

Role of Social Media in the Political Participation of Ebonyi Youths in 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Stephen Nwanchor Elem and Jacinta Chinenye Igwe

Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Department of Mass Communication, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media networks has brought a new dimension to the way news is gathered and disseminated. No one doubts that the primary function of social media : Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube, and so on - is to connect people through interactive computer-mediated platforms so they can share information [1], Social media have helped to deconstruct the structure of news gathering and dissemination [2]. Social media has quickly risen to prominence as a news source [3]. Yet, lingering doubts remain about the quality of information obtained through it [4].

The evolution of social media provides avenue for both trained journalists and untrained public to report news for public consumption. This was not the case when only the traditional media such as radio, television and newspaper served as the main means of mass communication. According to [5], social media can be defined as “forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)”. There are a variety of different types of social media used in Nigeria, with some of the most popular including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatup, MySpace, YouTube, and LinkedIn, with Facebook having the highest number of daily users, and Twitter with the second highest [6].

[7] regards social media as informal news institutions which serve as “pervasive agents of globalization as well as democratisation”. Social networking sites support the human need for social interaction, using internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues

(one-to-many) into social media dialogues (many-to-many) [8].

The Social media have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary society. The fast development of social media has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas [9]. It has had major effects on fields such as advertising, public relations, communications, and political communication [11].

More recently, the prominence of social media has been particularly highlighted in politics, given the fact that the use of social networking sites (Facebook) and (Twitter) are believed to have the potential of positively influencing political participation [6]. The emerging trend in the use of social media generally in Nigeria shows that social media such as Facebook, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApps, Twitter, Blog, MySpace, YouTube and Instagram are no longer mainly social with the primary purpose of creating and enabling participation in social networking sites. They also serve as avenue for people to socialize and check out what friends they are making [8] [9].

Social media have in addition to serving as interactive forum, become powerful tools for political communication and engagement, and a useful means of political campaign in Nigeria, and by extension, veritable tools for active political participation. For instance, social media became not only “sites of information”, “providing many Nigerians with political voice but also “sites of action” [4]. This may probably account for why the recent use of social media in Nigerian elections as argued

continues to demonstrate how social media have reshaped the structures and methods of contemporary political communication and engagement in the country [4] [5].

Social media use was not just restricted to announcing and monitoring election results but was vigorously deployed to different use by all the electoral stakeholders before, during and after the elections serving specific political interest of these stakeholder [11] pointed out that INEC, political parties, candidates, media and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) all made use of the technology in carrying out their activities during the electoral period.

However, it is argued that social media serve as vehicle for spreading unverified news which turn out to be fake news. In support of this view [2] states that recently, the damaging consequences of misinformation was witnessed during the 2016 US presidential election. Sleuths of fake news websites were setup by teenagers in Macedonia to generate and distribute discredited claims through Facebook so as to earn advertisement dollars. These examples demonstrate that the ramifications of the rapid spreading of inaccurate information in social media can extend to multiple domains (politics, health, finance), ultimately leading to misinformed citizenry, and crippling our democracy. More generally, this points towards the need for studying credibility in social media.

There is no consensus on what credibility means. Some scholars define credibility in terms of believability, that is the information worthy of being believed; others consider credibility as a property of the source, that is the statement from a person that can be trusted; credibility is also defined in terms of reliability, that is whether the information itself is reliable and the source as well [7].,

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the youths in Ebonyi State consider social media as credible source of political news.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria held general election in 2015 which provided an opportunity for voters to elect the president that would pilot the activities of the state for the next four years. Apart from the

conventional media of communication like radio, television and the newspaper available to political candidates and major stakeholders in the electioneering process to communicate their message to the electorates, the social media were massively deployed for the dissemination of political messages during the elections [11].

