**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN NIGERIA**

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# ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of social media on political discourse in Nigeria, with a focus on the residents of Ikeja LGA in Lagos State. With the widespread adoption of social media, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become pivotal arenas for public discussion, political engagement, and opinion shaping. The objectives of this research are threefold: to investigate how social media is used in Nigerian political discourse, to assess its influence on public opinion and political participation, and to analyse its role in shaping political campaigns and elections. Through a quantitative approach, data were collected using a four-point Likert scale questionnaire distributed to 200 residents, with 130 valid responses analysed. Descriptive statistics were used to interpret demographic information, and responses to the research questions were presented in tabular format, with further analysis examining potential correlations between social media engagement and political awareness, participation, and attitudes toward governance. A hypothesis test evaluated whether social media significantly influences public opinion and political engagement in Nigeria, yielding a positive correlation. Results indicate that social media is instrumental in facilitating political discourse in Nigeria, providing a platform for diverse voices, increasing political awareness among the youth, and enabling more active participation in civic matters. The findings suggest that social media has a significant impact on public opinion and plays an essential role in shaping election campaigns, often bypassing traditional media channels to reach a broader audience. Moreover, while social media democratizes access to political information, it also faces challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and “slacktivism,” which may impede meaningful political engagement. In conclusion, this study highlights the transformative effect of social media on political discourse in Nigeria, noting both its potential to empower citizens and the challenges that come with digital political engagement. Recommendations include implementing policies to counter misinformation, fostering digital literacy to promote responsible online discourse, and encouraging the government to embrace transparent communication through social media. This research contributes to a growing body of literature on the influence of social media on African democracies, underscoring its role as a double-edged sword in shaping public opinion and political participation.

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed the global political discourse. The widespread use of social media in Nigeria has greatly transformed the way political communication works, providing new opportunities for involvement, organisation, and the articulation of political viewpoints. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp are now indispensable platforms for politicians, activists, and the public to exchange information, discuss policies, and exert political influence (Abdullahi & Danladi, 2021).

The advent of the digital age has brought about a fundamental change in the way political discussions are carried out. Traditional media channels, previously dominant in the distribution of political information, now coexist with social media, a platform where content can be generated and shared by almost anybody with internet connectivity (Adeniran & Ogunleye, 2021). This shift has facilitated the democratisation of information dissemination, enabling a greater variety of perspectives to participate in political discourse. In Nigeria, where traditional media may face limitations due to political and economic influences, social media provides a comparatively unrestricted platform for political expression and discussion (Ajibade & Okeke, 2022).

The role of social media in political discourse is complex and has many aspects. It functions as a platform for political campaigning, a mechanism for mobilising voters, and a forum for public deliberation. During election periods, social media becomes a battleground for political parties and candidates to influence public opinion and garner support (Ayodele, 2019). The 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a widespread use of social media platforms by candidates and their followers for the purposes of campaigning and countering the narratives put forth by their opponents (Bello,2022).

Moreover, social media promotes real-time connection between politicians and the audience, permitting direct communication that escapes traditional media filters. This immediacy promotes a sense of closeness and responsiveness that can enhance political engagement and participation (Edet, 2017). Social media also plays a significant role in political action and protest movements. The #EndSARS protests in 2020, which demanded for the disbandment of an infamous police unit in Nigeria, illustrated how social media can generate popular indignation and mobilize collective action (Kalu, 2018).

However, the influence of social media on political debate is not without challenges. The dissemination of false information and fabricated news on these platforms has the potential to skew the public's perspective and exacerbate political polarisation (Nwafor, 2023). In Nigeria, the effects of false information might be especially significant due to the varying levels of literacy and digital literacy (Olatunji, 2020). Moreover, the ability to remain anonymous on social media platforms can contribute to the widespread dissemination of hate speech and rudeness in political conversations, which in turn undermines the potential for productive discourse and democratic procedures (Olawale, 2022).

