utilized social media as a tool of political expression, electioneering, and mobilization during the 2019 elections.

The agency of new media in political expression, mobilization, or education is hardly a novel subject. There are several studies on media and politics with a focus on Nigeria (Ekanem, 2013; Galadima and Goshit, 2013; Nwokefor, 2014; Uzukwu, 2010; Adebani, 2016), on Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Nyamnjoh, 2011; Willems and Mano, 2017; Chibita, 2011; Zeleza, 2009), and the world at large (Axford and Huggins, 2001; Trottier and Fuchs, 2015). However, social media and influence on civic vitality in Nigeria have only

recently started attracting scholarly attention.

Upon analyzing blog posts and tweets related to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria, Ifukor (2010) asserts that smartphones usage was rapidly increasing among Nigerians. This development enabled people's participation in democratic governance through their involvement in social media. Nnanyelugo and Adibe (2013) examined the role of social media platforms and users and how these roles determined the outcome of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The authors noted that social media provided a public sphere that enabled a wide political discourse. They added, however, that these platforms contributed to violence before, during, and after the general elections as users transmitted and shared hate messages and disinformation.

Dogona et al. (2013) surveyed youth participation and attitudes towards politics from a psychological standpoint, asserting that a relationship exists between Facebook use and political participation in Nigerian elections. Similarly, Smyth and Best (2013), comparing elections in Liberia and Nigeria, suggest that social media has not only availed the electorate the opportunity to feel included during political processes. It also has the potential to reduce electoral tension and help build public trust. Nevertheless, Alakali et

al. (2017) state that social media also serves as a platform for disseminating hate speech through text, audio, and video during electoral campaigns in Nigeria. Social networking sites avail governments, neutral bodies, and citizens a platform to interact during elections. Through user-generated texts, images, and memes, citizens bare their minds on the political atmosphere and critique the hegemonic political system in the country (Uzuegbunam, 2020).

This paper explores how the government, citizens, independent institutions, and the media utilized and deployed social media during, during, and after the 2019 Nigeria elections. Social media users share content that they are concerned about or find intriguing. Often, they are moved to share messages they believe will move others to action or bring about change in society. The study tracks the use of Facebook and Twitter by citizens to encourage people to vote and use these platforms by the government and non-governmental organizations for voter education.

Furthermore, the research investigates election monitoring and witnessing. Perhaps the most notable role social media played in the election process was monitoring and witnessing as citizens share narratives about the elections in the comfort of their homes. WhatsApp and Twitter came to life, with people

uploading and recording live videos from different election polling units. These videos, which were often sensational, stimulated fear among citizens. On the flip side, it kept people well informed, thereby allowing some to avert possible harm. In addition to tracing the history and progress of media in political communication and electioneering in Nigeria, this study analyses contemporary social media roles in elections while reflecting on its general effect on political outcome and governance in the country.

Theoretical Insight

We draw insights from the Social Media Participation Model to understand why and how digital citizens employ social networking sites to explore their political selves. The model, propounded by Knoll et al. (2020), was used to explain the psychological processes underlying the negative or positive relationship between social media use and political participation. They looked to accentuate conditions that foster political concurrence when a person or a collective unit is exposed to social media.

This model predicts the effects of social media on the level of political participation. However, in doing so, one must scrutinize the main processes behind the direct influence of the frequency of social media use and political participation.

This model envelops a complex scope of media and political studies. It incorporates theories of general media use and goal preferences, such as goal systems theory with the uses and gratification approach (Katz, 1974), appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), and primacy paradigm (Higgins, 1996). Not all social media exposure results in significant political participation. Hence, it is necessary to know the contingent conditions behind the psychological processes that lead to differential effects. This upshot can, in turn, help in studying how they promote or dampen participatory political outcomes.

