

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING
POLITICAL ATTITUDE AMONG FIRST-TIME VOTERS
IN NIGERIA**

BY

AMEDU BLESSING OSEMUDIAMEN

ART 2100890

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
MASS COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF
BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS
(B.A HONS.) DEGREE IN MASS COMMUNICATION**

OCTOBER, 2025

DECLARATION

This project work is based on a study conducted by me **AMEDU BLESSING OSEMUDIAMEN** in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin. All ideas and views are products of my personal research, and, where the views of others have been used and expressed, they were duly acknowledged.

AMEDU BLESSING OSEMUDIAMEN

ART 2100890

CERTIFICATION

This research was carried out by **AMEDU BLESSING OSEMUDIAMEN** of the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

Dr. Mrs. Grace Akintaro
Project Supervisor

Date

Dr. Daniel Ekhareafo
Head of Department

Date

STUDENT'S THESIS

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, Mr Amedu and my Family who supported me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my heart felt gratitude and praise to the Almighty God, the fountain of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. I humbly acknowledge His infinite mercies and loving-kindness that have sustained me throughout this academic journey. His divine presence has been my guiding light, source of strength, and inspiration, enabling me to overcome challenges and achieve this milestone.

My profound gratitude goes to my beloved father, Mr. Amedu, the architect of my future, who has been a constant source of support, guidance, and encouragement. Your paternal love, wisdom, and sacrifices have shaped me into the person I am today. Your unwavering faith in me has been a driving force behind my pursuit of excellence. I am forever indebted to you for the values of hard work, resilience, and determination that you've instilled in me.

To my family, the pillars of my strength, I express my heartfelt appreciation for their unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers. Your contributions to my success are immeasurable, and I am grateful for the love, care, and sacrifices you've made for me. Your collective efforts have been a source of motivation, and I celebrate the bond we share.

I acknowledge the immense blessings, support, and love I've received from all quarters, and I pray that God continues to bless and reward you all abundantly. May this achievement be a testament to your love, support, and prayers, and may it inspire future generations to strive for excellence.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the influence of social media in shaping political attitude among first-time voters in Nigeria, focusing on the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria. Social media has become a crucial factor in modern electoral processes, and understanding its impact is essential for democratic consolidation. The study aims to examine the social media platforms predominantly used during elections, understand social media's influence on voters' perception, and identify the challenges associated with the use of social media in the democratic process. The study surveyed respondents in Karu Community, FCT Abuja, gathering data on their social media usage, political engagement, and perceptions. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are the predominant platforms used by voters. Social media played a pivotal role in shaping voters' perceptions and influencing electoral outcomes. It is a key source of political information, but also spreads misinformation and hate speech. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that social media influences their views on political candidates. Misinformation is the top challenge, followed by lack of credible sources and perceived bias.

The study highlights social media's significant role in modern electoral processes, shaping voter perceptions and influencing outcomes. While it provides a conduit for politicians to reach voters, it also poses challenges like misinformation and hate speech. Electoral stakeholders and policymakers should harness social media's potential while mitigating its challenges. Regulations can ensure social media platforms are used responsibly and ethically during electoral processes, promoting a more informed and engaged citizenry essential for democratic consolidation in Nigeria and other emerging democracies.

Keywords: Social Media, Electoral Processes, Voter's Perception, National Assembly Elections.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The political systems in Nigeria has fully mobilised the current use of social media for it's effectiveness and engagement especially among youths.This is as a result of the country's youth population and increasing internet usage in our generation today. A study by Smith (2011) proves that social media has a significant influence on the political attitudes and behaviour among young people.

In the 2011 general elections, social media has been an effective tool in Nigeria politics inspired by the election of Barack Obama by the Facebook generation since 2008. A study by Femos (2015), a UK based market research firm, revealed that twitter was ten times more active during the 2015 election period in Nigeria than in normal times. Social media users tweeted over 12.4 million tweets about the elections over the period, and 216,000 Facebook users interacted with content on popular public pages related to the elections.

Many studies have explored the emerging impact of social media influencers on both political marketing and political public relations (Gomez et al., 2018; Li and Feng, 2022; Nwala and Uwalaka, 2022; Ohme, 2019; Uwalaka, 2023 aUwalaka, , 2023b. A few others have however examined the use of influencers to endorse dictators or for malign information influence (Arnesson, 2022a;Wagnsson, 2022). ...

They conclude that while perceived simplification of politics may fuel political cynicism, that it also stimulates youths' interest in politics. Consequently, social media platforms have been observed to play superior role in the media diet of digital native voters (Ohme, 2019). Social media platforms also help online opinion leaders or influencers to stir the zeal of digital native voters and help foster their campaign participation. This age cohort is the most politically active in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it can be statically proven that social media does play a role in shaping the attitude, perception and behavioural pattern of first time voters in Nigeria political system. The first time voters which are equally regarded as youths tends to be more politically informed through the use of social media or internet in general Ohme (2019). This age cohort are most likely to be active online hence the possibility to influence their perception of politics. At the same time, the engagement of novice voters in political activities is enhanced through social networking platforms (Ohme, 2019). The Internet, particularly in the setting of online political conversations, has been shown to have a strong influence in shaping the perception and idea of voting among young voters.

Research has shown that exposure to media coverage of proximal and distal terror attacks relates to post attack post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in youth (Comer and Kendall, 2007). Furthermore, the prominence of social media and its influence in shaping the political attitude of voters is especially apparent in young individuals (Ohme, 2019).

Social media thus play the most relevant role as sources of information for many adolescents and young adults (Ohme, 2019).

In Summary, the unique nature of social media, characterized by its immediacy, reach, and interactivity, has implications for voter behaviour, political communication, and the overall electoral process. Its influence on the political landscape has been profound, shaping the perceptions and choices of voters, candidates, and entire nations. The perception of social media's impact on elections is a double-edged sword. It simultaneously empowers and challenges the democratic process. It offers unprecedented opportunities for engagement, information dissemination, and mobilization, yet it also poses threats in the form of misinformation, polarization, and foreign interference (Goddy & Adeyefa 2023). With a focus on the just concluded 2023 general Elections, it is crucial to examine the intricate interplay between social media, politics, and public perception within Nigeria using Karu Community in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) as an area of study for this research.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The usage of social media is one of the most dominant forms of communication between politicians and the electorate, and it is massively and strategically exploited by the politicians across the globe to achieve their targeted goals as regard projecting positive images, retaining offices, and maintaining relationships with their publics. Social media has been useful in aiding exchange of information between the political candidates and

electorate; it helps citizens to be informed and influence their political choices, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour towards certain political candidates (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald & Chinedum, 2017).

Incidentally, in Nigeria, the everyday use of social media by politicians, and the manner in which the user-citizen interacts with the social network sites/pages of politicians has received rather less attention. Essentially, politicians expect the communication relationship to be positive and of benefit to them, thus, political gladiators of all shades of opinions, ideologies, intents and goals use the media with the belief that political communications through them might exert pressure or have influence on people's perception and behaviours.

This study is to examine the use of social media as a tool and instrument used in convincing youths to participate in elections vis-à-vis whether or not social media is actually instrumental in projecting a positive image on first time voters. This study intends to investigate the effectiveness of the use of social media as a political platform in Nigeria, and how the increasing advantages of social media can be harnessed and applied in making the electorate to possess their political sovereignty, by transparently voting-in and voting-out political office without undue interference or hindrance with regards to the 2023 general elections.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to assess the perception of social media influence on 2023 National Assembly Elections

1. To examine the Social Media platform(s) that is predominantly used by first- time voters in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria
2. To assess the influence of social media platforms on voter perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria
3. To identify the challenges associated with the use of social media in electoral processes in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives, this study will address the following research questions:

1. Which social media platforms is predominantly utilized by citizens during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria?
2. How do social media platforms influence the perception of voters during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria?
3. What challenges do individuals encounter when utilizing social media for political information within the context of electoral processes in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The research enriches academic fields such as political science, communication studies, and social media studies by adding to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the role of social media in shaping political attitudes in first time voters particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. It contributes to media and information literacy efforts in Nigeria by shedding light on citizens' ability to critically evaluate political information on social media platforms. This research contributes to the understanding of the complex relationships between social media use, political attitudes, and behaviors, particularly in the context of Nigeria's democratic development. It advances knowledge on the role of digital technologies in shaping political engagement and participation among young citizens.

The study have significant implications for industry professionals, particularly those involved in political communication, campaign management, and voter engagement. By understanding how social media shapes political attitudes and behaviors among young Nigerians, industry professionals can develop more effective strategies for reaching and engaging with this demographic. For instance, political consultants and campaign managers can use the study's findings to inform their social media strategies, tailoring their messaging and outreach efforts to resonate with young voters. This can help to increase the effectiveness of their campaigns and improve their ability to connect with this critical demographic.

Overall, the study's findings can provide valuable insights for industry professionals looking to understand and engage with young voters in Nigeria, and can help to inform the development of more effective strategies for promoting political engagement and participation among this demographic.