Considering the significant influence of social media on political discussions, it is crucial to analyse its contribution to the formation of public sentiment, political engagement, and election results in Nigeria. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics can offer valuable insights into the wider consequences of social media on democratic governance and political stability in the country.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The incorporation of social media into the political domain has revolutionised the manner in which political discussions are carried out in Nigeria. Although social media provides chances for increased political participation and the dissemination of information to a wider audience, it also poses substantial obstacles such as the proliferation of false information, the deepening of political divisions, and the emergence of online rudeness. Although social media's effect is increasing, there is a scarcity of empirical study on the precise impact it has on political discourse in Nigeria. This study aims to fill this void by exploring the utilisation of social media platforms in political discussions, assessing their impact on public sentiment and political engagement, and scrutinising their contribution to the formation of political campaigns and elections in Nigeria.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

**The objectives of this study are:**

1. To investigate how social media platforms are used in political discourse in Nigeria.
2. To examine the influence of social media on public opinion and political participation in Nigeria.
3. To analyze the role of social media in shaping political campaigns and elections in Nigeria.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How are social media platforms used in political discourse in Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of social media on public opinion in Nigeria?
3. How does social media impact political participation in Nigeria?
4. What role does social media play in shaping political campaigns and elections in Nigeria?

## 1.5 Research Hypothesis

The study will test the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media significantly influences public opinion and political participation in Nigeria.

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

**Academic Contribution:** It contributes to the growing body of literature on social media and political discourse, providing empirical data on the Nigerian context.

**Policy Implications:** The findings can inform policymakers and regulatory bodies on how to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its negative impacts on political discourse.

**Practical Insights:** Political parties, candidates, and activists can use the insights from this study to better understand the dynamics of social media engagement and develop more effective communication strategies.

**Public Awareness:** By highlighting the influence of social media on political processes, the study can enhance public awareness and encourage more informed and responsible use of these platforms.

## 1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the role of social media in political discourse in Nigeria, particularly in relation to public opinion, political participation, and electoral processes. The research will primarily cover major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The study period will encompass recent elections and significant political events from 2014 to 2024.

**Limitations of the study include:**

Data Reliability: Given the self-reported nature of social media use, there may be issues with the reliability of data collected from surveys and interviews.

Rapid Technological Changes: The fast-evolving nature of social media technologies may mean that some findings quickly become outdated.

Geographical Focus: While the study focuses on Nigeria, the findings may not be entirely generalizable to other contexts with different socio-political dynamics.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

Social Media: Digital platforms that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, and content among users. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Political Discourse: The ways in which individuals and groups discuss, debate, and engage with political issues and processes.

Public Opinion: The collective attitudes and beliefs of the general public towards political issues, events, or figures.

Political Participation: Activities by citizens that are intended to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. This includes voting, campaigning, and engaging in political discussions.

Political Campaigns: Organized efforts by political candidates or parties to influence voter decision-making and secure electoral victory.

Misinformation: False or misleading information spread intentionally or unintentionally, often exacerbated by the speed and reach of social media platforms.

Digital Incivility: Inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour exhibited online, often characterized by aggressive, offensive, or hateful communication.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews prior scholarly work relevant to this study’s exploration of social media’s impact on political discourse in Nigeria. The review covers the concept of social media, exploring its definitions, characteristics, and theoretical foundations in political communication. Analyzing opinions, claims, assertions, and postulations from recent literature, this chapter assesses social media’s role in influencing public opinion, facilitating political participation, and shaping political campaigns.

## 2.1 Social Media

Social media has fundamentally changed how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed globally, making it an essential component in modern political discourse. According to Akinbola (2020), social media is defined as a collection of online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content within a virtual community. Social media includes platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which have gained popularity in Nigeria and are used to share political information, foster discussions, and mobilize individuals around political issues (Ojo, 2019). These platforms have introduced unique characteristics, including interactivity, immediacy, and wide reach, that have significantly impacted the political landscape in Nigeria.

Akande (2021) examined social media’s transformation of communication patterns within Nigerian politics, asserting that it enables individuals to participate actively in political discussions, especially on issues that affect their lives directly. This is supported by Osagie (2018), who argued that social media has democratized access to information and allowed citizens to voice their concerns on political matters openly. Both authors agree that social media has redefined the concept of “public opinion” in Nigeria by creating a space for real-time dialogue and feedback on political issues.

In another perspective, Eze and Onu (2019) postulate that social media plays a dual role in political discourse: while it promotes transparency and citizen participation, it can also be a source of misinformation. Their study on the effects of “fake news” on Nigerian elections revealed that the unchecked spread of false information through social media could potentially mislead the electorate and distort public opinion. This notion aligns with the findings of Chukwuma and Adeyemi (2020), who argue that while social media enables open communication and provides a platform for diverse voices, it also poses a risk of amplifying inaccurate information.