Social Media Participation Model predicts under which conditions exposure to social media fosters political participation. This model recognizes that the effects of social media use depend on a chain of different contingencies experienced through the communication of political messages via social media platforms. Thus, phases of exposure to social media content to users are constructed systematically and addressed independently. These phases are:

Pre-exposure

Here the motivation to use social media is primal. The uses and gratification theory is influential in this aspect of the model as people have particular needs (Rubin, 2009).

People may feel the need to relax or to become informed about political issues. As a result, media use is goal-oriented, and this motivation drives one's intent during social media use.

Exposure

The user's activities are then tailored to coincide with the conditions of their pre-exposed state. They actively seek political information if that is their initial interest. They look at news sites and access profiles of candidates and political parties continually on their news feeds. This access helps determine the political expressions and identity of the user.

Reception

Reception is the stage where these contents are assessed and seen as either relevant or mere discrepant. When users view these contents as relevant, they expose themselves to related political content in other media or interpersonal communication.

Behavioral Situation

Given that a goal is explicitly formulated and activated, users appraise whether the goal is the dominant goal once they are in a behavioral situation (Kruglanski, 2015).

This appraisal is referred to as the dominant goal appraisal. This appraisal pertains to the fact that people often activate numerous goals but lack the time and ability to

achieve all of them simultaneously (Fishbach and Ferguson, 2007). A goal related to political participation may become superseded by other goals. The stronger the activation of competing goals, the greater the inhibition of the participatory goal (Shah et al., 2002). In this paper, these phases are embroidered within the context of the 2019 Nigerian electoral process.

The Social media participation model comes in sound as it is germane in evaluating the interplay between social media users in Nigeria and participation in politics. Authors have critiqued the relevance of the Social Media Political Participation Model. They assert that many other media participation models may overlap parts of the Social Media Participation Model. They all include human processing mediated information (Walther, 2009). This model has also been criticized for being another speck on a wheel of numerous media behavior forecasting models.

In this regard, Knoll et al. (2020) have asserted that the Social Media Participation Model is more complex and seeks to explain psychological processes. For example, the O-S-R-O-R (Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response) model includes online messaging, a key variable of social media use (Shah et al., 2007, Amodu, et al.,

2019). However, it does not explain the detailed psychological processes which may explain participatory outcomes. The Social Media Political Participation Model is hence complex for a good reason. It combines existing theories of general media use and participation with psychological theories and, most importantly, incorporates social media-specific features.

History of Political Communication in Nigeria: From Traditional Media to New Media

Following an increased contact with Europeans and the consequent establishment of colonial rule in the 19th century, Nigerians were availed with new affordances, the most prominent of them, perhaps, being western education. Nigerians embraced and absorbed this new kind of education. With time, many educated youths were enlightened enough to understand the nuances of colonialism and demand more participation in government (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). Accordingly, western education created a new elite that challenged British imperialism through publications.

The early newspapers established in Nigeria helped set the scene for democratizing public opinion and advocating nationalism (Okon, et al., 2018). Influential

figures such as Ernest Ikoli, James Bright-Davies, Kitoyi Ajasa, and Thomas Jackson Horatio shouldered the African Messenger, Nigerian times, Nigerian Pioneer, and the Lagos Weekly Record in the early days of Nigerian journalism. They all confronted injustice and encouraged cultural awareness through their publications. These men profoundly influenced the first crop of nationalists and politicians that emerged in the early 1900s who equally utilized newspapers in electioneering. Among them was Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first president (Omu, 1978).

Hodgkin (1961) noted that these nationalist movements recorded major successes towards establishing a representative government and later developed into political associations that contested elections. The first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), was co-founded by Herbert Macaulay in 1922/1923. As a result of his initial radical anti-colonial misrule stand, mainly popularised by his newspaper articles, the party became the most successful at the time.

The party's newspaper, the *Lagos Weekly Record*, served as a campaign medium and a way to update concerned citizens on their activities. The party swept up elective seats in the Lagos Town Council in

its heydays (Falola, 1999). Undoubtedly, their activities and successes ushered in a new era of journalism concerning politics in the country. Macaulay found another political party – The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) with Nnamdi Azikiwe. Azikiwe, who assumed leadership of the party following the death of Herbert Macaulay two years later, was himself an astute journalist and nationalist.