It is a fact that new technologies have become an integral tool of political communication on a global scale. The media are gradually becoming a dependable tool in influencing and changing the opinions and behavior of the public. Recognizing the benefits derived from the social media for political news, Nigerian politicians have embraced and exploited them for political campaigns during the 2015 presidential elections. [2], noted that over 1 million Nigerian use the social media especially Facebook, for political interest. However, there is no comprehensive knowledge of how this "new form of media" can facilitates as well as impact on political news in Nigeria.

The problem of this study therefore is to find out what the public thinks about the credibility of political news on social media as presented to the public by the political actors, gladiator, and commentators during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to evaluate public perception of the credibility of social media political news as the 2019 Nigerian presidential election approaches. To achieve this central objective, the following sub objectives will be explored:

- To determine whether Ebonyi youths consider political news from social media on the 2019 presidential elections as credible.
- To ascertain the extent political news on social media is regarded as credible by Ebonyi youths with the 2019 presidential election in view.
- To ascertain whether Ebonyi youths use social network sites as credible source of getting information on the 2019 presidential election

REVIEW OF RELATED LITRATURE

Overview of Political Participation

Political participation can be defined as citizens' activities affecting politics. Ever since the famous funeral speech of Pericles (431 BC), politicians and scholars have stressed the unique character of democracy by emphasizing the role of ordinary citizens in political affairs. [6] defines political participation as "freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and right to social justice, health services, better working conditions and opportunity to franchise". [3] noted various variables of political participation which include voting in election and contesting elective (public) offices but argues that these do not mean representation in decision making and governance.

The 2011 general election in Nigeria was a remarkable turning point in the history of Nigerian politics. It was the first time digital media was used as a political platform in the electioneering process and campaign in the country. It thus, signaled a paradigm shift in the history of Nigeria political and electoral history and introduced Nigeria to the use of what has become known globally as "Internet elections" or "e-electioneering" [4]. That is the use of social media in electioneering campaigns and politics made popular by the President Buhari in 2018 for his political campaign.

Prior to 2011, elections in Nigeria had been associated with and characterized by malpractices of various kinds: rigging, ballot box snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of voters' list, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters [3]. As suggested by political pundits, the use of social media in the 2011 elections significantly reduced the various malpractices that plagued the election process in the country and enthroned a more transparent process. Before the conduct of the 2011 polls, the 2003 and 2007 elections were particularly marked by dissatisfaction by candidates, voters and observers. The flaws that characterized the

conduct of the 2007 elections severely dented the integrity of elections in Nigeria, and triggered demands for freer, fairer, and more transparent elections, and perhaps resulted in part to the adoption of the internet elections in 2011 which could also be seen as a reflection of the global trend towards internet campaign and electioneering.

While the 2011 elections, marked the establishment of digitalization of politics in Nigeria, the 2015 Nigeria general election, further entrenched digital media use as part of Nigerian political culture. In the 2015 elections, results were first announced through the social media before the official announcements from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) - a remarkable departure from previous established practice. This was also evident in the 2017 Anambra gubernatorial polls. Either by twitting, facebooking or whatsapping, Nigerian citizens participated vigorously in these general elections, contributing in part to the political change of baton in the Nigerian democratic terrain.

Social media use was not just restricted to announcing and monitoring election results but was vigorously deployed to different use by all the electoral stakeholders before, during and after the elections serving specific political interest of these stakeholders [6]. As [9] pointed out, the INEC, political parties, candidates, media and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) all made use of the technology in carrying out their activities during the electoral period.

Since the use of digital media is only possible with the existence of internet connectivity and access, it can be said that the recent increasing use of the social media in Nigeria elections is related to a high level of Internet connectivity witnessed recently in the country.

Social Media and Credibility for Political Participation

Social media can be defined as a collection of internet-based applications that expand the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that permit the creation and exchange of user-generated content [3]. Social networking sites are the interface between people and social media, and

for many the "Internet" is synonymous with social networking sites [3].