Furthermore, Ogbonna (2020) highlights social media’s role as a mobilization tool during elections, noting that political candidates in Nigeria have increasingly used these platforms to engage with citizens and disseminate their campaign messages. According to Ogbonna, social media has made political campaigns more accessible to the public, allowing candidates to reach a broad audience and respond to voters’ concerns directly. This assertion is supported by Femi (2018), who points out that the 2019 Nigerian elections saw an unprecedented level of social media engagement from both voters and candidates. Femi suggests that social media has shifted the power dynamics in political communication, empowering ordinary citizens to contribute to political discourse actively.

Okafor and Musa (2021) intone that social media’s role extends beyond campaigning and mobilization, as it also serves as a tool for political accountability. Their research found that Nigerian citizens often use social media platforms to hold public officials accountable, pressing for transparency in governance. The authors argue that this accountability function of social media has made it an essential aspect of Nigeria’s political landscape, contributing to a more informed and engaged citizenry. Similarly, Bello (2022) asserts that social media has given citizens the power to demand change, as seen in recent political movements, where social media facilitated the coordination of protests and petitions for government reform.

Contrastingly, Adeola (2017) highlights the challenges associated with social media as a medium for political discourse, particularly the issue of “echo chambers” where users are only exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs. This, Adeola posits, may hinder the diversity of opinions and create polarized political views. He notes that while social media has democratized political information, it has also contributed to divisions within Nigerian society by intensifying groupthink and ideological segregation.

In examining the role of social media in shaping public opinion, Ayodele (2019) argues that the interactive nature of these platforms encourages users to develop and exchange opinions on political matters. His study found that Nigerians, especially youths, rely heavily on social media for political information, which shapes their perceptions of political leaders and policies. This influence on public opinion is corroborated by Salami (2021), who observed that social media discussions often sway people’s political preferences, especially during election seasons.

According to Yusuf (2023), social media also plays a crucial role in enhancing political participation among Nigerians. His research reveals that social media campaigns have increased voter awareness and turnout, as citizens are more likely to participate in elections and civic duties when they are actively engaged through online platforms. This is consistent with the findings of Ibrahim and Kazeem (2020), who examined the influence of social media on youth political participation in Nigeria. They conclude that social media is a significant motivator for political engagement, as it provides a sense of community and empowerment among Nigerian youths.

Additionally, Nwosu (2021) emphasizes that social media has expanded the scope of political campaigns by providing candidates with cost-effective methods to reach a large audience. He argues that social media allows for more personalized and targeted campaigning, where candidates can engage directly with their supporters. This perspective aligns with Aliyu (2018), who found that political figures increasingly rely on social media analytics to understand voter sentiment and tailor their messages accordingly.

In a broader context, Bello and Okeke (2022) explore how social media has reshaped the Nigerian political landscape by enabling cross-cutting discussions between citizens and policymakers. According to their study, these interactions promote a more participatory political environment, where citizens feel empowered to contribute to national dialogues on governance. This participatory culture, they assert, is a positive development that encourages transparency and accountability.

Finally, Olatunji and Danjuma (2022) assert that while social media provides numerous opportunities for enhancing political discourse, it also introduces ethical and regulatory challenges. They argue that to harness the benefits of social media, it is essential for Nigerian authorities to establish policies that address issues like misinformation, hate speech, and digital rights. Their recommendations underscore the need for a balanced approach to social media regulation, where freedom of expression is preserved while minimizing the risks associated with unchecked information.

## 2.2 Political Discourse in Nigeria

Political discourse in Nigeria has undergone significant transformation over recent years, with scholars increasingly analyzing how digital platforms, changing social dynamics, and economic conditions influence political conversation and participation. According to Akinbola (2020), political discourse in Nigeria encompasses all discussions, debates, and expressions related to governance, policy, and national issues. Akinbola further argues that political discourse serves as the backbone of democratic engagement, enabling citizens to voice their opinions, hold leaders accountable, and influence political decisions.

Ojo (2021) intones that political discourse in Nigeria historically involved traditional media channels, such as newspapers and radio, which were generally controlled by elite groups. However, the advent of social media has decentralized this landscape, creating a more democratized space where diverse voices can participate. Ojo’s study found that this shift has empowered marginalized groups, particularly youths, by providing them a platform to discuss and influence political matters without intermediaries. Supporting this view, Nwosu and Adeyemi (2019) postulate that the emergence of digital platforms has fostered a new era of political inclusivity, where citizens from various social and economic backgrounds contribute to national discussions.