In Nigeria society, this research has implications for promoting informed citizenship, critical thinking, and democratic participation among young Nigerians. By shedding light on the ways in which social media shapes political attitudes and behaviors, the study can help to identify opportunities for promoting more inclusive, informed, and engaged citizenship. The study contributes to the development of theories on social media, politics, and democracy, providing insights into the complex dynamics of digital technologies and their impact on political attitudes and behaviors. The research can help to refine existing theories and models, and inform the development of new frameworks for understanding the relationships between social media, politics, and democracy.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the development of theories on social media, politics and democracy providing insights to the complex dynamics of digital technologies and their impact on political attitudes and behaviours. This research can help to refine the existing theories and models and inform the development of new frameworks for understanding the relationship between social media, politics and democracy. The study findings can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which digital technologies are reconfiguring the relationships between citizens, politics and the state. By

examining the impact of social media on political attitude and behaviours, the research can provide insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of social media use in the context of democratic participation.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study encompasses an in-depth investigation on the influence of social media in shaping political attitudes among first-time voters in Nigeria within the context of Karu community in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). Karu is a Local Government Area in Nasarawa State, central Nigeria. It is close in proximity to the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. It has an area of 2,640 km². Karu local government has its headquarters in New Karu town. It was originally built to house the capital's civil servants and lower income families, but had no running water or good sanitation system. Karu has grown in population beyond its original planned capacity. To Ensure Administrative convenience and bring government closer to the grass root people, Karshi Development Area was created with its administrative secretariat at Uke.

This study will examine the key role that the media has played in the aspects of political candidates in passing their ideas and portraying their image to voters. It will explore how this first time voters are influenced and how these messages are perceived by them. Furthermore, exploring their attitude towards exercising their political sovereignty and their free will to vote their desired candidates. This study will access and explore some of the dangers of social media on youth political participation, effects and consequences.

Such as disinformation and fake news, decreased critical thinking, lack of transparency and accountability, Unrealistic expectations and disillusionment, harrassment and bullying. According to Abdelsalam M. Alodat, Lamis F. Al-Qora'n, and Muwafaq Abu Hamoud, social media has the potential to contribute to a division of public dicourse.

In view of this, the role of social media in youth political participation will be discussed as the advent of internet tends to be utilised in our world especially by people of this particular age range. Some of this roles which includes the increase in political engagement. Lee (2020) argued that social media reduces the barrier to political participation by facilitating dialogue between people who tend to share same beliefs. It can also be seen that it provides a political platform for youth to express their own opinions, George and Linder (2019). Enhancing political literacy Kahne and Bowyer (2019). Facilitating political activities and activism amongst youths Valenzuela (2013).

1.7 Operational Definition of Significant Terms

Below are some definitions of key terms relevant to the study

1. Influence: Refers to the power someone or something has to affect the way someone thinks or behaves, or the way something works or develops.
2. Social media: refers to websites and software programs used for social networking, encompassing platforms like Facebook and Instagram.
3. Attitudes: Refers to the way you think and feel about someone or something, or the way you behave towards them.

4. Voter: A voter is a person who has the right to participate in an election by an elector
5. Participation: Means the act of taking part in an activity or event.
6. Election: An election is a democratic procedure through which one or more persons are chosen as executives or representatives in certain bodies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction to the theme, rational and objective of the study has been covered in chapter one. The present chapter is devoted to review of related research. As a result of the interdisciplinary nature of the study, encompassing the influence of social media on the political attitudes and behaviour among first time voters in Nigeria (A study of Nigeria politics among Youths). The literature review was diversified in it's content and format

- i Conceptual Literature Review
- ii Empirical Review
- iii Theoretical Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

In recent years, the intersection of social media and politics has become a significant area of academic inquiry and societal concern. This conceptual review seeks to delve into the intricate relationship between social media and the popular perception of social media's role in elections, with a specific focus on the Nigerian context. It aims to elucidate key concepts, theories, and insights that underpin this evolving dynamics

2.2.1 Concept of Social Media

Social media is the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation. Often the development of media is divided into two different ages, the broadcast age and the interactive age. In the broadcast age, media were almost exclusively centralized where one entity such as a radio or television station, newspaper company, or a movie production studio distributed messages to many people.

Feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed, and impersonal. Mediated communication between individuals typically happened on a much smaller level, usually via personal letters, telephone calls, or sometimes on a slightly larger scale through means such as photocopied family newsletters. With the rise of digital and mobile technologies, interaction on a large scale became easier for individuals than ever before; and as such, a new media age was born where interactivity was placed at the center of new media functions. One individual could now speak to many and there is a possibility of instant feedback possibility. Where citizens and consumers used to have limited and somewhat muted voices but now they could share their opinions with many. The low cost and accessibility of new technology also allowed more options for media consumption than ever before, and so instead of only a few news outlets, individuals now have the ability to seek information from several sources and to dialogue with others via message forums about the information posted.

Social media is seen as "new media" because it has sped up dialogues and increased engagement in general. According to Sherman (2000), Danah and Ellison (2008) the phrase "social media" was first used in 2007. Although the phrase is frequently used to refer to the same thing with notions like new media and social networking sites, the two ideas are essentially distinct. It is essential to think about what social networking sites are in order to contextualise the idea of social media. Social networking sites, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008), are web-based services that provide users with the ability to create a public

or semi-public profile within a circumscribed system, establish a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and browse and navigate both their list of connections and those made by other users." According to Chijioke (2013) as cited in Ufuophu-Biri, (2020), "social media are simply internet-based interactive platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis," which is in line with Boyed and Ellison's definition. He continued by pointing out that they are online platforms for democratic and participatory communication that permit people to share information and documents without restriction. According to Udoka (2015), social media are computer-mediated tools that enable users to build, share, or exchange knowledge, concepts, images, and videos in online communities and networks. Additionally, social media platforms are highly participatory and allow for the sharing, co-creation, discussion, and modification of user-generated material are created using mobile and web-based technology. We can define social media using the concept offered by Boyd, Ellison, and Udoka that social media provides channels through which people can communicate critical information to friends.

As a result, social media is part of information and communication technologies. Similar to this, Okoro and Kenneth (2013) claim that social media is an interactive form of web-based media which enables users to express themselves, communicate with friends, exchange private information, and post their own opinions online. Undoubtedly, the widespread use of these online tools promotes democracy by giving people greater

opportunities to participate actively in politics. According to this, voters are becoming message makers rather than merely passive consumers of digital messaging. The characteristics, common forms, and common functions of social media are explored here (Manning, 2014). Social media has taken media democratic function further by allowing both synchronous and asynchronous interactions and serving as platform for collective action. By serving as a two-way communication route, social media allows political organisations and aspirants to communicate and connect. It is, therefore, not uncommon these days for political aspirants to maintain profiles on social network sites and other mobile social media like Twitter (Mustapha, Gbonegun & Mustapha, 2016). Social media is the most popular, quickest, and easiest way for people to communicate online and share opinions and information regarding both social and political issues. Looking ahead, it's evident that social media has become a significant player in Nigeria's political discussions. As broadband and smartphone usage continue to expand, its impact is poised to intensify. Social media's rapid information dissemination and global audience engagement make it a potent tool for politicians to efficiently communicate their messages directly to voters. Moreover, it offers a platform for candidates to engage directly with supporters, promptly addressing questions or concerns in real-time (Nwokoma, 2023). News and diverse content rapidly circulate across social media networks, carrying significant implications, as highlighted by Premium Times in 2022. The governance of social media is notably decentralized, offering an expansive and unrestricted platform for

the exchange of ideas and perspectives (Premium Times, 2022). In this open space, politicians, parties, and activists competitively engage to influence public opinion through leveraging social media channels (Premium Times, 2022). The emergence of social media has facilitated the interaction of activists, leakers, and opposition politicians with the public, providing a platform that circumvents restrictions imposed by the ruling party (Premium Times, 2022). In the contemporary era of social media, concealing potentially detrimental information becomes exceedingly challenging, as asserted by Premium Times (2022). The use of social media for political purposes was first experimented in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) examined the drawbacks and lessons learned from the experimental deployment of online platforms during the elections. They found evidence suggesting that online media were used to attack perceived political opponents, spread false rumours, fake news, hate speeches, and inciting messages that contributed to tension and violence recorded before, during, and after the elections. Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2014) also found that social media had a significant positive influence on citizens' mobilization and participation in the 2011 general elections. They concluded that online platforms contributed to the success of the 2011 general elections, which was adjudged the freest and fairest in Nigeria since the country returned to democracy in 1999. Exploratory research conducted in Nigeria during the 2015 elections underscored the significant role of social media in influencing the shift of young voters' support away from the Federal Government, which was then in power (Premium Times, 2022). Notably, by the 2019

Presidential election, social media had evolved, with a discernible trend of older individuals increasingly turning to these platforms for political information and debates, marking a departure from the previous dominance by millennials and young adults (Premium Times, 2022). The moral ramifications of social media use in politics are evident, notable for plunging political and public discourse to new depths (Premium Times, 2022). This, according to Akpore (2023), presents the social media as “a mixed bag”. The 2023 general elections may be remembered as a significant event where technology played a role, alongside various polls, real or otherwise, that inundated social media with updates from across the country (Akpore, 2023). However, not all information posted on social media can be independently verified. Since social media is an open platform with no clear rules and no government regulation, anyone can publish content there (Akpore, 2023).