It has been long recognised that credibility in social media is not inherent to a source [4]. Credibility in social media is a judgment made by the user based on a host of factors, including believability, accuracy, fairness, depth, trustworthiness, bias, completeness, reliability [8]; [9] as well as ease of use and attractiveness of a site [11]. Because there are now so many easy and convenient ways, such as Social Network Sites (SNS) and blogs, to post information on the Internet, it is often not filtered through professional gatekeepers. Further, sites lack traditional indicators of authority such as author identity and established reputation, which puts the burden of determining credibility more squarely on the shoulders of the users [3]; [4].

Because credibility is based on user's perceptions, several researchers have developed models that explain how individuals determine site credibility (e.g. [2]; [3]). Many of these credibility models are based on information processing models such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model [3] and the Heuristic-Systematic Model [10], [11]. The degree, then, to which online messages and sites are scrutinized for their credibility depends on users' ability to evaluate the site or message (e.g., their Internet experience and their critical abilities to evaluate information) and how motivated they are to ensure that the information they receive is accurate and credible. For instance, users surfing the Internet for entertainment may not assess the credibility of a site at all or rely on surface characteristics of a site such as its appearance, while those highly motivated to get accurate information, such as someone recently diagnosed with a serious disease, might engage in a more rigorous, systematic approach to credibility assessment such as verifying the author's qualifications or credentials or turning to other sources to validate the information [5].

Studies examining students found that they rarely or only occasionally systematically verify information and that their actual verification behavior (e.g. clicking links to external sites to verify information) is even more

sporadic [2]. In information processing terms, then, people rely on more peripheral cues or heuristics (that is, information processing strategies that rely on useful mental short cuts, rules of thumb or general guidelines) rather than systematic or central processing (more systematic and rigorous approaches) to determine site credibility [11].

Since the early days of credibility research, studies have shown people rely on a source's trustworthiness and expertise in making credibility judgments [7]; [8] and it seems that this holds true for online information as well [6]. Individuals are likely to connect to sites and messages that support their beliefs [4]. The credibility of SNS information is enhanced if it comes from those who share the users' values and interests [4].

In general, information that supports a receiver's worldview is convincing and confirming and thus it is judged as more legitimate and credible than challenging information [3].

Furthermore, users are more likely to support an opinion if it is advocated by many of those in their social network, and they are likely to believe information that comes from individuals they already trust or from people who seem to hold similar political views [1]. According to [5], Koreans considered news media to be more credible than the online news formats. [3] study found that German media consumers rated newspapers as being more credible than television or online news. At the time that the study was conducted, the Web was relatively new to consumers and the majority of participants were non-Internet users. While newspapers were generally considered to be the most credible medium, the lines between television and online news media were blurred. Television was considered as more serious, well-researched, critical, proficient and professional, whereas the Web was rated as more thorough and impartial.

Research has shown that age affects how audiences rate credibility. [11] discovered that college students found television news and online news more credible than older media consumers. Older participants, however, found online news to be more credible than

television news, whereas college students found television news to be more credible.

Some research has also examined Internet credibility without considering other media. [1] compared the credibility of a highly credible and recognizable online news source *Nytimes.com* (the online version of *The New York Times*) to a personal Web page. Participants saw either a highly credible source or a less credible source, and then rated the credibility of a news story on the page. The highly credible source was evaluated as the most credible, but the difference was not statistically significant. [4] found that online news credibility was not affected by story design.

The proliferation of specialty SNS also fosters the congregation of users with similar backgrounds and interests. For instance, *LinkedIn* is a business-oriented site that attracts the more educated with higher incomes [5]. *Schmooze* is an SNS that draws Jewish people, *AsianAve* targets Asians, *Glee.com* is for the professional gay community, and Mormons gather in *LDS LinkUp for Mormons*.

Social Network Site, like all media, depends on loyal followers for their existence. Such sites need to build a consistent following because the more heavily people rely on a medium the more credible they judge it [5]; [6]; [7]. This relationship seems to hold true not only with mainstream sources but also with online ones as well. For instance, studies of blogs, bulletin boards, and chat rooms report reliance as the strongest predictor of judgments of high credibility [8]; [9], [10]. Apparently reliance is such an important predictor of the credibility of Internet components because the more experience users have with each component the greater their ability to judge its credibility [4]; [5].