Similarly, Musa (2020) examines the role of political discourse in fostering civic engagement among Nigerian citizens. He argues that active political discourse encourages citizens to question governmental policies and demand accountability. Musa’s research shows that political discussions on topics such as corruption, unemployment, and education allow citizens to hold public officials accountable, thereby strengthening the democratic process. This finding aligns with Kalu (2018), who suggests that Nigeria’s political discourse has grown more critical and investigative, driven by public dissatisfaction with governance and socioeconomic conditions.

Ajibade and Okeke (2022) assert that Nigerian political discourse is often polarized, particularly around ethnoreligious lines. They argue that this polarization influences voting behaviour and political affiliations, often leading to entrenched political divisions. According to Ajibade, political discourse in Nigeria frequently emphasizes regional and religious identities, which can obstruct a unified national identity and fuel tension during elections. This viewpoint is corroborated by Bello (2019), who highlights the role of ethnoreligious rhetoric in shaping political allegiance in Nigeria. Bello’s research illustrates how political discourse can sometimes exacerbate sectarian conflicts, affecting national unity and stability.

On the other hand, Abdullahi and Danladi (2021) highlight the positive impact of digital political discourse on raising political awareness among Nigerian youths. They argue that online platforms provide opportunities for young people to learn about political issues, debate policies, and engage with their representatives. This increased awareness, according to Abdullahi, has contributed to a more politically active youth demographic, as demonstrated by the rise of youth-led movements such as the #EndSARS protests in 2020. Abdullahi’s study also found that this political awareness often translates into increased electoral participation and advocacy for governmental transparency.

Eze (2017) examines the impact of “elite capture” in Nigerian political discourse, arguing that elite groups, including influential politicians, business moguls, and celebrities, tend to dominate public discussions. Eze’s analysis shows that this elite influence can skew political discourse by focusing on issues that serve the interests of powerful individuals rather than the general public. However, as argued by Adedoyin (2020), the rise of social media has somewhat mitigated this trend, enabling grassroots movements and voices to gain prominence in national discourse. Adedoyin’s findings indicate that social media has shifted power dynamics within Nigerian political discourse, allowing previously marginalized voices to influence public opinion.

In a different perspective, Adeyemi (2016) argues that political discourse in Nigeria is often hampered by misinformation and propaganda. He claims that misinformation is a significant problem during elections, as political actors frequently use social media to manipulate public opinion. This assertion is supported by Chukwu (2018), who notes that political misinformation in Nigeria can undermine electoral integrity and lead to widespread public mistrust in democratic processes. Chukwu further points out that the lack of regulatory frameworks for digital media contributes to the spread of false information, highlighting the need for policies that promote responsible discourse.

Okonkwo and Salami (2019) examine the impact of political discourse on voter behaviour, arguing that political discussions on social media significantly influence citizens' voting decisions. Their research found that voters are more likely to support candidates who actively engage in online discourse and address pressing social issues. Okonkwo suggests that social media has transformed the way political candidates communicate with the electorate, fostering a more direct and interactive relationship. This view aligns with Alabi (2022), who argues that online political discourse has created a culture of accountability, where politicians are compelled to address public concerns directly and transparently.

Olatunji (2020) explores the role of political discourse in shaping public policy, arguing that citizens’ discussions on social issues often pressure the government to address specific concerns. Olatunji’s study found that online debates about economic reforms, education, and healthcare have sometimes influenced legislative action. For instance, public outcry on social media over unemployment and poor healthcare services has led to debates in the Nigerian National Assembly. Similarly, Adeniran and Ogunleye (2021) posit that political discourse provides an avenue for citizens to demand change, stating that social media platforms serve as a “virtual town hall” where citizens express their needs and grievances.

Another relevant contribution to Nigerian political discourse is the concept of “digital activism,” which, according to Yusuf (2021), has empowered citizens to demand accountability and reforms through coordinated online campaigns. Yusuf’s study on the #NotTooYoungToRun movement shows how digital activism in Nigeria has fostered greater youth participation in politics. Yusuf argues that social media platforms have facilitated impactful discussions that challenge existing political norms and encourage inclusivity, especially in youth representation. This aligns with Olawale (2022), who suggests that online political discourse has not only amplified youth voices but has also created a culture of civic responsibility among young Nigerians.

In contrast, Sanni (2019) argues that political discourse in Nigeria can sometimes lead to “slacktivism,” where citizens express outrage or support for political causes online without taking tangible action. Sanni’s study highlights the limitations of digital political discourse, suggesting that while it raises awareness, it does not always translate to actual change. This view is supported by Edet (2017), who claims that the lack of physical involvement in political activities can undermine the effectiveness of online political discussions. According to Edet, there is a need for more structured engagement that connects online discussions to real-world political actions.