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram, among others, will likely need to address why half-truths and lies predominated in the final weeks before the 2023 general elections. Depending on the subject they were hired to handle and whose side they were on, influencers were quite busy trying to weave narratives to either shape or distort opinions. Although social media did not spare anyone, some influencers even transformed into spin doctors, spouting and spinning stories as the situation demanded (Akpore, 2023). In the days leading up to the general elections, a viral message was spread via social media that the Apex Bank will shut down all electronic

banking networks (Azeez, 2023). This was purportedly to prevent vote buying through bank transfers, even disabling bank apps and the Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD). Other sources released information claiming to be from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), stating that voters without Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) could cast ballots, allowing them to approach election officials with mere shady identifications, as the Bimodal Voter Accreditations System (BVAS) would verify them. INEC swiftly refuted this claim, but social media presented a different narrative. Numerous falsehoods were disseminated by voices of individuals and well-known figures concealed behind technology and artificial intelligence (Akpore, 2023). While acknowledging the drawbacks of social media, it's essential to highlight the positive aspects that emerge. Ekwueme and Folarin (2018) found out that the social media played key roles in mobilising electorates, creating the needed awareness on political happenings and engendering a high level of citizens' participation in the 2015 electioneering process in Nigeria, although they were also used to promote hate messages, negative memes and smear opposition political parties/candidates. This was also affirmed by Apuke and Appollos (2017) the effectiveness of technology thus lies in its deployment for the right reasons; however, when used as a tool for misinformation, it can lead to mischief. The challenge lies in the ability of individuals to decipher the information accurately without falling prey to misinformation (Akpore, 2023).

Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping political landscapes in Nigeria. The evolution of social media, as evidenced from the 2015 to the 2019 and 2023 elections, illustrates its increasing influence on diverse age groups. However, this rise of social media in politics is accompanied by ethical concerns, with the potential for misinformation, manipulation, and the dissemination of unverified information, as highlighted by Akpore (2023). Despite the drawbacks, the positive aspect of social media in mobilizing citizens and influencing political change is acknowledged. The 2023 general elections, marked by rumours and misinformation, underscore the challenges associated with social media's unregulated nature. The multi-stakeholder approach and ethical communication principles are advocated for addressing the negative consequences of dishonest political communication. Social media, while a powerful tool, demands careful regulation and ethical considerations to ensure its positive contributions outweigh its potential harms in the political context in Nigeria.

2.2.2 History of Social Media

The roots of social media stretch far deeper than we might imagine. Although it seems like a new trend, sites like Facebook are the natural outcome of many centuries of social media development (Drew, 2013). There are ongoing debates on whether e-mail could be considered a part of social media. The predominant reasons why e-mail is not considered a social medium are because E-mail is a distribution mechanism whereas social media is a collective mechanism and Mass communication is different from mass

collaboration. But e-mail certainly qualifies if we go by the simple definition that “social media is conversations that happen online”. Though the debate goes on, we cannot ignore the fact that the introduction of e-mail marked the beginning to the much more collaborative social media years later (Sajithra & Pathil 2013). The advent of various social media platforms such as Instagram and twitter has marked significant milestone in social media history. This various platforms focused on the networking of ideas while others such e.g twitter can be seen to share content, microblogging and visual discovery. The evolution of social media continues with emerging trends like artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality and several concerns relating to privacy and security.

In the 1990s, the world was evolving rapidly to the connected forefront. Personal computers had evolved in popularity in developed nations, and people started realising the potential that a connected world may have. Hence rose the Internet Relay Chats(IRC)s in 1988 which became popular in 1990. This was a rudimentary form of text messaging and instant communication, and not until 1997 did we see the first full-blown social medium come into being (digit.in, 2019).Six Degrees was an online platform that allowed users to create their own profiles and ‘friend’ others on it. This was, in the true sense, a precursor of greater days for social media, and the fact that Six Degrees also allowed users to add unregistered people as friends too showed the global impact that social media would eventually have all across the world. The platform was named after the ‘Six Degrees of Separation’ theory. Originally proposed back in 1929 by Frigyes Karinthy in

light of a shrinking world, the theory suggested that everyone in this world is connected and interconnected by no more than six degrees, or individuals, in between. With the advent of social media, the theory took even more profound a meaning, and the world shrunk further (digit.in, 2019). After the success of IRC, many personal websites, discussion groups and chat groups also became popular. At the beginning of the 90s, internet access was not completely accessible to the public. This situation changed when private Internet service Providers (ISPs) began to start operations in the United States around 1994 or 1995. This gave millions of home users the chance to experience it. The other reason for the initial euphoria was the fact that the content was absolutely free other than the data usage paid to the internet companies. Early internet users were extremely outspoken and opinionated by today's standards. People were thrilled at the possibility of sharing their opinions and often went overboard in their expressions. The first online social media etiquette standards were proposed, and called netiquette, as a control mechanism. Internet forums grew in popularity by the late 90s and as the primary platform for topical discussions (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). The modern blog evolved from the online diary. Justin Hall, who began personal blogging in 1994 is generally recognized as one of the earliest bloggers.

2.3 Role of Social Media in Elections in Nigeria

Social media has become an essential part in the aspect of Nigerian politics, with politicians, citizens, and activists leveraging platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and

WhatsApp to shape public discourse and influence political outcomes. According to scholars like Oladapo Oyewusi and Ademola Ajuwon, social media has increased political engagement among Nigerians, particularly among young people. For instance, during the 2015 presidential election, social media played a significant role in mobilizing support for candidates, with politicians like Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan using platforms to reach voters and promote their agendas. However, social media has also been criticized for spreading misinformation and disinformation (Oludayo Tade and Ayoola Akanbi). False information can spread rapidly on social media, influencing public opinion and potentially harming political discourse. For example, during the 2019 presidential election, fake news stories about candidates and their parties spread widely on social media, potentially influencing voters' perceptions. Social media has also been used to mobilize support for social justice causes in Nigeria. (Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebani). social media has enabled activists to organize and advocate for change, particularly in cases like the #EndSARS movement, which aimed to end police brutality and corruption.

Moreover, social media has been used by politicians to shape public opinion and influence political outcomes. As noted by scholars like Rotimi Suberu and Darren Kew, politicians have used social media to promote their agendas, respond to critics, and engage with citizens. In terms of challenges, social media regulation has been a contentious issue in Nigeria. Therefore regulating social media while balancing free speech and preventing the spread of harmful content is a complex challenge that requires careful consideration

(Olu Ogundimu and Lanre Amodu). The advent of social media has brought about a profound transformation in communication on various fronts. It's participatory, interactive, and cost-effective nature has democratized mass communication, aligning with Marshal McLuhan's prophetic vision of a "global village," where worldwide events are instantaneously and universally recognized. Social media's potential is harnessed not only by individuals but also by organizations and nations across the globe, rallying millions to support their causes. It has evolved into a potent instrument for engaging and inspiring citizens to actively participate in political discourse and democratic processes. This resonates with Okoro and Dirim's (2009) assertion that media facilitates free participation in discussions concerning the common good. The rise of social media has given politicians access to their supporters, the ability to assess their political acceptance and significance, and even the ability to heat up politics in order to realise their political goals or ideologies (Mamman, 2019). Social media is heavily utilised by Nigerian politicians, particularly during election and campaign seasons.

The use of social media in elections appears to be considerably altering traditional electioneering practices. This rapidly spreading phenomenon is based on the rapidly expanding access to the Internet and the rising availability of Internet-ready smart phones and other communication devices that are swiftly permeating most civilizations. This access allows individuals to exchange information with their peers at the same time, which spreads information faster than traditional media channels could. The use of social media

platforms by Nigerian voters, particularly the youth, who are gradually becoming highly energetic and tech-savvy, is the culmination of the increasing penetration of internet and telephone technologies. Nigerian politicians had no choice but to use the media platform via which they could be easily contacted in order to communicate with this target population (Alakali, Akpan, and Tarnongo, 2013).

Nigeria experimented the use of this technology for political discourse during the 2011 general elections. The platform gave voice to many Nigerian politicians and electorates alike to make their voice heard in the electoral process. Regardless of the successes, many lapses were observed and many lessons abound for future elections in the country (Musa, 2018). According to Ezeah and Gever (2015), both the electorate and the politicians have recognized the enormous opportunity social media provides in terms of exposing voters to the political messaging of the politicians as well as receiving feedback from the public on the politicians. The usage of social media has simplified, demystified, and democratized communication between politicians and voters. A study on social media use for expression of political views in Nigeria by Ugwuanyi, Olijio, and Gever (2019) found that many voters in Nigeria used social media to communicate with politicians and among themselves for electioneering purposes during the 2019 general election in Nigeria. Scholars including Adegbola and Gearhart (2019), Assibong and Oshanisi (2018), Ayeni and Esan (2018), and Kahnea and Middaugh (2012) found that politicians and the electorate are sufficiently exposed to political communication and societal matters.

In Nigeria, the surge in social media's role in shaping elections underscores a profound shift in how citizens perceive and engage with the electoral process. With a staggering 32.9 million active social media users, according to Statista, the country's political discourse and electoral processes have been significantly impacted. The 2015 general elections in Nigeria may have been the first time that digital tools really came to the fore. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) the then opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) launched 'The Broom' app, a social media platform for its supporters, and took advantage of the digital space that was largely unoccupied and uncontrolled by the ruling party. Before these pivotal elections, many Nigerians converged on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to voice their frustrations against government policies and actions, as highlighted by Omojua (2015).