A newspaper he helped establish, the West African Pilot launched in 1937, was primarily concerned with the fight for independence. The paper helped to spread socio-political consciousness among the masses and served as a vehicle for campaigning for candidates during elections. In this era, journalism drove politics; broader newspaper coverage meant increased political support. Soon, the radio became ubiquitous, complementing the newspaper in information dissemination and political communication.

The radio broadcasting industry and its contribution to the dynamics of politics in Nigeria's history cannot be neglected. Uche (1985) writes that even though the Nigerian public initially accused the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) of being a hegemonic government tool, the medium soon gained popularity. NBS

was founded in 1951 by the colonial government. As part of democratizing radio broadcasting and information dissemination in extension, broadcast media was regionalized in 1959. The Awolowo-led western region took the lead to establish a radio and television station that became the first in Nigeria and Africa. The government of the Eastern region followed the next year.

Similarly, the Northern region began its broadcasting system two years later, in 1962. Radio soon became a popular medium for political information and mobilization around the country. Because of its relative ubiquity, especially at the grassroots level, it became a sensation, as far as political *up-to-dateness* is concerned. The regional radio stations would become more popular in the wake of tribal cum regional tensions. Like the newspapers that preceded it, they asserted and propagated regional interests (Uche, 1985). Between 1966 and 1970, radio was used by the two warring sides during the Nigerian civil war to communicate, disseminate news, and push propaganda. It was equally instrumental during Nigeria's era of military rule.

However, the manipulation of radio for political gains has not been a strategy exclusive to the military.

Successive democratic governments have also adopted this, with calculated subtlety, to maintain their grip on power and remain in charge. Shehu (2013) observed that the former president, Obasanjo established federal radio stations all over the country. He focused on states controlled by the opposition parties to achieve broader access to the masses and gain more supporters.

Television came with groundbreaking advantages concerning political enlightenment all over the world. In Nigeria, political dynamism birthed the first television station, Western Nigerian Television (WNTV), established by the Western Nigerian Government in 1959. Due to the fiercely competitive political atmosphere of the country, fuelled by sectarianism and distrust, other regions began to open up television stations shortly after. In 1962, the Federal government established the National Television Service in Lagos. The government united all regional broadcasting outlets and inaugurated it as the Nigerian Television Authority in 1977 (Nwokeafor, 2010). Through the years of sociopolitical fluctuations in the nation, television served the interest of the current governments and relatively repressed opposing political voices.

The 1993 presidential election offered a glimpse of hope to the

Nigerian populace by promising a new democracy and political inclusion due to its vibrant electoral process. The military government, under General Babangida, had agreed to transfer power to civilians after a June 12, 1993, election. For this purpose, two candidates emerged: Chief M.K.O Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa. Many Nigerians who had access to a television in 1993 would remember the sensational campaign advertisements on television at the time.

Unimpressively, even though a winner emerged, the military government refused to hand over power to civilians, throwing Nigeria back into an abyss of dictatorship. Television played a crucial role in the general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 (Aririguzoh, 2012). Political parties and candidates engaged the medium extensively and competitively to reach the targeted audience.

Since 2007, due to the wide distribution of smart devices globally, social media has been effectively utilized for elections in Nigeria. Ifukor (2010) explored how citizens used twitter and blogs to engage in political discussions during the 2007 elections in Nigeria. Correspondingly, research by Aleyomi & Ajakaije (2014) reveal that social media platforms were extensively used by both candidates and voters during the 2011 general

elections in Nigeria. President Goodluck Jonathan even announced his candidacy on Facebook in an unprecedented move (p.40). Political parties were not left out. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) could boast of an account online. Nigerian politicians were keying into the global trend. Social media, which primarily served as a space for friendly chit-chat, suddenly metamorphosed into a socio-political sphere to serve the masses.