Nwafor (2023) emphasizes the potential of political discourse in promoting social cohesion, arguing that open discussions about Nigeria’s challenges can foster a shared sense of purpose. Nwafor posits that constructive discourse around issues like poverty, education, and health can bridge the gap between different social groups, promoting unity. However, as argued by Umoru and Bello (2021), political discourse must be handled cautiously to prevent divisiveness, especially during election periods when sentiments are high.

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in investigating the impact of social media on political discourse in Nigeria, focusing specifically on Ikeja, Lagos State. The methodology includes the research design, study area, population and sample, sampling technique, data collection instruments, validity and reliability of instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

## 3.1 Research Design

The research adopted a survey design to explore the impact of social media on political discourse. Surveys are a widely used method in social science research for collecting quantitative data from a sample population to make inferences about a larger group (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design was chosen for its ability to gather data from a large number of respondents efficiently and to analyse relationships between variables such as social media use, political engagement, and public opinion.

Surveys are particularly effective for capturing individuals' perceptions and behaviours in relation to social media and political discourse, as they can provide a broad overview of trends and patterns (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). This approach also allows for statistical analysis to test hypotheses and identify significant correlations.

## 3.2 Area of the Study

The study focused on Ikeja, a Local Government Area (LGA) in Lagos State, Nigeria. Ikeja was selected due to its significance as the state capital of Lagos and its diverse population, which provides a representative sample of urban political discourse and social media use (Akinmoladun, 2020). Lagos State, being the most populous state in Nigeria, offers a vibrant context for examining the role of social media in political communication (Fawole, 2019).

## 3.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of residents of Ikeja who are active social media users. According to City Population Statistics (2022), Ikeja has over 470,200 residents. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Selection of respondents were based on certain criteria like availability, knowledge of the subject matter, and willingness to participate in the study. A total of 200 residents of Ikeja LGA was selected for this study.

## 3.3 Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that various demographic groups within Ikeja were adequately represented in the sample. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into distinct subgroups or strata (e.g., age, gender, socio-economic status) and then randomly selecting samples from each stratum (Creswell, 2014). This method ensures that key characteristics of the population are represented and improves the precision of the results. For instance, the sample was stratified based on demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational level, reflecting the diversity of the population in Ikeja. This approach enhances the generalizability of the findings across different segments of the community.

## 3.4 Data Collection Instruments

**3.4.1 Questionnaire**

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. Questionnaires are effective tools for gathering standardized information from a large number of respondents and are well-suited for survey research (Fink, 2017). The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to measure respondents’ social media usage patterns, political engagement, and perceptions of political discourse.

The questionnaire was divided into sections:

**Demographic Information:** Age, gender, education level, employment status, and other relevant characteristics.

**Social Media Usage:** Frequency of use, types of platforms used, and purpose of use.

Political Engagement: Participation in political discussions, sharing political content, and involvement in political activities.

**Perceptions of Political Discourse:** Views on the impact of social media on political communication and public opinion.

## 3.5 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

**Validity**

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, content validity was established through expert review. Subject matter experts in political science and social media were consulted to assess the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire items (Clark & Watson, 2019). Their feedback was used to refine the questions and ensure that they accurately measured the intended constructs.

**Reliability**

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, a statistical measure of internal consistency. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with a sample of 30 respondents from a similar demographic to the target population. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated to verify that the questionnaire items were consistently measuring the same constructs (George & Mallery, 2016). A coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for ensuring the reliability of the instrument.

## 3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a period of four weeks. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to respondents in person and through online platforms to accommodate different preferences and accessibility. The data collection process involved:

**Preparation:** Obtaining necessary permissions from local authorities and community leaders in Ikeja.

**Administration:** Distributing the questionnaires to selected respondents and providing instructions on how to complete them.

**Follow-up:** Ensuring a high response rate by following up with non-respondents and addressing any questions or concerns.

The data collection procedure was designed to minimize biases and ensure the accuracy and completeness of the responses.

## 3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the sample population and their responses to the questionnaire. These statistics provided an overview of social media usage patterns, political engagement, and perceptions of political discourse. The Chi-square tests were employed to analyse the relationships between categorical variables and test hypotheses. The significance level was set at 0.05.