The collective pressure exerted by diverse social media users across Nigeria played a significant role in reshaping the country's political landscape at that critical juncture. Indeed, social media users harnessed their online presence to organize protests, such as the "Enough Is Enough" movement in April 2010. This mobilization led to the elevation of then-Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to Acting President, subsequently triggering the "doctrine of necessity" that prompted the National Assembly to endorse his status as Acting President (Omojua, 2015). On the positive side, social media has been a catalyst for transforming public discourse, revolutionizing political campaigns, fostering citizen engagement, and revitalizing the democratic process. However, its unregulated nature

presents significant challenges, as it creates fertile ground for the proliferation of misinformation and the rapid dissemination of fake news. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria may be etched in memory for their unique relationship with technology.

Social media platforms were inundated with various surveys and reports, offering a dynamic yet occasionally chaotic view of the political landscape. Nonetheless, the absence of stringent rules and oversight on these platforms has raised concerns about the unchecked spread of unverified information, exacerbating the problem of fake news. The two leading political parties All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) developed a noticeable and expanding internet presence in 2019, with coordinated disinformation tactics designed to sway public opinion and create clear distinctions between party members and political rivals. Experts projected that social media influence would play out in the 2023 elections since it makes spreading misinformation easier. Cross-posting on social networking sites, a function that makes it simpler to be heard or seen on several platforms at once, is another threat. This makes it possible for one to be seen and to reach multiple audiences at once (Garba, 2023). In the previous elections, TikTok had not gained currency in Nigeria, and Twitter Spaces had not yet been introduced. Thus, experts predicted their role in the elections as they make disinformation easier to spread. This is especially true of TikTok, which has gained popularity during the 2023 election campaign despite having a modest user base (Garba, 2023). TikTok is now being used by politicians and their social media consultants to attract new audiences.

As Nigeria, embarks on its digital transformation, the significance of social media in shaping electoral outcomes and public sentiment has surged to the forefront. Social media in Nigeria possesses the potential to serve as both a catalyst for democracy and a potential barrier to authoritarianism. It offers political actors a platform for continuous engagement with the electorate, bridging the gap between elections and fostering direct, unmediated communication between leaders and the people. This phenomenon revitalizes the political environment. However, its ability to influence and predict voting behavior is a complex interplay of limitations and considerable impact. While it may not singularly determine election results, it undeniably shapes public discourse, influences perceptions, and contributes to the vibrancy of democracy (Nwokoma, 2023). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, and others may need to account for the prevalence of half-truths and falsehoods in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections (Akpore, 2023). Influencers, depending on the subjects they were engaged to handle and the sides they favoured, were actively shaping narratives to either shape or distort public opinions (Akpore, 2023). While social media spared no one, certain influencers assumed the role of spin doctors, adeptly articulating and manipulating stories to fit the demands of the situation (Akpore, 2023).

In the context of Nigeria, particularly on Twitter, social media has played a significant role in disseminating credible election-related news but has concurrently been a major source of disinformation and misinformation (Tukur, 2023). Leading up to the

2023 general/national assembly elections, a viral broadcast message on social media claimed that the Apex bank of Nigeria, CBN, would shut down all electronic banking networks to prevent vote buying (Azeez, 2023). Furthermore, other sources disseminated information falsely attributed to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), asserting that voters without Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) could still cast ballots by approaching election officials, claiming that the Bimodal Voter Accreditations System (BVAS) would verify them merely by presenting questionable identifications. INEC promptly refuted this claim, clarifying that only individuals with PVCs were eligible to vote. There were far too many lies disseminated by voices of persons and well-known figures concealed behind technology and artificial intelligence (Akpore, 2023). The competitive nature of social media, as highlighted by Premium Times (2022), observed numerous political contenders vying for the attention of the same audience.

This intense competition, coupled with innovative online crowdsourcing, appears to have played a role in influencing the outcomes of the 2023 elections. While social media undeniably plays a substantial role in shaping political narratives and information dissemination, its influence on elections carries a dual nature. Ethical considerations, the prevalence of unverified information, and the active role of influencers contribute to a complex landscape, emphasizing the need for scrutiny and regulation to ensure the integrity of electoral processes.

2.4 Challenges faced by Voters.

Nigeria meets all the criteria of vulnerability to social media abuse identified by the "Kofi Annan" Commission, on Electoral Integrity in the Digital Age. This encompasses the issues of low trust in institutions, deep ethnic, religious and regional cleavages, and highly partisan media. Nigeria also has a history of election-related violence that puts the nation on tenterhooks every five years. Some of the problems encountered include;

1. Disinformation:

Disinformation is driving dissent and threatening national cohesion,” confirmed Idayant Hassan, the director of the Centre for Democracy Development (CDD), West Africa, who explained how social media had exacerbated traditional Nigerian identity politics. Professor Kuna, INEC’s Chief Technical Officer, explained that thanks to the many improvements in the electoral process over the past decade, elections in Nigeria have become much harder to rig. As a result, candidates and parties have to find new ways of influencing the results and manipulating public opinion via social media (as well as traditional vote-buying). “We have, to a large extent, fixed the integrity of the process, but we cannot fix the lack of integrity of some people”, Prof. Kuna concluded. Rotimi Oyekanmi, the Chief Press Secretary at INEC, conceded that social media had helped generate renewed interest in elections, “but it is a problem that more Nigerians look for electoral results on social media than from INEC.” Oyekanmi explained that INEC has over 2 million followers on Twitter and its strategy is to counter disinformation with factual

information on its platforms. But with over 250 local languages, media monitoring is a challenge.

2. Hate Speeches and Polarization:

Social media can fuel hate Speeches, insults and character assassinations by political opponents, contributing to Polarization (Usman Jimade's). Hate speech on social media played a significant role in Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections, fueling polarization and tensions among different ethnic and religious groups. According to Matthew Alugbin, the loudest voices on social media weren't necessary the most visionary but often the most divisive, spreading ethnic jabs, religious splurs and political threats.

3. Information Overload and Credibility Issues:

The vast amount of information that can be obtained on social media makes it a bit difficult for voters to discern credible sources from unreliable ones. With a vast amount of contents on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, voters may struggle to identify trustworthy information about candidates, policies or election processess. This issue is particularly significant in the context of political information and elections. Authors like Cass R. Sunstein discuss how social media can create "echo chambers" or "information cocoons" where users are exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs, potentially exacerbating polarization and affecting credibility assessments.

In the context of Nigeria's elections, researchers like Tolulope Akinsulire and colleagues studied the impact of political misinformation and disinformation on social

media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. They highlight the challenges of discerning credible information in the midst of abundant and often conflicting content on social media.

2.5 Social media Impact on First time Voters

The impact of social media on first-time voters in Nigeria is significant, with various studies highlighting its influence on their political attitudes and behaviors. Here are some key impacts:

1. **Increased Political Engagement:** Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have been found to increase political engagement among Nigerian youths. According to Akindutire and Oluwatosin (2023), 71% of respondents depended on Twitter for election updates during the 2023 presidential election, indicating a high level of engagement.¹
2. **Influence on Voting Decisions:** Social media content can shape voters' opinions and influence their voting choices. A study by Onyekachukwu Obi and Nneka P. Etoamaihe (2023) found that 83.1% of respondents agreed that Facebook and Twitter political messages influenced their willingness to vote. This suggests that social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping the voting decisions of first-time voters.
3. **Shaping Political Attitudes:** Social media platforms have been found to shape political attitudes and opinions among Nigerian youths. Akindutire and Oluwatosin

(2023) noted that 56% of respondents agreed that Twitter was effective in supporting and influencing the candidates of their choice.

4. **Mobilization Tool:** Social media platforms are used as mobilization tools for electioneering and awareness. According to Onyekachukwu Obi and Nneka P. Etoamaihe (2023), political parties and candidates made use of Facebook and Twitter as veritable mobilization tools for electioneering and are credible which also contributes to powerful awareness.
5. **Education and Participation:** Social media can also educate voters and encourage participation in the electoral process. A study found that ideological themes in social media political campaigns have influenced voters' education and participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Overall, social media has become a significant factor in shaping the political attitudes and behaviors of first-time voters in Nigeria. Its influence on voting decisions, political engagement, and mobilization makes it a crucial aspect of the electoral process.

Popular Social Media Platforms

Facebook: Found to be the most used social media platform for political participation among Nigerian youths, with a usage rate of 98.8%.

Twitter: Played a significant role in shaping political attitudes and opinions among Nigerian youths, with 55.3% usage rate for political participation.

WhatsApp: Widely used for political participation, with a usage rate of 93.8%.

2.6 Empirical Review

The study “Influence of Social Media on Electioneering and Youths' Political Participation during Nigeria's 2023 General Elections” was researched by Edith Ohaja et al (2023). The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the sample was 400 students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was chosen through a multi-stage sampling technique from eight departments in four faculties of the institution. The findings of the study showed, among other things, that social media were widely used in their campaigns by political parties and candidates for content sharing, holding discussions, directing supporters and interacting with voters; social media positively influenced political engagement and voter turnout among youths in the elections; and balancing freedom of speech and expression with curbing fake news and disinformation was identified as one of the major challenges of regulating the use of social media in the campaigns for the 2023 general elections. It was thus recommended that the youths should keep up and improve on their political participation as the drive for change and good governance must be sustained for it to bear fruit; broadening voter education and media literacy of citizens is essential to help them critically assess political information shared on social media; and political parties, candidates, and their supporters should use social media ethically and responsibly, upholding the truth in their communications.