For SNS to be effective campaign tools they need a loyal audience who views them as credible. These users who deem Social Network Site as credible purveyors of political news are those who participate in civic activities. For instance, those who use SNS for political reasons (i.e. visiting candidate profiles on an SNS and sending messages to the candidate) are likely to participate in

civic activities such as volunteering for local organizations or government boards [2]; [3]; [4]. Further, they report high levels of political interest, campaign interest, civic duty, and political efficacy as well as a greater likelihood to vote and lower levels of political cynicism [7]; [8].

Social Media and Nigeria's Electoral System

The media was at the forefront of the agitation for electoral reforms, reporting regularities and malpractices that characterized the 2003 and 2007 elections and called for immediate actions after elections [11]. General elections were characterized by fraud, miscounting, rigging and malfeasance. In addition, the election was not issue-oriented; the political parties lacked well thought -out programmes and manifestos, the executive lord over the other two arms through actual disrespect of ruling or threat of impeachment and blackmail [11]. The 2007 elections were the worst in the history of Nigeria. Everything about the elections in the judgment of most Nigerians was bad. Its conduct has certainly armed critical observers of the Nigerian political scene with weapons to portray the country in a bad light in the world [4]. The media played a crucial role in the emergency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the elected President in 2011. Everything worked well for Jonathan in the run up to the elections. Jonathan is an Ijaw, one of the minority ethnic groups in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. For a long time, the people of the Niger-Delta had advocated for the control of crude oil following years of massive environmental degradation and gross underdevelopment of millions of Nigeria through the media. In his nation-wide campaigns, he often spoke about his "grass to grace" story. [3] asserted that: In my early days in school, I had no shoes, no school bags, I carried my books in my hands but never despaired, no car to take me to school but I never despaired. There were days I had only one meal, but never despaired. I didn't have power, didn't have generators, I studied with lanterns but I never despaired. In spite of these, I finished secondary school, attended the University of Port Harcourt, and now hold a doctorate degree.

Fellow Nigerians, if I could make it, you too can make it. Jonathan actively engaged millions of Nigerian youths through the active use of the social media such notably facebook. The facebook platform bridged the communication gap between the political leadership and the ordinary Nigerians. Jonathan's closest rival General Muhammadu Buhari (retd) was portrayed in the media as a ridge personality, an old-fashioned ex-military dictator and religious fundamentalist who cannot lead a modern Nigeria. It was not surprising that Jonathan emerged as the clear winner of the presidential election 2011. What are the fault lines and countervailing factors in presidential political exclusion in the 2015 General Election? These are the issues to be sought and examined.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian presidents have tried to gain access to political decision-making positions through one way or the other by contesting for elective positions at various levels. Their efforts however have not translated to gains as subsequent elections since 1999 revealed. Not only has there been marginal gain over the years which in itself is not very encouraging, but a decline in the number of elected politicians in the 2015 General Elections shows a manifestation of political disempowerment and this is more worrisome.

Given the ground swell and campaign for participation by men in the general elections, the poor performance is indeed very troubling. In the 2015 General Elections, Nigerian presidential candidates as usual came out and participated in all aspects of the electoral process.

Social Media, Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation in Political Campaign

As in politics and elections across the world, social media is set to play a major role in Nigeria's 2019 campaign. In the 2015 elections, hate speeches and misinformation spread far and wide, with Buhari targeted in particular. After the elections, incredible rumours and lies continued to abound, to the extent that there were even allegations that the man that eventually returned from London after prolonged illness was not

in fact the real Buhari, but a cloned version from Sudan [5].

Ahead of the recently concluded Anambra governorship elections, we saw another example of how fast-spreading misinformation could almost skew a process. Rumours emerged on social media that soldiers had invaded schools in Ozobulu, Anambra State, and were forcefully injecting pupils with poisonous substances that cause monkey pox. This led to the shutdown of schools in Imo, Enugu, Abia, Anambra and Ebonyi states and even affected Rivers and Baysa states. The false story was said to have been posted on the Facebook page of the IPOB, which had vowed to disrupt any elections in the region.