## 3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to the research process:

**Informed Consent:** All respondents were provided with detailed information about the study’s purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Consent was obtained before participation, ensuring that respondents were fully aware of their involvement (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

**Confidentiality:** Respondents' privacy was protected by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. Personal identifiers were removed to ensure confidentiality and prevent the identification of individual respondents (Wiles et al., 2008).

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Integrity:** The research adhered to ethical standards of honesty and integrity in reporting findings, avoiding any form of fabrication or misrepresentation of data (Resnik, 2018).

# CHAPTER FOUR

# DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction
This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from the 130 validated responses. The findings are based on the study’s objectives, focusing on the role and impact of social media on political discourse, public opinion, political participation, and political campaigns in Nigeria, specifically within Ikeja LGA, Lagos State.

## 4.2 Demographic Information

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Category** | **Frequency (n = 130)** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Age | 18-25 | 30 | 23.1 |
| 26-35 | 50 | 38.5 |
| 36-45 | 35 | 26.9 |
| 46 and above | 15 | 11.5 |
| Gender | Male | 70 | 53.8 |
| Female | 60 | 46.2 |
| Educational Level | Secondary | 15 | 11.5 |
| Undergraduate | 45 | 34.6 |
| Graduate | 50 | 38.5 |
| Postgraduate | 20 | 15.4 |
| Frequency of Social Media Use | Daily | 90 | 69.2 |
| Weekly | 25 | 19.2 |
| Occasionally | 10 | 7.7 |
| Rarely | 5 | 3.8 |

The demographic data indicate that the majority of respondents (69.2%) use social media daily, signifying a strong digital presence. The sample includes a slightly higher percentage of male respondents (53.8%) and is primarily composed of young adults (26-35 years), suggesting that this age group may be more inclined to engage in political discourse through social media.

## 4.3 Research Questions Analysis

**Research Question 1:** How are social media platforms used in political discourse in Nigeria?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **A** | **SA** | **D** | **SD** | **Total Agreement (%)** |
| Social media is my primary source of political news. | 60 | 40 | 20 | 10 | 76.9 |
| Social media allows open discussions on political issues. | 50 | 55 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |
| Social media helps me stay updated on political events. | 70 | 40 | 15 | 5 | 84.6 |
| Social media enhances understanding of candidates. | 65 | 45 | 10 | 10 | 84.6 |

Most respondents agree that social media is integral to accessing political information and fostering discussions. The highest agreement (84.6%) suggests that social media effectively keeps users informed of political events, while 80.8% believe it facilitates open discussions, highlighting its role in engaging the public in political discourse.

**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of social media on public opinion in Nigeria?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **A** | **SA** | **D** | **SD** | **Total Agreement (%)** |
| Social media shapes my opinion on political issues. | 55 | 50 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |
| Social media discussions impact my political decisions. | 60 | 45 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |
| Social media encourages me to discuss Nigeria’s politics. | 75 | 40 | 10 | 5 | 88.5 |

Respondents indicate that social media significantly influences their political opinions and decisions, with 80.8% agreeing it affects their viewpoints. The highest agreement (88.5%) reveals that social media motivates individuals to discuss Nigeria's political future, indicating its impact on shaping public opinion.

**Research Question 3: How does social media impact political participation in Nigeria?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **A** | **SA** | **D** | **SD** | **Total Agreement (%)** |
| Social media prompts me to participate in political activities. | 65 | 40 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |
| Social media discussions encourage voting and involvement. | 70 | 35 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |

Approximately 80.8% of respondents acknowledge that social media encourages their political participation, especially in voting and other political events. This suggests social media’s role as an influential motivator in political engagement within the Ikeja community.

**Research Question 4:** What role does social media play in shaping political campaigns and elections in Nigeria?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **A** | **SA** | **D** | **SD** | **Total Agreement (%)** |
| Social media is an effective tool for campaign promotion. | 60 | 50 | 10 | 10 | 84.6 |
| I follow political candidates on social media for information. | 65 | 45 | 10 | 10 | 84.6 |
| Social media affects my voting choice. | 70 | 35 | 15 | 10 | 80.8 |
| Social media significantly impacts election outcomes. | 60 | 50 | 15 | 5 | 84.6 |

A strong consensus (84.6%) indicates that social media is an effective tool for campaign promotion and election influence. Additionally, 80.8% of respondents feel social media affects their voting choices, underscoring its impact on electoral decisions.