Okpala, C. et al (2023) studied the Perception of the Influence of Social Media on the Mobilization of the Electorate in the 2023 Presidential Election in Awka Metropolis. 385 respondents were purposefully chosen from the whole population of the Awka metropolis for the survey research design. According to research, most people view social media contributions to 2023 political involvement procedures as having a progressive objective, while most people view political campaign messaging as little more than political propaganda. The investigation suggested that Nigerian politicians should make every effort to match their words with necessary deeds once in office and that, despite social media's obvious negative effects on politics and politicking, Nigerian politicians should vigorously embrace social media in it subsequent elections due to its interactive potential analysis. The study highlighted that Twitter can be a powerful platform for political mobilization, it is one among many channels for engaging with voters. However, extrapolation on the Obidient Movement in the 2023 general election in Nigeria involves making predictions or projections based on existing trends or patterns. The study adopted the survey method and the area of study is Imo State. The population is 5,830,489 and a sample size of 384 was attained using Wimmer and Dominick calculator. The multistage/cluster sampling technique was adopted and a questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The mean and percentage descriptive statistics were used for data presentation. At a mean average of 2.8, there is a greater motivation behind the emergence of the Obidient Movement in Nigeria's 2023 election. The movement has had a

significant impact on voter behaviour and electoral outcomes in the 2023 general election 2.5 (N=378). The study recommended that those in charge of the electoral process in Nigeria must ensure readiness as there will be improved voter participation in subsequent elections in the country. furthermore, political movements must look at the broader political and social dynamic leading up to subsequent elections.

The influence of social media on political communication: a case study of Nigeria's 2023 general elections in Omu-Aran Kwara State was investigated by (Ojo, Joseph. I. et al 2023). The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of social media on political communication in Omu Aran during the elections. The study investigated the role of social media in shaping public opinion, voter mobilization, and candidate campaigns. It also conducts a case study of Omu Aran's political communication landscape and examines the benefits and drawbacks of social media in political communication. The study is situated within the framework of the Agenda-setting theory and the voting behaviour theory. The research methodology involved the use of both secondary and primary sources of data, including online sources, articles, journals, and textbooks, and administered questionnaires to the target participants. The study reveals that voter education programs facilitated by social media have contributed to increased election literacy, improved voter turnout, and reduced invalid ballots. The media's presence during the entire electoral process acts as a deterrent to fraudulent activities. The study recommended that Political parties and candidates need to strategically utilize social media

platforms to shape public opinion and mobilize voters. However, challenges such as the spread of misinformation and online manipulation should be addressed through media literacy promotion and measures to combat misinformation.

Obi, Onyekachukwu G. and Etoamaihe, Nneka. P. (2023) studied the impact of Facebook and Twitter political messages on influencing the Nigerian youth's willingness to vote: a study of youths in Owerri municipal. The rationale was to ascertain why the Nigerian youth have a low interest in voting and how they utilize Facebook and Twitter and its influence on their voting behaviour. This study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory. To achieve this study, the mixed method was adopted using survey methods and in-depth interview methods. The population employed in the study was 31,347 and 25 youths in Owerri Municipal. A sample size of 385 was adopted using the Taro Yamane formula. Data was collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire data was obtained from 385 youths in Owerri Municipal and interviews were granted to 25 respondents. Findings revealed that Facebook and Twitter political messages have a powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigerian youths to vote. These social media platforms also influenced youth participation in the 2023 general elections. Political parties and candidates made use of Facebook and Twitter as a veritable mobilization tool for electioneering and are credible and contribute to powerful awareness. The study concludes that Facebook and Twitter political messages have a powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigerian youths to vote. It was recommended that

the federal government and the media should work together to encourage youths of eligible age to participate in the electoral process and vote for candidates of their choice.

Oberiri Destiny A and Ivo Nkasire A (2017) investigated Public perception of the role of Facebook usage in political campaigns in Nigeria was conducted in Taraba State Northern Nigeria. The study made use of a descriptive survey design with a questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The data was analysed using the 2016 Microsoft Excel statistical package with frequency counts and simple percentages presented in tables and graph. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics (Chi-square analysis at 0.05 level of significance). The study revealed that Facebook was used in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba and this influenced the electorate to vote a particular candidate. However, it is the perception of the respondent that there were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortion in the information about the opponent, abusive speech, distortion of facts about personal performance and misinformation as a strategy for influencing the Facebook pages of the electorates and the candidates. The study recommended that reliability (e.g. message must be clear, focused, well conveyed, believable, credible, and free from abusive speech and attacking opponents) should be an essential concept in the posted political messages or promises of politicians to draw more fans to themselves.

2.7 Gap in Literature

Although the existing body of literature acknowledges the overarching role of social media in fostering free, fair, and credible elections, both in Nigeria and on a global scale, there remains a noticeable gap in research that delves into the distinct dynamics and perceptions surrounding social media within the specific electoral context of Karu during the 2023 elections. Situated within the Abuja Municipal Area Council, Karu stands out as one of the rapidly expanding suburban settlements in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja. It is demarcated into two primary segments: Karu-site, predominantly inhabited by urban residents, and Karu village, primarily occupied by local inhabitants, albeit with the presence of various ethnic groups (Gusah, 2012). While there exist studies examining the influence and perception of social media on the electoral process in Nigeria, there is a notable absence of research focused on the influence and perceptions related to the National Assembly. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of literature addressing the viewpoints and attitudes of community residents within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This underscores the need for comprehensive research in these areas to better understand and enhance the democratic processes at various levels of governance in Nigeria.

The study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the nuanced ways in which social media influenced the electoral landscape in Karu during this crucial political event. It seeks to explore not only the general benefits of social media, such as improved communication, connecting individuals, enhancing professional networks, and facilitating access to global information but also the distinct impact of social media on the perceptions and attitudes of

voters, candidates, and other stakeholders within the Karu community during the 2023 National Assembly elections. By narrowing the focus to this specific locality and timeframe, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the role and popular perception of social media in a highly localized electoral context that has not yet been extensively studied in the existing literature.

2.8 Theoretical Review

There are several theories the research considers relevant to this study. The theories are Agenda-Setting Theory, Two-Step Flow Theory, Democratic Theory, and Social Identity Theory. This study however, builds on two of the stipulated theories; Agenda Setting theory and Democratic theory.

The Agenda-Setting Theory:

The Agenda-Setting Theory, conceived by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts that media, whether traditional or social, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and priorities by determining which issues receive attention and prominence. It posits that the media has the power to define the salient and important topics in the public's mind. Originally applicable to traditional mass media, the theory has evolved to encompass the influence of social media platforms. In the context of the research on the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu LG, FCT, Nigeria, the Agenda-Setting Theory is applied to comprehend how social media platforms influence public perceptions and set the agenda

for discourse. Social media, with its rapid information dissemination and vast user bases, has become a significant source of information for voters (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The theory is employed to explore how issues gain prominence on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. It acknowledges that the frequency and visibility of specific topics in users' feeds can influence their perceived importance during elections.

The theory is also applied to analyse the active role of political actors, including candidates, parties, and interest groups, in shaping the public agenda through strategic promotion of their preferred issues and narratives. Hashtags, viral campaigns, and influencer endorsements are identified as tools used to draw attention to specific topics (Zúñiga et al., 2015). Furthermore, the theory recognizes the empowering nature of social media, allowing ordinary users to set their own agendas through user-generated content and grassroots movements (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Movements like #EndSARS and #NigeriaDecides gained significant attention through user-generated content on social media.

The influence of algorithms on content curation and visibility is explored, acknowledging that these algorithms, like traditional media gatekeepers, can impact the salience of certain stories and topics (Tandoc et al., 2018). Social media allows for the framing of issues through the use of images, headlines, and captions, influencing how users perceive them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For instance, the framing of a political event as a "scandal" versus a "controversy" can lead to different public perceptions. This

theory forms the basis for understanding how social media platforms set the agenda for public discourse and shaped popular perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu LG, FCT, Nigeria

Democratic Theory:

Democratic theory, as expounded by Dahl (1971), underscores the crucial role of citizens in shaping the political process, a concept highly pertinent to evaluating the influence of social media on Nigerian elections. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by a vibrant democracy, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp wield significant power in molding public opinion and affecting electoral outcomes.

The diversity of Nigeria's population and the complexity of its political landscape resonate with democratic principles of pluralism and inclusion, aligning seamlessly with Dahl's ideals (1971). These digital platforms offer an all-encompassing forum where a wide spectrum of voices, irrespective of background or affiliation, can actively engage in political discourse, exemplifying the democratic tenet of inclusivity and a thriving public sphere. One of the cornerstone principles of democratic theory, championed by Norris (2001), emphasizes equitable access to information to facilitate informed decision-making. In Nigeria, social media democratizes the dissemination of information by granting users access to diverse sources and perspectives. Nevertheless, addressing the challenges of misinformation and disinformation remains imperative to uphold the democratic ideal of an informed electorate.

Moreover, participatory democracy, a central element of democratic theory, encourages active civic engagement beyond the electoral process, which is evident in Nigeria's case through the pivotal role of social media platforms in mobilizing citizens for political activism and advocacy (Dahl, 1971). However, Sunstein's concerns (2017) about misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases must be addressed to ensure the preservation of democratic principles during Nigeria's electoral context. In essence, democratic theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending the intricate relationship between social media, elections, and public perception in Nigeria. These platforms offer prospects for heightened civic participation, information access, and engagement (Dahl, 1971) but simultaneously necessitate vigilant efforts to safeguard democratic ideals of pluralism, deliberation, and accountability within the Nigerian electoral process.