The 2015 elections can only be described as intense. The opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) used digital media in every way possible to change the narrative and ultimately take power. The period leading to the election was a defining time in Nigerian democracy and political communication (Olowojolu, 2016). 2011 seemed to have confirmed the indispensability of social media in Nigerian politics. Stakeholders were not testing the waters anymore; they were throwing in all they had.

The incumbent PDP tried to use the same strategy used in 2011 against their key opponent, Mohammadu Buhari—by portraying him in the media as an unbending, poorly educated religious fundamentalist. This tactic seems to have failed. Their strategy was used

against them, leading to the unseating of President Goodluck Jonathan. The 2015 election was a war of perception, pushed by the media and delivered to the hands of citizens through social media, accessed via mobile phones. The media had painted President Jonathan as a heavily corrupt, inadequate, and weak leader who had embarked on a money embezzling spree with his goons. Olowjolu (2016, p.9) opined that “despite the postponement of the general elections from February 14 to March 28, the incumbent government could not overturn the negative perceptions towards Jonathan and the ruling party, the PDP”. As the elections began around the country, it was somewhat clear from online and offline overtones that Goodluck Jonathan may not be retaining his position. The Nigeria media, over time, has played the role of providing information, education, and entertainment. Social media, despite its relative newness, has reshaped political participation in Nigeria.

Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods were adopted to understand how different actors engaged in social media in the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Content analysis of over 200 Facebook and Twitter posts was carried out. Borrowing techniques from cyber-

ethnography, social media forums, Facebook groups, and Twitter trends were explored and studied. Comments, shares, and posts made within the focus period relating to this research theme were analyzed. However, the researchers recognize that this study has methodological limitations. For one, demographic information of commenters on social media is sometimes not sufficient or reliable. Hence, while it may be relatively easy to gather data on these sites, proper analysis requires the knowledge of context and, often, demographics of the posts and posters, respectively.

The quantitative methods helped to elevate the reliability and validity of the investigation. A questionnaire was designed and randomly distributed online. In the end, over 290 individual responses were gathered. Some 49 percent of the respondents identified as female, the rest being male. A few weeks after the elections, copies of the questionnaire were filled out and handed in between April and May 2019.

Findings and Discussion

Voters Education: The Role of Nigeria's Election Umpire in the Social Media Matrix

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the election

umpire in Nigeria. In recent years, INEC has intensified its efforts to educate the Nigerian public on electoral process issues. To meet this urgent global demand for voter and civic education, INEC has dedicated a section of its website to voter education. In addition to the information on its website, the body utilized social media networks to reach citizens and the general public during the elections.

Among the most popular social media platforms in Nigeria are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. For this study, we asked respondents to mention three social media platforms in which they were most active. Responses show that WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the most popular. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that INEC capitalized on these platforms to reach its audience.

Choose three social media platforms where you are most active.
293 responses

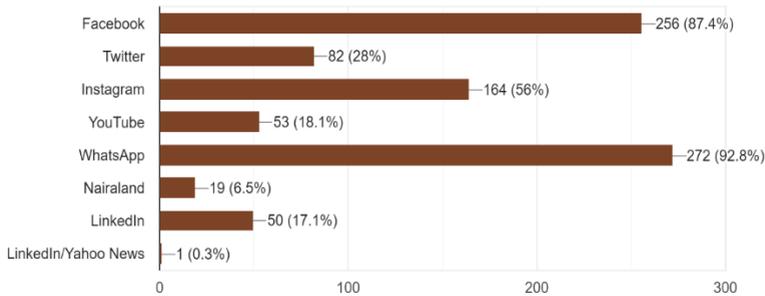


Figure 1: Study participants' social media sites usage

In this section, we reflect on how INEC used social media to foster voter education in the 2019 Nigeria general elections. What are the outcomes of these efforts? Are there any visible challenges or limitations of using social media for civic education? The Commission is reasonably visible on Facebook. INEC's official Facebook page boasts nearly 400,000 followers

(as of June 2021). Before and during the 2019 general elections, INEC utilized this medium extensively to educate Nigerians. For instance, on the 23rd of November 2018, a video enlightening voters on the permanent voters' card (PVC) was posted on the page. Again, in November, the commission sought to inform voters about their intention to clean up the

voters' register to eliminate deceased registered voters, non-Nigerians, and under-aged persons.