## 4.4 Test of Hypothesis

**Hypothesis**
H1: Social media significantly influences public opinion and political participation in Nigeria.

A Chi-square test was conducted to determine the association between social media use and its influence on public opinion and political participation.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Observed Frequency (O)** | **Expected Frequency (E)** | **(O - E)²** | **(O - E)² / E** |
| Agreement (Public Opinion) | 105 | 65 | 1600 |
| Disagreement (Public Opinion) | 25 | 65 | 1600 |
| Agreement (Participation) | 110 | 65 | 2025 |
| Disagreement (Participation) | 20 | 65 | 2025 |
| Total |  |  |  |

Chi-Square Critical Value (df = 1, α = 0.05): 3.84
Chi-Square Calculated Value: 111.54

Decision Rule: Since the calculated Chi-square value (111.54) is greater than the critical value (3.84), we reject the null hypothesis.

Conclusion: The test results suggest a statistically significant influence of social media on public opinion and political participation in Nigeria (p < 0.05). Therefore, H1 is accepted.

## 4.5 Discussion of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that social media is a central channel for political discourse and shaping public opinion in Ikeja LGA, Lagos State. Most respondents consider it their primary source of political news, engaging in discussions that help form their political views. The data suggest that social media’s real-time updates and interactive nature make it a preferred medium for political engagement, significantly impacting users' understanding of political events and influencing their political decisions.

Public opinion and political participation are significantly influenced by social media, with the platform encouraging users to discuss political issues actively and participate in activities such as voting. Respondents also see social media as instrumental in organizing and mobilizing support for political events, confirming its capacity to influence voting behavior and participation in political campaigns.

In terms of campaign impact, respondents largely believe that social media has reshaped how campaigns are conducted, with its influence visible in election outcomes. The platform allows candidates to connect directly with citizens, providing information on their agendas and fostering transparency. Consequently, social media has emerged as a democratizing tool, facilitating access to political information and amplifying citizens' voices in Nigeria’s political process.

Overall, the findings reveal that social media is integral to political discourse in Nigeria, deeply intertwined with public opinion formation, participation, and campaign promotion. The results underline the platform's role as a critical component in modern political engagement in Nigeria.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1. Summary

This study examined the impact of social media on political discourse, public opinion, political participation, and political campaigns in Nigeria, focusing specifically on the residents of Ikeja LGA in Lagos State. The rapid growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp has revolutionized how individuals access and engage in political information. This study aimed to understand how social media facilitates political discourse, shapes public opinion, influences political participation, and impacts political campaigns and elections. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed among residents of Ikeja LGA, with 150 returned, out of which 130 were validated for analysis. The demographic data revealed that a majority of the respondents were young adults (aged 26-35), with more frequent users of social media using it daily. Males comprised slightly more than half of the respondents, and most had a university-level education. The data analysis, using descriptive statistics and a Chi-square test for hypothesis, provided significant insights into how social media functions as a political tool.

The analysis of the first research question revealed that social media is widely used as a primary source of political news and information. Approximately 84.6% of respondents agreed that social media helps them stay updated on political events and enhances their understanding of political candidates and issues. The open and interactive nature of social media was recognized as a key factor in its ability to foster political discourse. Regarding the influence of social media on public opinion, the results showed that a large majority (80.8%) of respondents agreed that social media platforms significantly shape their political views and influence their decisions on political matters. Respondents noted that participating in political discussions on social media platforms, particularly on issues affecting Nigeria, helped them form better-informed opinions. In terms of political participation, the analysis revealed that social media motivates users to engage in political activities. A significant portion of respondents (80.8%) indicated that discussions and campaigns on social media platforms inspired them to participate in voting and other political events. This highlights social media’s role in encouraging political engagement and activism among users.

The study also found that social media plays a crucial role in political campaigns and elections. More than 84% of respondents agreed that social media is an effective tool for campaign promotion and shaping voting choices. Social media's ability to directly connect political candidates with citizens is viewed as an important factor in influencing electoral outcomes. A Chi-square test of the hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between social media use and its influence on public opinion and political participation, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. The study concludes that social media is a powerful medium in Nigeria’s political landscape.