The Nigerian media have played a significant role in the political evolution and development of the country. The traditional media was at the vanguard of the struggle for independence and the enthronement of democracy after several years of military dictatorship. Since the birth of the current democratic governance, the media through agenda setting, have promoted the issues of accountability and good governance, development, fundamental human rights, justice and the rule of law among others. Given the democratic gains achieved so far in such a short time, the Nigerian media must be commended for its patriotic contributions to the restoration and sustenance of democracy. The media has wielded enormous influence in the determination of public perception concerning the conduct of our politicians and other aspects of the country's democratic practices.

As our democracy advances, new frontiers have now opened and more enabling environment created for expression. This freedom has somewhat been abused as some media have been found to indulge in professional misconduct. The media, like any other profession, have also been subjected to abuses arising from practices that run foul of professional ethics. Apart from this, there are still pertinent issues and questions that the media must continue to reflect upon so that it can remain focused in its continuous efforts at shaping democracy in Nigeria. Furthermore, despite the elaborate

provisions in the Electoral Act on issue of reporting and evaluating electoral processes, there has emerged a Media culture, which may not be helpful especially in time of election.

Nigeria's social media space is generally highly susceptible from manipulation by influential individuals with vested interests and little sense of electoral ethics. They are ready to confuse or divide people along ethnic, religious or other lines to serve their own ends. In 2015, the PDP recruited Cambridge Analytical. In 2019, those with sufficient resources may gain solicit the services of international PR firms with records of employing questionable methods.

Users gathered a database of fake news articles that circulated in the three months before the 2019 election that Atiku will defeat Buhari with tangible reasons, using lists from three independent third parties. First, we scraped all stories from the Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton tags on Snopes (snopes.com), which calls itself "the definitive Internet reference source for urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation." Second, we scraped all stories from the 2019 presidential election tag from PolitiFact (politifact.com), another major fact-

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In the above review related literature, the researcher was guided by the topic and problem of the study which centers on the public perception of the credibility of social media political news, the 2019 Nigerian presidential election in focus.

[1] carried out an experiment titled 61 million person experiment in social influence and political mobilization and concluded that social media messages do influence people. They estimated that tens of thousands of votes eventually cast (during Nigerian Presidential election 2015) were generated by a single Facebook message.

[3] in their study of the Effects of politicians' social media activities on voting behavior submitted that there is evidence that the total social media actively has positive effect on voter turnout. The result for effect of social messages on voters preferences was not conclusive.

checking site. Third, we use a list of 21 fake news articles that had received significant engagement on Facebook, as compiled by the news outlet BuzzFeed [4]. Combining these three lists, we have a database of 156 fake news articles. We then gathered the total number of times each article was shared on Facebook as of early December 2018, using an online content database called BuzzSumo (buzzsumo.com). We code each article's content as either pro-Clinton (including anti-Trump) or pro-Trump (including anti-Clinton).

This list is a reasonable but probably not comprehensive sample of the major fake news stories that circulated before the election. One measure of comprehensiveness is to look at the overlap between the lists of stories from Snopes, PolitiFact, and BuzzFeed. Snopes is our largest list, including 138 of our total of 156 articles. As a benchmark, 12 of the 21 articles in the BuzzFeed list appear in Snopes, and 4 of the 13 articles in the PolitiFact appear in Snopes. The lack of perfect overlap shows that none of these lists is complete and suggests that there may be other fake news articles that are omitted from our database.

[4] in his study Assessment of the impact of social media on the 2015 electioneering in Asaba, Delta State reached the same conclusions as that Gromark and Schliesmann by stating that social media increased the turnout of voters by increasing information exchange and participation of the electorates. A similar study was carried out in Anambra State by [6] and they also concluded that social media platforms present unique opportunities for mobilizing of youth for political participation.