2.9 Justification of Theory

The selection of Agenda-Setting Theory and Democratic Theory as the foundational frameworks for this study is justified based on their theoretical robustness, applicability to the research context, and their capacity to provide comprehensive insights into the dynamics of social media perception in electoral contexts. Both theories align closely with the context of the study. The Agenda-Setting Theory is highly relevant because it explores how media, including social media, can influence public perception and priorities by determining which issues receive prominence. Given that social media

plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes, this theory provides a strong framework to analyze how social media platforms may have impacted the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community. The Agenda-Setting Theory allows for an in-depth exploration of the role of social media in shaping public agendas and perceptions and, helps researchers assess how certain issues gained traction and prominence during the election campaign, shedding light on the extent of social media's influence on voters' priorities.

Democratic Theory, on the other hand, is critical in understanding the role of information dissemination, citizen engagement, and participation in the democratic process. Given that social media platforms democratize access to information and encourage civic engagement, this theory provides valuable insights into how citizens in Karu Community, FCT, were engaged in shaping the political process through social media.

Both theories also address challenges associated with media influence. The Agenda Setting Theory can help identify how algorithms and content curation on social media platforms may have influenced the visibility and framing of political issues. Democratic Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to address challenges like misinformation, disinformation, and algorithmic biases to ensure a fair and informed electoral process. By combining these two theories, the research offers a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between social media, public perception, and the democratic process in the specific context of the 2023 National

Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria. This dual theoretical framework allows for a multi-faceted examination of how social media both sets the agenda and influences citizen engagement in the electoral context.

In summary, the Agenda-Setting Theory and Democratic Theory provide a robust foundation for exploring the impact of social media on popular perception in the 2023 National Assembly Elections. They help researchers delve into how social media platforms shape public agendas, influence citizen engagement, and contribute to the democratic process while considering potential challenges and opportunities in the context of a local electoral event.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The systematic research process and procedure framework that guided the study as well as the justification were explained in this section.

3.1 Research Design

The research adopted a survey research design. Onwukwe (2011), as cited in Amdi (2014), underscores that survey research systematically collects data to describe and interpret various conditions, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and more. In this study, the survey aimed to systematically gather insights into the perceptions and attitudes of a specific population regarding the role of social media in the 2023 National Assembly Elections in

the Karu community, FCT, Nigeria. Survey design is particularly relevant for studying public sentiment, especially in developing or third-world nations like Nigeria. It has the capacity to capture people's opinions, often on a day-to-day basis, concerning government performance, policies, and issues of public interest. Survey methods encompass diverse data collection techniques, such as mailing questionnaires, making phone calls, or conducting face-to-face interviews with a sampled population. In this research, survey questionnaires and secondary data analysis were employed.

3.2 Area of Study

Karu District is located just beyond the eastern limits of the FCT and is therefore considered to be a “satellite town” to the city. Administratively, it falls under the purview of the Abuja Municipal Area Council (a local government structure), rather than the Federal Capital Territory Administration, which administers the FCT (Gusah, 2012). It holds a rich historical development marked by rapid urban growth and economic development. With an area of 40,000 hectares and a population exceeding 2 million [“Karu Urban Area,” 2023], it has experienced an annual growth rate of over 40%. The influx of migrants from various parts of the country has significantly contributed to its economic vitality (Rikko and Laka, 2013). Karu is a cosmopolitan area where diverse ethnic groups coexist harmoniously. Indigenous groups, including Gbagyi, Koro, Yeskwa, Gwandara, and Gade, live alongside settlers such as Mada, Eggon, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Tiv, and

Yoruba. This blend of cultures contributes to the vibrant socio-cultural fabric of Karu (Nasarawa State, 2010).

The main occupations of residents are civil servants in FCT Abuja and traders in the formal and informal sectors (Kanayochukwu and Dogo, 2019). This portrays a diverse educational background, reflecting the literacy required for effective engagement with social media. The area's economic prospects have attracted a population with varying educational levels, contributing to the overall literacy and technological proficiency of the community. The strategic choice of Karu as the study area within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) is based on its unique position as a district encompassing both urban and traditional elements. Comprising sub-divisions like Jikwoyi, Karu Site, and Karu Village, with 25 settlements within them, Karu mirrors a microcosm of broader societal landscapes. By focusing on Karu, this study aims to uncover insights not only specific to the district but also relevant to electoral processes in similar socio-political contexts across Nigeria.

3.3 Table 1: Population of the study:

SN	LG	WARD	PU	DELIM	TOTAL
1	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I /CENTRAL PRIMARY SCH	37/06/10/001	2,736
2	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I / B. T. S. KARU	37/06/10/002	1772
3	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE / AGRICULTURAL EXT. OFFICE	37/06/10/003	2814
4	Municipal	Karu	UNG.GINAR / HEALTH CENTRE	37/06/10/004	2850
5	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA I / KARU VILLAGE JUNCTION	37/06/10/005	2501
6	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA II /OLD MARKET SQUARE	37/06/10/006	3150
7	Municipal	Karu	UNG. HAUSAWA III / AFTER SALASI RD. JUNCTION	37/06/10/007	2909
8	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE I/ MIN. OF IDUS QRTS	37/06/10/008	2496
9	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II/ OLD NEPA OFFICE JUNCTION	37/06/10/009	3482
10	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IIB / NEAR AREA COURT	37/06/10/010	3232
11	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II (F. H. A.) (CUSTOMS QUARTERS)	37/06/10/011	3105
12	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION I	37/06/10/012	3848
13	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION II	37/06/10/013	2125
14	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKOYI PRI. SCH.	37/06/10/014	6263
15	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI II/JIKOYI TOKKA VILLAGE	37/06/10/015	2905
16	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/UNG. GADE	37/06/10/016	2355
17	Municipal	Karu	JIKOYI/JIKWOYI PHASE III	37/06/10/017	4348
18	Municipal	Karu	UNG PASHE/BESIDE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL	37/06/10/023	1067
19	Municipal	Karu	ALONG CITY COLLEGE ROAD BESIDE HEALTH CENTRE	37/06/10/033	1160
20	Municipal	Karu	KUGBO MECHANIC VILLAGE BESIDE SUVERAY FILLING STATION	37/06/10/065	1,525
Total population of Karu community Abuja Municipal Area Council(AMAC) Voters					56,643

Sources: <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FCT-PU-s-above-3000-voters>

3.4 Sample Size

Sampling involves the selection of a number of study units from a defined study population or universe. A sample is therefore a smaller representation of a large whole or population. When the population is too large that the researcher may find it difficult to finish at a time; a portion of the population may be studied. Thus the sample of the study is the selected portion of an entire population to be studied on the basis of which conclusions are drawn on the entire population.

For the purpose of this study, the purposive sampling technique was adopted. Purposive random sampling was applicable because it's practically impossible to gather the voters and sampling their opinion. Hence, the respondents' opinion are randomly sampled based on their consent, readiness and interest to take part in the survey. The researcher moved to the next polling unit after completing the expected sampled respondents in a particular polling unit. Therefore, Yamane Formula was adopted for the computation of sample size. Yamane (1967) formula for calculation of sample size was used to determine the sample size. According to him, for a 90% confidence level and $p = 0.1$, size of the sample should be:

$$n = N / [1 + N (e^2)]$$

N = Known population size = Always constant

$$e = \text{Error Margin} = 56,643 / [1 + 56,643 (0.12)] = 99.8 \text{ approximate to } 100$$

The researcher grouped the settlement within the community into four zones to make the administrator of questionnaire easy and ensure equal sample representation of the target respondents. The study used Probability Proportional to size (PPS) to allocate sample to each polling unit to give a fair representation of the results. Hence, the sample respondents were allocated below.

3.5 Table 2: Sample Distribution

SN	LG	WARD	PU	TOTAL	Sample Allocation (PPS)
1	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I /CENTRAL PRIMARY SCH	2,736	5
2	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE I/B. T. S. KARU	1772	3
3	Municipal	Karu	UNG.PASHE / AGRICULTURAL EXT. OFFICE	2814	5
4	Municipal	Karu	UNG.GINAR / HEALTH CENTRE	2850	5
5	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA I / KARU VILLAGE JUNCTION	2501	4
6	Municipal	Karu	UNG.HAUSAWA II /OLD MARKET SQUARE	3150	6
7	Municipal	Karu	UNG. HAUSAWA III / AFTER SALASI RD. JUNCTION	2909	5
8	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE I/ MIN. OF IDUS QRTS	2496	4
9	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II/ OLD NEPA OFFICE JUNCTION	3482	6
10	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IIB / NEAR AREA COURT	3232	6
11	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE II (F. H. A.) (CUSTOMS QUARTERS)	3105	5
12	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION I	3848	7
13	Municipal	Karu	KARU SITE IV /CBN QRTS JUNCTION KARSHI JUNCTION II	2125	4
14	Municipal	Karu	JKOYI/JIKOYI PRI. SCH.	6263	11
15	Municipal	Karu	JKOYI II/JIKOYI TOKKA VILLAGE	2905	5
16	Municipal	Karu	JKOYI/UNG. GADE	2355	4
17	Municipal	Karu	JKOYI/JIKWOYI PHASE III	4348	7
18	Municipal	Karu	UNG PASHE/BESIDE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL	1067	2
19	Municipal	Karu	ALONG CITY COLLEGE ROAD BESIDE HEALTH CENTRE	1160	3
20	Municipal	Karu	KUGBO MECHANIC VILLAGE BESIDE SUVERAY FILLING STATION	1,525	3
				56,643	100

Source: Author Nov. 2023

3.6 Method of Data Collection

The research employed a comprehensive approach that combines both primary and secondary data sources to effectively address the study objectives. A structured questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of respondents from the

Karu district. The questionnaire captured demographic variables and explores respondents' opinions on the impact of social media on the 2023 National Assembly Elections.