## 5.2. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact social media has on political discourse, public opinion, political participation, and election campaigns in Nigeria. The role of social media as a tool for communication and engagement is undeniable in modern political settings, particularly among the youth in urban areas like Ikeja LGA. Social media platforms have democratized access to information, giving citizens the ability to receive real-time updates on political events, discuss political issues openly, and directly interact with political figures and candidates. First, the study confirms that social media serves as a major source of political news and information for Nigerians, especially for younger, digitally active users. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have enabled users to engage in discussions, challenge political ideas, and contribute to the broader political discourse in ways that were previously impossible through traditional media. The convenience, speed, and accessibility of social media make it an indispensable tool for political awareness and education. Second, the influence of social media on public opinion is significant. The findings suggest that citizens rely on discussions and information shared on social media to form their political opinions. This process is often driven by exposure to different viewpoints and direct engagement with political debates and campaigns. However, the study also raises concerns about the potential for misinformation and bias, as social media can sometimes present unverified or skewed information, which may mislead users in forming opinions. Third, social media’s role in encouraging political participation is notable. The results indicate that individuals are more likely to participate in political activities such as voting, attending rallies, or supporting political movements due to the influence of social media campaigns. Social media fosters a sense of community among politically active users, motivating them to act on their political beliefs and engage in the democratic process. Finally, the study concludes that social media has reshaped political campaigns and elections in Nigeria. It has provided candidates with a direct platform to communicate with voters, share their manifestos, and respond to public concerns. Social media has also given political campaigns a wider reach, allowing candidates to target specific demographics effectively. This suggests that social media will continue to play a critical role in future Nigerian elections and political campaigns. This study concludes that social media is an influential and dynamic force in Nigeria’s political landscape, significantly impacting how citizens engage with politics, form opinions, participate in democratic processes, and interact with political leaders.

## 5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the positive impact of social media on political discourse and participation in Nigeria:

**Promote Digital Literacy**

The government, NGOs, and educational institutions should work to promote digital literacy among citizens. This will help people critically evaluate the political information they receive on social media and discern credible sources from misinformation or propaganda. Educating citizens on how to engage responsibly with political content will improve the quality of discourse and reduce the spread of false information.

**Encourage Political Leaders to Leverage Social Media for Transparency**

Political leaders and candidates should use social media as a tool for transparency and accountability. By engaging with citizens directly, providing clear and accurate information about their policies, and responding to public concerns, leaders can build trust and improve political participation. Social media should be used to foster open dialogue between leaders and citizens rather than as a platform for disinformation.

**Implement Policies to Combat Misinformation**

Social media platforms and regulatory bodies should work together to implement policies that address the spread of misinformation and hate speech during political campaigns. This could include stricter content moderation, fact-checking services, and penalties for individuals or groups that disseminate false information. Ensuring that political discussions on social media are based on accurate and verified information will enhance the quality of public opinion formation.

**Use Social Media for Voter Education**

Social media can be a powerful tool for voter education. The government and civil society organizations should harness social media platforms to provide voters with essential information about election processes, candidates, and their manifestos. This will enable citizens to make informed decisions during elections and foster greater political participation.

**Facilitate Inclusive Political Participation**

Efforts should be made to ensure that social media use in political discourse is inclusive and representative of all demographic groups. This includes making sure that marginalized communities, such as women, the elderly, and rural populations, have access to social media platforms and are empowered to participate in political discussions. Bridging the digital divide will ensure that all voices are heard in Nigeria's political landscape.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Section A: Demographics**

Age:

 18-25

 26-35

 36-45

 46 and above

**Gender:**

 Male

 Female

 Other

**Educational Level:**

 Secondary

 Undergraduate

 Graduate

 Postgraduate

Frequency of Social Media Use:

Daily

Weekly

Occasionally

Rarely

**Section B: Social Media and Political Discourse in Nigeria**

**Please select one of the following for each statement:**

A – Agree

SA – Strongly Agree

D – Disagree

SD – Strongly Disagree

Social media platforms are my primary source of political news.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Social media allows for more open and honest discussions about political issues.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Social media helps me learn about political events happening in real time.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Social media has contributed to a better understanding of political candidates and their agendas.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Section C: Influence of Social Media on Public Opinion and Participation

I rely on social media to form my opinion on political matters.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Political discussions on social media platforms influence my decisions on political issues.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

I am more likely to participate in political activities (e.g., voting, attending rallies) because of social media influence.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Social media motivates me to participate in conversations about Nigeria’s political future.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Section D: Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns and Elections

Social media is an effective tool for political campaigns and candidate promotion.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

I follow political candidates on social media to learn more about their plans and positions.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

Social media ads and posts from political candidates affect my voting choice.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐

I believe social media plays a significant role in influencing election outcomes in Nigeria.

 A ☐ SA ☐ D ☐ SD ☐