In their own study carried out in Ondo State, [11] concluded that social media actually stimulated voters to participate in the electoral process in Akure metropolis. Similarly, [7] in their study set in Enugu State reveal that a substantial number of respondents were influenced to a large extent by exposure to social media in the way they participated in the 2015 general elections. [6] reported that the majority of respondents in her study set in Oyo

State that the use of social media as a political awareness tool positively influenced them in voting for the candidate(s) of their choice.

The role of social media in shaping public opinion of Nigerians in the 2015 electioneering was the study undertaken by [1] and they concluded that the social media are influencing the public on issues that are important to them especially politically.

The verdict of [3] in their study titled Social media and political participation in Nigeria during 2011 General elections: the lapses and lessons was that whereas many used the technology (social media) to make vital input in the political discourse, others used it to spread hate and inciting messages.

[5] in their study of the Influence of social media on the political knowledge and participation of electorates in 2015 electioneering campaigns in Nigeria concluded that there are knowledge levels on the use of social media political learning and use of social media has different levels of influence on electorates' political participation. [5] "The *Facebook Election*" is a compilation of series of studies published in Mass Communication & Society Journal which examined the way in which Online Social Interactive Media (OSIM), more specifically social network sites, blogs, micr blogs, (like Twitter), video sharing sites and online discussion forums changes the ways candidates campaigned, how the media covered the election and how voters received information in the 2008 (U.S Presidential election). The studies have revealed conflicting results as regards effects of social media, [3] study of "Political uses and perceived effects of campaigning on My Space" concluded that in general social network sites may not have much influence on political attitudes and behaviours. Another study by [7] titled "The influence of social network sites on political attitudes and behaviours" also reached a similar conclusion as that of Cozma & Postelnicu's study.

Conversely, Valenzuela, Park and Kee's study entitled "Is there social capital in a social network site? *Facebook* use and College students' life satisfaction, Trust

and Participation" suggested there are positive relationship between intensity of Facebook use and students' life satisfaction, social trust, civic engagement and political participation.

Another study "Social networking sites and our lives" carried out by [9] for renowned research organization Pew Internet revealed that *Facebook* users are more politically engaged than most people. According to survey conducted over the February 2015 Nigerian Presidential election, it revealed that "10% of Americans reported that they had attended a political rally, 23% reported that they had tried to convince someone to vote for a specific candidate and 66% reported that they had or intended to vote.

Bowers, Fernandez, Giurcanu & Neely's Study "The Writing on the wall: A content Analysis of College Students' *Facebook* Groups fir the 2008 Presidential Election" found that political discussion dominated the discussion between posters as they used the *Facebook* groups to transmit important information related to the candidates' campaigns, issues and appearances rather than for social purposes. The authors argued that the result bode well for the potential of social network sites to foster civic engagement among young voters.

A study by Hanson, Hardakis, Wagstaff, Sherma & Ponder entitled "The 2008 Presidential campaign: Political cynicism in the Age of *Facebook*, MySpace and You Tube examines the relationship between political cynicism and use of social media. The study reveals social media users tend to have lower political cynicism the more they utilize social media. The authors suggest the reason for this could be the strong interpersonal nature of social networking sites, as many people tend to regard their friends/family's/contacts opinions more highly than those from politicians or media. [7] in his study "The Autoregressive influence of social network political knowledge on voting behaviour" concluded that social network have a large influence on vote choice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchor on the Agenda Setting Theory of the Mass Media.

Agenda Setting Theory states that the media may not always be successful in

telling people what to think, but they are usually successful in telling people what to think about. This theory was developed in 1970 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw after their study of media role in the 1968. The theory confirmed that the power of the press to decide the agenda of public discourse and debate is quite potent. The amount of attention given to an issue in the press affects the level of importance assigned to that by consumers of mass media messages.

When we say media has an impact in agenda-setting, we mean that it has the ability choose and emphasize certain programs and issues, thereby causing the public (men) to perceive these issues as important. Thus, during political campaign activities, the mass media especially the social media, pinpointed on the need for the masses to partake in politics and noting else.