In addition, document analysis is used to gather and analyse relevant documents and official electoral materials related to the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu. This approach complements primary data collection methods, allowing for a comprehensive view of the electoral process. The holistic approach aims to explore the role of social media in shaping popular perceptions during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Lagos State Nigeria, while ensuring a thorough examination of research questions considering data availability and limitations.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data for this study was generated from primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data was generated using the questionnaire. The secondary sources of data basically consisted of second hand information collected from studies of relevant books, journal articles, media reports, newspapers, and relevant websites. The data collected in the course of this study was presented using descriptive statistic. The descriptive method deals with the presentation of the variables of the study (in relation to the subject) such as the profiles of respondents.

The descriptive method is employed to explain responses obtained from the questionnaires presented to respondents. The data gathered for this research utilized Microsoft Excel as the primary tool for analysing the gathered data due to its versatility

and powerful analytical capabilities. The analysis covered descriptive statistics and percentages were employed to present a clear and insightful portrayal of the data concerning the “Perception of Social Media Influence on the 2023 Election: A Study of the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT, Nigeria.”

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

At this section, the data that was collected for the study will be summarised, analysed and interpreted.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter contains data collected and analysed from a sample size of 200. The results are thereby designed in frequency tables.

Section A: Respondents Demographics
Question 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	No of Respondents	Percentage
Male	96	41%
Female	104	59%
Total	200	100%

The study had slightly more female respondents than males, indicating a gentle lean towards female representation. This subtle imbalance may influence findings, especially in gender-sensitive areas, so it's worth considering when interpreting results. However, the relatively even engagement from both genders adds robustness to the insights drawn.

“Question 2: Distribution based on Age

Age	No of Respondents	Percentage
18-24	62	31%
25-29	80	40%
30-34	42	21%
35 and Above	16	8%
Total	200	100%

The study’s respondents are mostly young adults, with the 25-29 age group being the largest segment. The representation decreases as age increases, indicating a strong focus on younger demographics. This suggests the findings may reflect perspectives typical of

younger adults, potentially influencing the study’s applicability across different age groups.

Question 3: Level of Qualification

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage
SSCE/NCE/ND	107	54%
BSC/B. A/HND	67	33%
MASTERS/PhD	26	13%
Total	200	100%

The data reveals that a clear majority of respondents (54%) hold SSCE/NCE/ND qualifications, indicating the study’s findings are heavily influenced by this group’s perspectives. This educational demographic dominance suggests insights may particularly reflect experiences and viewpoints associated with this level of academic attainment, shaping the study’s narrative and applicability.

Question 4: Occupation of Respondents

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage
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Students	62	31%
Self-employed	53	26%
Civil servants	85	43%
Total	200	100%

Civil servants made up the largest group of respondents (43%), suggesting the study's findings may reflect public sector perspectives and experiences. Students and self-employed individuals followed, indicating the insights may align with these groups' dynamics and attitudes.

Question 5: Are you a resident of Karu Community, FCT Abuja?

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	158	66%
No	42	24%
Total	200	100%

The study mostly captured views from Karu Community residents (66%, 158 individuals) in FCT Abuja, suggesting findings reflect local perspectives and experiences. Results may be specific to this community's context.

Section B: Social Media Usage

Question 6: Which social media platform(s) do you use most frequently ?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	83	42%
Twitter	69	34%
Instagram	34	17%
WhatsApp	15	7%
Total	200	100%

Facebook is the most used platform (42%, 83 individuals), followed by Twitter (34%), Instagram (17%), and WhatsApp (7%). The study's social media insights likely reflect Facebook-centric behaviors and attitudes, highlighting its significant role in respondents' online interactions.

Question 7: How often do you use social media for political information ?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very frequently	68	34%
Frequently	88	44%
Rarely	4	2%
Occasionally	40	20%
Total	200	100%

Respondents frequently use social media for politics, with 44% using it for political info and 34% for political posts/ads. Social media is a key source for political awareness, showing its significant role in shaping perceptions and engagement.

Section C: Influence of Social Media on Voter's Perceptions with political narratives.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree that social media influences your perception of political candidates

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	90	45%
Agree	100	50%
Neutral	4	2%
Disagree	4	2%
Strongly Disagree	2	1%
Total	200	100%

Respondents overwhelmingly agree (95%) that social media influences their views on political candidates, with 45% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing. This highlights social media's significant role in shaping electoral awareness and perceptions of political figures, indicating its potent impact on respondents' engagement and decision-making.

Question 9: How do you think social media influenced your decision making during the 2023 general elections?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very positively	72	36%
Somewhat positively	68	34%
Neutral	35	17%

Somewhat negatively	21	11%
Very negatively	4	2%
Total	200	100%

Respondents mostly see social media's influence as positive (72 respondents) with 36% saying it's positive and 34% somewhat positive. Only 13% report negative impacts, indicating social media is largely viewed as beneficial in shaping decisions.

Section D: Challenges Associated with Social Media Usage

Question 10: What challenges did you encounter when using social media for political information?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Misinformation	100	50%
Bias	42	21%
Lack of credible sources	58	29%
Total	200	100%

Misinformation is the top concern (50%, 100 respondents), followed by lack of credible sources (29%) and perceived bias (21%). Respondents are acutely aware of the pitfalls of relying on social media for politics, highlighting a critical vulnerability in digital political discourse.

Question 11: How do you think this challenges can be addressed?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
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Through fact-checking initiatives	88	44%
By promoting media literacy	44	22%
By increasing online regulations	68	34%
Total	200	100%

The data reveals a strong endorsement for fact-checking initiatives as a key strategy to mitigate challenges associated with social media's political information landscape, with 44% (88 respondents) strongly agreeing. This is complemented by support for promoting media literacy (22%, 44 respondents), and increasing online regulations (34%, 68 respondents). The pronounced backing for fact-checking underscores respondents' faith in verification processes as a potent antidote to prevailing issues like misinformation, highlighting a proactive stance towards enhancing digital information credibility.

Section E: Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Attitudes and behaviours

Question 12: To what extent do you agree that social media shapes your political attitude and behaviours?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	90	45%
Agree	100	50%
Neutral	4	2%
Strongly Disagree	2	1%
Disagree	4	2%
Total	200	100%

The data overwhelmingly indicates that respondents acknowledge social media's significant influence on political behavior and awareness, with a striking 95% expressing agreement (45% strongly agree, 50% agree). This dominant consensus underscores the perceived potency of social media in molding political attitudes and shaping voter behaviors. The negligible neutral (2%) and dissenting (3% combined with disagree and strongly disagree) responses further accentuate the widespread recognition of social media's impactful role in the political sphere, suggesting respondents broadly attribute considerable sway to these platforms in informing and influencing electoral engagement.

Question 13: Did social media change your views on any political issue leading up to the 2023 elections?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
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Yes	148	74%
No	2	1%
Slightly	48	24%
Undecided	2	1%
Total	200	100%

The data compellingly reveals that a substantial majority (74%, 148 respondents) acknowledge social media's influence in shaping their perspectives on political issues preceding the election. This pronounced affirmation underscores the perceived significant role of social media in informing and molding respondents' political views and opinions. With minimal disagreement (1% disagree, 24% slightly disagree) and negligible undecided responses (1%), the dominant narrative emphasizes social media's impactful contribution to respondents' political awareness and decision-making processes leading up to the 2023 elections, highlighting these platforms' considerable sway in electoral contexts.

Section F: Relationship between Social Media and Voter Turnout

Question 14: Did you vote in the 2023 national elections?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	164	82%
No	36	18%
Total	200	100%

The data indicates a high level of electoral participation among respondents, with a significant majority (82%, 164 individuals) confirming they voted in the 2023 national elections. This pronounced turnout suggests a strong engagement with the democratic process among the study's cohort. The relatively low proportion of non-voters (18%, 36 respondents) further underscores the dominant pattern of active civic involvement, implying respondents exhibited considerable commitment to exercising their electoral rights in shaping Nigeria's political landscape.

Question 15: To what extent do you agree that social media influenced your decision to vote?

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	120	60%
Agree	75	37%
Neutral	5	3%
Disagree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	200	100%

This data shows social media had a major influence on respondents' voting decisions, with 97% agreeing (60% strongly agree, 37% agree) that it played a role. This suggests social media significantly shaped their electoral participation, highlighting its impact on civic engagement and voting behavior. With only 3% neutral, it's clear respondents see social media as a key factor in motivating their vote.