INEC's Twitter participation has the best showing. Its official Twitter page created in 2010 has 1.8 million followers (as of June 2021). This development is not particularly surprising as Twitter has metamorphosed into a primarily political platform in many parts of the world. By July 2021, the page had almost 17,000 tweets, pictures, and videos. These posts get a reasonable number of comments and reactions, and hundreds of retweets for popular posts are not uncommon. Expectedly, a good number of the comments are from trolls. They were either insulting the administration of INEC, expressing their distrust/dissatisfaction towards the commission or the government, or proffering quick solutions to perceived problems. Their educational tweets (on Twitter) achieved the highest post reach compared to their pages on other social networks. State branches of INEC also have online social media accounts that have less followership. INEC's account has over 400 subscribers and 90 uploaded videos on YouTube (as of June 2021). Before the 2019 elections, the account was partially inactive, and the uploaded videos were mainly poorly edited and untargeted. However, barely one month before the 2019 elections, the page became relatively active.

Thoughtful and professionally made videos were shared, but unfortunately, these highly educative videos did not reach a large audience. Some of the videos sought to educate the public on voting procedures and election offenses, and malpractice. Many of the videos were inclusive in that they considered people with disabilities and non-English speakers. INEC invested more resources like never before in voter education for the 2019 elections.

Despite the extensive adoption of new media tools by INEC in the 2019 elections, it can be argued that their social media contents were under-engaged. INEC did post educational posts on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, it did not reach a vast audience, and even when it did, engagement with the posts was not optimal. A few factors may have limited the efficacy of voter education by INEC in Nigeria during the 2019 general elections:

1. Citizens' apathy towards INEC as a body — Nigerians are very wary of government institutions. The ethnic tensions in the country contribute to the distrust of politicians or heads of establishments (elected or appointed), whom they believe will not favor their ethnoreligious interests (Morah & Omojola, 2020, Morah, Omojola & Uzochukwu, 2016). INEC has had quite a controversial history,

and many Nigerians perceive the commission as a puppet of the ruling class. As voters do not trust INEC, information from them is often treated with negligence and apathy.

2. Citizens' indifference to non-sensational news/information — In this era of sensationalism, emotion-triggering pieces of information are highly desirable. That attention is drawn more to controversial news than to issues like voter education, is hardly contestable. Netizens seem to engage more when the post is surprising, funny, exciting, controversial, or motivational.
3. Poor internet connectivity, especially among rural dwellers — Many Nigerians living in rural areas do not have a strong internet connection. Consequently, their online activities are limited. Such participants avoid heavy data-consuming sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Even when they visit these sites, they do not usually share videos or pictures. Some urban dwellers are equally affected as they cannot afford full and sustained internet access.
4. Propaganda — Even when citizens share educational posts, some use these posts to push different propaganda to stimulate distrust and fear among voters.

Interpretation matters in every message and posts could be interpreted to mean something entirely different from what was intended.

Citizen-to-Citizen Social Media Voter Education

Ordinary citizens were equally involved in voter education through social media. In August 2018, several hashtag campaigns such as *#PVCisagoal*, *#GetyourPVC*, *#GoGetyourPVC* *#NigeriaDecides* were launched by ordinary Nigerians on Twitter to encourage eligible citizens to obtain their Permanent Voters Card (PVC). Without the permanent voters' card, a person cannot vote in Nigeria. Many Nigerian celebrities joined the trend and shared messages on social media concerning the voters' card. Famous Nigerian online comedians like Frank Donga, Craze Clown, MC Lively, and Emmaomagod made short funny skits with 'Get Your PVC' as the key message. These posts were widely shared by politicians and ordinary people on social media. By the end of the PVC registration process, 84 million people had registered to vote, according to INEC. The campaign was a huge success, considering the widespread voter apathy before that time.