[9] contributed that in choosing or displaying news stories, news casters and online journalist play an important part in shaping political realities. This study, public perception of the credibility of social media political news, the 2019 Nigerian presidential election in focus, looked into the role the social media played among the users as a medium of mass communication in galvanizing and preparing the Nigerian presidential election for 2019.

[8] states that the information is power especially news that relate to any governmental issues. This, in effect for the betterment of the country and Ebonyi Youth in particular. It is through the internet that will access many things

DISCUSSION

In the 2019 presidential election, youths in Nigeria including Ebonyi youths used social media platforms to send and receive information on the presidential electioneering campaign and to monitor information about the presidential candidates, especially Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar [4], Ebonyi youths relied on social media messages as credible source of political information. This finding was supported by the result from the testing of Hypothesis 3 which the accepted alternate hypothesis indicated that Ebonyi youths used social network sites as credible source of getting

we do today that are done in so many countries. Under the Agenda setting theory, people's opportunity to get information should not be impaired. They should be exposed to all kind of information and opinions and should be allowed to make decisions because of the media focus on such issues.

Finally, a prominent dimension in agenda setting theory is the suggestion that people source for news in different ways to know what is happening around and outside the country and they believe that as it seen in social media so it is. The theory was considered suitable for this study because of the related issue it holds with the topic of the research. The media most often initiate an issue for discussion which the society adopts and makes it a subject of discussion and heated debate in a democratic setting.

As it concerns Nigeria politics, the media not only propagate, promote transmit event on line, activities and commentaries but also keep politicians abreast of what is happening around them, including their political party activities and other commentaries. Further demonstrates that the social media and the offline media especially, is the vehicle conveyed ideas and wishes of one discussion of the society to the government. Agenda setting theory gives social media users the right to sources news to certain issues such as political news and issues that is prominent among audience as prevalent issues to think and talk of whom to win in 2019 general election.

information on the 2019 presidential election.

Candidates and parties also used the social media to provide the electorates information regarding their attributes, political agendas, and proposed plans. Besides meeting directly with members of the electorate, candidates and parties accomplish this task through campaigns via media. Politicians used the social platforms to gauge voter interest and identify what truly matters to them. With the right data-driven strategy, candidates identify the right audiences on social media for both support and voting [11].

In the Ebonyi State presidential, gubernatorial elections, the conversation about the election was happening on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Blogs, MySpace, and so on. These platforms became the new town hall for exchange of political information. The 2019 campaigns before the elections seem to have set a new pattern for political discussion through social media. In the 2019 general elections, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and photo-distributing platform Instagram, were used as sources for the distribution of news stories and medium-based discussion and also for political mobilisation and campaign. At some point the social media platforms especially Facebook and WhatsApp became the alternative campaign battle ground for all the political parties and their candidates. Candidate's popularity and chances of winning were at some point in the peak of the campaign period in Ebonyi state predicted by the electorates based on the candidates and parties visibility in the social media. This means that the electorates, especially the youths of Ebonyi State believed in the information about candidates and the parties as reported on social media platforms.

The social media in Nigeria, particularly the Facebook, and WhatsApp, Instagram was used extensively in the Ebonyi presidential election to garner supporters for the political parties, and in this way distinguish itself as the major site for political news,

deliberations and discussions [10]. For political parties with the proper tracking software, what potential voters say on social media, can provide real-time feedback in digital election campaign to find out what is working and use in re-strategizing for future campaigns. What made social media particularly attractive for both political candidates is that they have unprecedented control over the images they present. Social media allow candidates a direct means by which to communicate with the voting public, thereby bypassing the news media as a gatekeeper.

Social media were also used for mobilisation during the 2019 general elections. Mobilization refers to the use of social media to encourage followers to take part in something, usually to attend rallies, meetings, and to persuade people to vote for them. This was also very visibly used by political candidates in the Ebonyi polls [8].