4.5 Discussions of findings

The study seeks to explore the influence of Social Media in Shaping Political Attitude among First-time Voters in Nigeria. The result from the findings shows that all the respondents that partake in the research exercise were social media users (100%), with 44% making use of social media for political information and awareness and 50% agree that social media provides balanced coverage on candidates. 59% of 100 respondents agrees that it shapes their political attitude and behaviours while 60% agreed that it influenced their decision to vote. This finding collaborates with Castells (2013) asserts that

digital platforms have evolved into crucial space for disseminating information on political discourse and mobilization towards grassroots engagement. While, Ojobor (2014), buttress that social media integration in political activities aids in sharing of information, and influencing perception of public deliberations.

Engagement on social media was found to have high participation, with 34% of 68 respondents acknowledging its frequent use of social media platforms for political information, discussing politics with friends or followers online, while only 2% rarely makes use of social. In addition, it was discovered that 50% of the respondents agreed that social media enhanced their knowledge of candidates' policies and platforms, compared with 1% who strongly disagreed. These results show that social media functioned as both a campaign channel and an arena for civic learning. Which was supported by McQuail's (2010) opine on media effects theory, that postulate that media messages can modify people's thoughts and opinions.

Information credibility and skepticism in regards to misinformation and fairness were major worries by respondents, with about 50% claiming that that faced the problem of misinformation through the use of social media for politics and 29% who claims that social media failed to provide trusted and reliable information. Compared with 44% which represents 88 respondents agreed on fact-checking the authenticity of claims of content on political issues. This reflects considerations about misinformation on civic engagement on online space , consistent with Allcott and Gentzkow's (2017) findings, but also indicates

that fact-checking is emerging a growing trend among people taking to verify information accuracy , suggesting increase level of critical thinking and awareness among social media users.

The findings also provide indispensable insight on social media influenced political awareness and attitudes, with over 74% of 148 respondents acknowledged that social media changed their views on political issues leading up to the election, while only 1% said it did not, and 24% admitted it influenced them only slightly. This echoes Norris (2001), assertions that media serve as a crucial mediator that enhance political socialization. However, 60% of 120 respondents strongly agreed to social media influencing their voting decision and 37% of 70 respondents agreed to this claim. This strikes a balance of social media playing a pivotal role in politics. This validate Dahlgren's (2013) claim that engagement through digital platforms can translate into real-life civic engagement.

In conclusion, the findings reveals that prior to the election , many respondents had claims that social media positively influenced their decisions in the 2023 elections. Prior to this, 2% claimed social media had a very negative impact on their decisions and 17% were. However, social media serves as a catalyst that altered the level of public engagement during the elections. This also highlights the transformative power of social media in mobilizing previously indifferent groups, consistent with Boulianne's (2015) mobilization theory.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarize the study, highlight the findings and the recommendations. Thereafter, the conclusion of the study highlights the suggestion for further study.

5.1Summary

The study assesses the perception of social media influence on the 2023 elections with a focus on the National Assembly elections in Karu Community, FCT Abuja Nigeria. The study found that Nigerians, particularly the youth, widely utilize social media, as affirmed by the study. The findings indicate that respondents use social media regularly—whether daily, weekly, or monthly— with the majority engaging on a daily basis. The study also highlighted the prevalent use of various platforms, with Twitter and Facebook taking the lead. This underscores their importance as primary sources for political information and discussions.

Social media play a crucial role in influencing voters' decision-making processes, and participants held diverse perspectives on the credibility of political messages on these platforms. Respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of social media in disseminating election-related information, highlighting its role in shaping opinions and potentially influencing decisions. The study identified a substantial impact on political opinions, with a notable proportion attributing social media influence at a moderate level. Regarding the overall electoral atmosphere, varied perceptions were observed, with some maintaining a

neutral stance and others perceiving the impact as somewhat positive. These results highlight how social media influences perceptions, opinions, and contributes to the electoral atmosphere during the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Abuja. This aligns with the notion that these platforms offer a democratized space for political engagement and diverse discussions.

The study highlight the harmful effects of social media, contributing to the spread of misinformation, fostering polarization, and facilitating online harassment, thereby posing a threat to the fundamental principles of a healthy democracy. A significant challenge identified in utilizing social media for electoral processes was the prevalence of misinformation related to the 2023 National Assembly elections. While these platforms enable rapid information dissemination, they also serve as conduits for misinformation and disinformation during electoral periods. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the adverse political outcomes associated with online communication tools, underscoring the critical necessity for vigilance and fact-checking to address the challenges posed by misinformation on social media during electoral periods.

5.2Recommendations

In the wake of this study into the influence of social media on the 2023 National Assembly Elections in Karu Community, FCT Nigeria, several key recommendations emerge to enhance the role of social media in electoral processes and address associated challenges. Firstly, addressing the urgent need for enhancing civic education and media literacy

programs is crucial. Initiatives should be developed to empower social media users with the skills required to critically evaluate information, fostering a more informed electorate capable of discerning between credible and deceptive content. Simultaneously, taking a proactive approach to strengthen political engagement on social media is vital.

Political candidates and parties should be encouraged to actively interact with citizens on these platforms, fostering a more participatory and informed voter base. Implementing awareness campaigns could be instrumental in conveying the advantages of engaging with political content on social media, thereby promoting active involvement in discussions related to political affairs. Promoting transparency and accountability in political communication on social media is crucial. It involves encouraging candidates and parties to provide accurate information and establishing mechanisms to report and address misinformation. Tailoring social media campaigns to reach diverse age groups is also important, considering the varied preferences across demographics.

Additionally, implementing effective fact-checking mechanisms directly on social media platforms can swiftly identify and label misinformation, contributing to a more accurate information environment. Dealing with information overload on social media platforms is crucial. Exploring tools to help users manage this overload will lead to a more focused consumption of election-related content. Investing in technical infrastructure to tackle issues like misinformation and technical glitches is vital.

This investment ensures a smoother user experience during elections, reducing potential challenges related to the technical aspects of social media platforms. Regularly reviewing and updating policies on social media platforms is crucial for their relevance and effectiveness in combating misinformation and encouraging a healthy political discourse. Collaborating with government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders is encouraged to collectively tackle challenges and promote responsible social media use during elections. Implementing these recommendations collectively aims to improve the positive impact of social media in the electoral process while effectively addressing associated challenges.

5.3 Conclusion

In the evolving landscape of contemporary politics, the impact of social media has become increasingly pronounced, reshaping the flow of information and influencing individual choices. The 2023 Nigerian presidential elections served as a pivotal moment where technology, communication, and democracy converged. This study sought to investigate the influence of social media perceptions on the 2023 elections, specifically focusing on the National Assembly Elections.

The research uncovered a substantial impact of social media platforms in disseminating political information, moulding voters' perspectives, and contributing to the democratization of the electoral process. As Nigeria advances in its democratic journey, the study underscores the necessity of developing a nuanced understanding of how social

media shapes political narratives. This understanding is essential for comprehending the evolving dynamics of the nation's democracy and assessing its potential implications for the future.

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APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Mass communication,
Faculty of Art,
University of Benin,
Edo-State.
14th September, 2024.

Dear Sir/Ma,

REQUEST FOR THE COMPLETION OF ITEMS IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I am an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Art, researching on the topic: Influence of social media in shaping political attitude among First-time voters in Nigeria, using a study of the 2023 General Assembly Elections in Karu Community FCT. This research work is basically, written for academic purpose in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of B.A. (Bachelor of Art) in Mass Communication.

Your response will be highly appreciated as information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you in anticipation of your corporation.

Yours faithfully,

AMEDU BLESSING OSEMUDIAMEN

(Researcher).

INSTRUCTION: Please tick [✓] in any option as best suit your opinion.

SECTION A: Bio-Data of the Respondents (Demographics information)

1. Gender: Male [] Female []
2. Age Group: 18-24 [] 25-34 [] 35-44 [] 45-54 [] 55 and above []
3. Educational Background: Primary/FSLC [] SSCE [] OND/NCE [] HND/BSc [] Higher Degree []
4. Occupation of Respondents : Yes [] No []
5. Are you a resident of Karu Community, FCT Abuja? Yes [] No []

Section B: Social Media Usage

6. Which social media platform(s) do you use most frequently?
Facebook [] Twitter [] Instagram [] WhatsApp []
7. How often do you use social media for political information ?
Very frequently [] frequently [] Rarely [] Occasionally []

Section C: Influence of Social Media on Voter's Perception

8. To what extent do you agree that social media influences your perception of political candidates? Strongly Agree [] Agree [] Neutral [] Disagree Strongly [] Disagree []
9. How do you think social media influenced your decision making during the 2023 general elections?
Very positive [] Positive [] Somewhat positively [] Neutral []
Somewhat negatively [] Very Negatively []

Section D: Challenges Associated with Social Media Usage

10. What challenges did you encounter when using social media for political information? Misinformation [] Bias [] Lack of credible source []

11. How do you think this challenges can be addressed?

Through fact-checking initiative [] By promoting media literacy [] By increasing online regulation []

Section E: Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Attitudes and behaviours

12. To what extent do you agree that social media shapes your political attitude and behaviours?

Strongly Agree [] Agree [] Neutral [] Disagree Strongly [] Disagree []

13. Did social media change your views on any political issue leading up to the 2023 elections?

Yes [] No [] Slightly [] Undecided []

Section F: Relationship between Social Media and Voter Turnout

14. Did you vote in the 2023 national elections?

Yes [] No []

15. To what extent do you agree that social media influenced your decision to vote?

Strongly Agree [] Agree [] Neutral [] Disagree Strongly [] Disagree []