In this study, 295 respondents were given multiple options and asked

to choose their activities during the elections. The respondents could choose more than one option, which includes:

- a. I campaigned for or against a particular party/candidate.
- b. I shared posts encouraging people to get their voters' cards and/or to cast their votes.
- c. I shared vital information relating to the electoral process.

- d. I talked about the elections in general through posts, comments, and private messages when necessary.
- e. I discouraged people from getting involved.

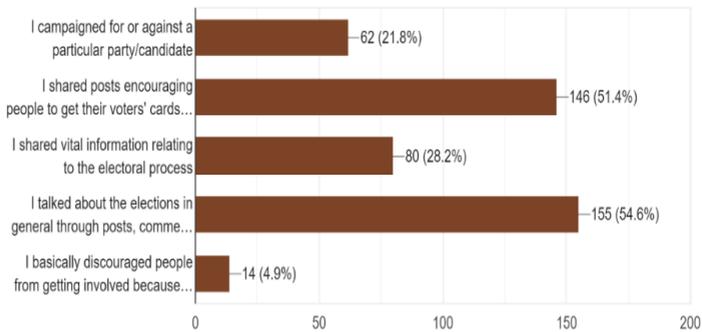


Figure 2: Political activities of study participants on social media during the 2019 elections.

The results show that most respondents participated in the elections in some way through social media. While levels of participation may differ significantly, it is hardly debatable that Nigerians are willing to engage in political discourses online. From persuading fellow citizens to exercise their political agency by getting their voters' card

or showing up on the elections day to cast their votes to campaign for their preferred candidates, Nigerians wielding internet-enabled devices were committed to citizen-to-citizen voter education and sensitization. It is hardly shocking that nearly five percent of respondents reported that they discouraged people from getting involved in the elections.

This is perhaps a case where the exception proves the rule.

Civil Participation in the 2019 Elections—The Online against the Offline.

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria might go down in history as having one of the lowest voter turnout. Out of over 82,000,000 voters registered to vote, only about 27,000,000 citizens were actually at the polling units to cast their votes. In other words, less than 35 percent of the registered voters showed up.

The figures show an unfortunate drop from 43.6 percent voter turnout in the last elections in 2015 (IDEA, n.d). This plummeting interest in civic participation is a broad concern to both the

government and international observers. When rigging, manipulations, and violence characterize local and general elections year after year, the resultant effect is that the people begin to lose faith in the electoral process. Consequently, distrust in the electoral process will lead to low interest.

In the survey conducted for this study, respondents were asked to indicate their interest/involvement in Nigerian politics. Some 10.3 percent reported that they were involved, while 28.4 percent said they were very interested but not necessarily involved. Some 41.8% reported that they were occasionally interested, while 15.4 percent indicated indifference to Nigerian politics.

Table 1: Study participants' level of engagement with Nigerian politics

Question:	Involved	Very Interested	Occasionally Interested	Indifferent	Abhorrence
What is your attitude towards Nigerian Politics?	10.3%	28.4%	41.8%	15.4%	4.1%
	<i>n=30</i>	<i>n=83</i>	<i>n=122</i>	<i>n=45</i>	<i>n=12</i>

Given that a majority had agreed to have participated online somehow,

respondents who indicated that they were involved in Nigerian politics

shared posts on politics. Ditto those who declared that they were very interested or occasionally interested. However, it is difficult to determine how much their interest—which they showed during the 2019 elections by engaging with election-

related posts—can translate to actual offline participation, such as voting, contesting, or attending an in-person political rally. Table 2 shows the level and degree of participation online against offline.