Lastly, in terms of dialogue, social media presented an opportunity to connect and engage with voters in discussion, as well as receive feedback on political issue. However, most of the accounts were not run personally by the politicians [5]. They engaged users of the social media (Internet warriors) who have amassed huge following on the platforms as consultants to run their accounts, with a view to getting issues to trend by bringing it to the consciousness of the public and influencing opinions and perceptions in their favour.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed suggests that the social play significant role in dissemination election information as it is used in creating awareness. The users of social media closely monitor political activities. Social media kept people informed about the 2019 general elections educated the voters although some messages on social media also confused the voters. This study concludes that the credibility of social media news in the 2019 presidential election is in doubt because of fake political information that was spread through social media platforms. The

youths of Ebonyi State seem to have not given much thought to evaluating the credibility of the news that was spread through social media. As a result, social media news was followed as all factual news during the political campaigns and the declaration of election results. The presidential candidates of the two major political parties in Nigeria (Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar) used social media for their campaigns and this provided them the opportunity to reach every Nigerian on social media network to market their political manifestoes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the literature reviewed and the findings of the study, the researcher recommends as follows:

- The youths of Ebonyi State should evaluate the source of political information on social media platforms to make that the information is from a person that can be trusted before accepting such information as credible.
- Media literacy education should be organised for Ebonyi youths to educate them on how to identify fake political news and hate speeches used by politicians. The ability of the youths to identify false political news will help them to know when to accept or not to accept news from social media as credible.
- Ebonyi youths should not accept information from social media

platforms as credible without verification. This is because findings from several studies (e.g. Reimink, 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Ecker, Lewandowsky, Chang and Pillai, 2014; Goodwin-Ortiz, 2017) show that social media provide platforms where both trained and untrained journalists publish information, sometimes without any form of verification of the authenticity of such information.

- Finally, politicians and their supporters should not be allowed by social media operators to spread fake news. This can be done by installing software that can dictate news that is false and which can make people not to trust political information from social media platforms.

REFERENCES

1. Reimink, E. (2018). Is This Thesis Fake News? *Linguistic Methods for Categorizing News*, B.A., Yale University.
2. Allcott, H. and Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-236
3. Ecker, U. K. H., Lewandowsky, S., Chang, E. P., and Pillai, R. (2014). The effects of subtle misinformation in news headlines. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*. Ecker, Ullrich.
4. Orjime, M. (2018)., *2019: as candidates battle on social media*. Available at: <https://leadership.ng/2018/12/02/2019-as-candidates-battle-on-social-media/> [Accessed 12 March, 2019].
5. Mitra, T. (2017)., *Understanding social media credibility* [online] Available at: <https://smartech.gatech.edu/bits-tream/handle/1853/58691/MITR-A-DISSERTATION-2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Accessed 16 March, 2019].
6. Caumont, A., (2017). *12 trends shaping digital news*, [online] Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2013/10/16/12-trends-shaping-digital-news/>. [Accessed 16 March, 2019].
7. De Beer, Arnold S. (2010). News from and in the "Dark Continent" Afro-pessimism, news flow, global journalism and media regimes. *Journalism studies*. 11(4), 596-60
8. Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango and Ada, (2012) Global news flow debate in the era of social media networks: Is U.S media still the world's new leader? *European Scientific Journal*, 8(3), 136-160.
9. Ajala, O. (2018)., Reasons why Nigeria is not ready to hold free and fair elections next year, [online], Available at: <https://theconversation.com/nigeria-is-not-ready-to-hold-free-and-fair-elections-next-year-heres-why-97300> [Accessed 29 January, 2020].
10. Akinnaso, N. (Punch, November, 2018), *Social media and the 2019 general elections*, [online] Available at <https://punchng.com/social-media-and-the-2019-elections/> Available at <https://punchng.com/social-media-and-the-2019-elections/>: [Accessed 16 March, 2019].

11. Taherdoost, H., (2016). Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument; How to Test the Validation of a Questionnaire/Survey in a Research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)* 5(3), 28-36.