Table 2: Study participants' level of participation during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria

Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Cannot remember (%)
Are you a registered member of any political party?	6.5	92.6	0.7
Did you attend any political rally?	11.7	79.4	8.9
Do you belong to any Nigerian political group on social media? (Any group in support of a candidate, a party or a political agenda)	18.6	76.6	4.8
Did you donate to any political group or any political cause during the elections?	3.8	84.9	11.3
Did you physically participate in the elections (by voting or working as an ad-hoc staff)?	44.3	45.4	10.3
Did you share your experience on social media during or after the voting process through notes, photos, or videos?	36.6	51.7	11.6

The table shows that while non-committal engagements such as post-sharing or online commentary on political issues are widespread, citizens do not typically translate

that to offline political commitments in the same manner. Responses show that less than 45 percent of respondents went to the polling units to cast their votes. The low turnout

may have resulted from insecurity and fear in many parts of the country, distrust in the political process, or apathy towards actual involvement in elections and politics in general.

Nonetheless, citizens' online participation during the 2019 elections is commendable. In the quest for civic vitality, Nigerians have shown their will to be involved in preserving their democracy. For instance, the hashtag "NigeriaDecides" and "NigeriaDecides2019" were used millions of times. Citizens took to Twitter and Facebook to express their thoughts on the elections in 2018 and 2019.

Electoral Monitoring and Social Media Witnessing

On February 15, 2019, just a few hours to the scheduled general elections, *Sahara Reporters* - a popular news outlet in Nigeria - made a post on their official Twitter account titled "Be A Citizen Journalist." The post urged citizens to send videos or photo evidence of electoral malpractices to the news agency (*Sahara Reporters*) on Facebook, Twitter, or through email if they encounter any. Recently, citizen journalism

has been on the rise in Nigeria. Television stations such as Channels TV and TVC dedicate prime time to show images or videos of happening sent in by concerned citizens. Videos sent captured, among other things, dilapidated structures forgotten by the government used as polling booths and a policeman unjustly harassing an innocent citizen.

In the 2015 general elections, citizen journalism played a vital role during and after the elections. A particular video showed underaged voters gaining access to polling booths in Northern Nigeria. The video drew massive responses, causing some concerned citizens to question the integrity of the nation's electoral system.

Nigerians were willing to record and share any anomaly they might notice on their social media accounts. This posture is unlike journalists who might be less sanguine in reporting such scenes. During the presidential and gubernatorial elections, social media users posted texts, images, videos, and live happenings on various platforms.

The trend began with politicians and celebrities and extended to others. On the morning

of the election day, a wealthy Nigerian celebrity, identified as Femi Otedola, posted a video of himself walking to the voting center with his daughter, who is a popular singer. In the video, they encouraged citizens using the following words, “Go and vote and let us change the future of Nigeria.” Other celebrities, including singer Timi Dakolo and TV presenter Mo Abudu, posted videos showing decorum in their polling units. Another singer, ‘Banky W,’ uploaded a video on Instagram alleging that a polling station did not have ballot papers for the House of Representatives elections.

While the democratization of election monitoring and witnessing seems like a positive development, it appears to have the propensity to be overly sensational and result in scaring people away from casting their votes. Violent occurrences at these centers are more likely to go viral than reports of decorum. However, it is no wonder that many believe that elections in Nigeria are synonymous with pandemonium. The following questions were asked to estimate the effect of social media posts (particularly citizen journalism) on public perception and voter turnout during elections.

Table 3: Social-media-induced public perception in the 2019 elections

Question:	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
From social media, I got the impression that the elections will be well organized, free, and fair.	36.5%	42%%	21.4%
	<i>n=106</i>	<i>n=122</i>	<i>n=62</i>

Item: Textual narrations, videos, or photos shared by witnesses of the elections at certain polling units, showing violence or

pandemonium, affected/or will likely influence your voting behavior in the future.

Table 4: Social-media-induced public perception in the 2019 elections II

Agree	Disagree	Neutral
71.9%	9.9%	18.2%
<i>n=210</i>	<i>n=29</i>	<i>n=18.2</i>

Citizen journalism and social media witnessing ensured accountability to a reasonable extent during the elections. Internet users had the opportunity of following the voting exercise in different centers in real-time from different parts of the world. However, it is vital to be aware of the implications of these images and videos shared by witnesses. While it provides invaluable information and may even keep people aware of and away from impending danger or violence in these centers, it often significantly influences voter turnout.

Conclusion

This paper casts light on the intersections between social media usage in Nigeria and electioneering, campaigns, and political processes. Findings suggest that in the Nigerian 2019 general elections, social media

was employed extensively and profitably by diverse political actors.

In retrospect, the 2019 elections in Nigeria featured differently on various social media platforms. The way citizens and voters engaged posts and information on Facebook differed from how they engaged the identical posts on Twitter or Instagram. Twitter—thanks to its interface, which allows 280 characters per tweet—was used to pass short but meaningful messages with punchlines or call to action.

Posts on Twitter are retweeted rapidly within the first hour, after which retweets become less frequent (Elmer, 2012). Posts are engaged by the most active users who can follow up trends. This finding is fascinating because even though Nigerians on Facebook outnumber those on Twitter, politicians have far more followers on Twitter than they do on

Facebook and Instagram. Hence, the assertion can be made that the Nigerian Twitter users are primarily interested in politics and governance matters. However, it is worth questioning the relationship between having a large following on social media and winning elections. Nigerians of northern extraction voted massively for the current President Muhammadu Buhari. They were less preponderant on social media, but they became significant influencers of the elections that brought in the president.

A post on Twitter by @Mai_bulala, a northerner on the 26th of February 2019, after President Buhari declared winner pushes this point further. He tweeted:

"#IAMNorth and I pride myself as a northerner. I may not always have data to vote on Twitter like you, but I listen to Radio and I have PVC. I vote with my PVC in the polling unit not with data on Twitter. Proudly Aboki. Proudly Almajiri. 'cuz #iamnorth".

A few other catchphrases were also circulated after the elections, such as "votes are not won on Twitter" and others that conveyed the same or

similar meaning. This meaning elicits questions about Twitter as a political influencer. Twitter, from our findings, has shown to be a civic vitality promoter as netizens embrace thoughts and counter-thoughts, notwithstanding the trolling and attacks that go with such exchanges (Gainous & Wagner, 2014). However, it remains open to debate how this vitality translates to an actual political victory for the political actors in Nigeria.

Through its community-friendly features such as Facebook groups, Facebook allowed users to participate in the elections differently. The platform users started different groups whose primary aims revolved around campaigning, praise-singing, or information dissemination. It appears that the political posts on Facebook are less critical than posts shared on Twitter.

Nonetheless, Facebook captured a more diverse audience - from teenagers and younger adults to the elderly. Discussions were more robust, open-ended, and tend to mirror the African sense of community. Facebook provided a platform for voters and supporters with a more traditional perspective to catch up on electoral activities. Instagram, a Facebook sister medium, emerged to enable people

to share images and short videos with friends and followers. The actors in the elections employed it to serve as a platform for voters to engage with multimedia.

Twitter and Facebook, unlike Instagram, offer an adaptable and effective means of communication to a wide range leading to a significant diverse dataset. This capacity causes it to analyze large amounts of data essentially on every topic from online users. Consequently, media structures, politicians, institutions, entertainers, artists utilize social media as an interface with a more ubiquitous audience. As shown in this study and past investigations, social media platforms are fundamentally contributory in election campaigns and other political disputes. How this vitality translates to election victories is fuzzy and subject to further investigations. However, researchers can also extend their interest to how disinformation and hate speech can be curbed to make social media safer for users.

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