THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES ON THE YOUTH'S VOTING BEHAVIOR IN ENUGU METROPOLIS

EDEANI, Sullivan Kosorochi
Department of Mass Communication
Enugu State University of Science and Technology
Edeanisullivan@gmail.com

Abstract
The study assesses the influence of social media messages on the voting attitudes among Enugu Youths. The rationale was to ascertain why the young population of Nigerian youths has a low voting interest during elections and how they utilize social media and its influence on their voting behaviour. The study used survey and interview methods to obtain mixed views of Enugu Youths within three local government areas of Enugu state; these include Enugu South, East, and North. The study finds that Enugu youths residing within the metropolis are very active on social media, although that does not influence their voting preferences. The study recommends that the government intensify its Information Communications Technology (ICT) drive and strategy in education and other essential sectors to give citizens more access to information. In addition, the study suggests that political parties and election institutions increased online presence on social media platforms will enhance voting interest among Enugu Youths.
Keywords: **Election, Information, Social Media, Youths, and Voting Apathy**

Introduction

The importance of social media in our contemporary system of communication is indispensable. Modern technology in communication no doubt has turned the entire world into a "Global Village" (McLuhan M. 1964). Social media are modern interactive communication alleys through which people connect, and share opinions, experiences, pictures, messages and information of joint interest. Political messages are not an exception as politicians and respective political parties during the electioneering period go to a large extent to reach their eligible citizens and target audience with persuasive messages to convince them to vote for them. No stratum of the society is spared from the barrage of electioneering: market women, working-class, traders, artisans, students, professional bodies, youths etc are all targeted to secure their votes.

This is usually pronounced in a democratic government. Abraham Lincoln who is being celebrated today as the father of democracy defined it in 1858 as; "the government of the people, for the people and by the people". He underscored that democracy is a leadership achieved by the society's direct or indirect method. It would be directly when all the electorates come together to make a collective decision or indirectly through people authorized to be their leaders. Democracy is described by the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as a structure of government in which members of the government are voted by the people. Election is always a must-have in any democratic setting since it allows the people to choose their leaders. Elections are at the heart of democracy, and indeed, they are the entire essence of democracy. Before the election, however, political parties, politicians, party members, and stakeholders engage in electioneering, which is an equally significant procedure. This process entails the use of persuasion messages in both traditional and social media to persuade voters to vote for a certain individual or party.

Social media could be referred to a website and applications that allow users to generate and share content or participate in social networking (Oxford Dictionary, 2022). This entails that social media is a platform where people can develop and share ideas, information and content of interest and as well interact with one another. According to Bottle PR, Social Media is a set of software tools that enable groups to create content and engage in peer-to-peer discussions and content exchange (Chris L. 2009).

This means that social media bestows the opportunities for people to generate and disseminate ideas about a particular interest and also to communicate with their friends.

To reach a diverse and widely scattered public, social media is the instrument of choice, so, Politicians and their parties frequently set aside large sums of money for electioneering through conventional media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. The mass media's popularity stems from its broad reach and coverage. Nomadic herders can be reached through transistor radios, elites and the literate can be reached through newspapers, women can be reached through magazines, and town/city people can be reached primarily through television. However, a critical segment of the electorate, the youth, appears to be becoming increasingly unreachable through traditional media, as they transition away from traditional media and toward internet-based applications such as social media.

Nigerian youth account for a sizable portion of the population as well as eligible voters. Dr. Mrs Ngozi Okonjo Iwela, the former Nigerian Minister of Finance and Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), stated at a conference in Lagos in 2010 that 70 percent of Nigeria's 150 million people are under the age of 30. She went on to say that the young population (those aged 12 to 24) was anticipated to reach 30 million (kolapo, 2010). This is a significant population that cannot be overlooked by any politician or political party .A lot of factors have contributed to youths' media transition from traditional to internet-based applications such as social media. One of the factors is the country's growing internet penetration. Statistics show that Nigeria has 115.99 million internet users as of June 2022 (wordstats.com 2022), this figure equates to around 61.4 per cent of the total population.

Many Nigerian youths now have laptops and other mobile devices such as notepads, blackberries, Androids, iPhones, and other smart phones, which they use to access social media sites and information on the internet; such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Palm chat, LinkedIn, and so on.
The purpose of this study is to look into the impact of social media on voting and political behavior among Nigerian youths of voting age in the Enugu metropolitan. The goal of the study was to see if social media can be used as a legitimate weapon of social control in the same way that traditional mass media can.

Statement of the Problem
According to the 2006 Nigerian census, more than 70% of Nigeria's 150 million people are under the age of 30. (Kolapo, 2010). As a result, Nigeria's population is relatively youthful. Youth engagement in the country's electoral process, on the other hand, is not proportional to their numbers. Authorities have remarked that Nigerian youths are often uninterested in electoral affairs, resulting in poor voter turnout at elections. Mike Igini, the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Resident Electoral Commissioner for Akwa Ibom State, blamed voter apathy on political parties and politicians' failure to deliver on their pledges (PUNCH, 2022). This lack of enthusiasm among young people for elections does not bode well for the country's democracy, (YALI, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to look at how social media may be used as a true mobilizing tool for electioneering in general elections, with an emphasis on the Enugu metropolitan. As we prepare for the 2023 general election, this study will examine how the usage of social media messages has influenced youth voting and political behavior in the 2019 presidential elections

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to assess the impact of social media messages on the political participation of youths in the Enugu metropolis. Specifically, the study is set out to:

1. To determine the extent to which Youths in Enugu metropolis utilize the social media.
2. To determine the extent of the influence of social media usage on youths participation in the 2019 election process.
3. To ascertain the social media sites mostly used by youths in Enugu metropolis.
4. To review the level of credibility youths attach to social media messages.

Research Questions

To analyze and understand the facts behind the problems, this study intends to scrutinize the following important questions:

1. Did Youths in Enugu metropolis utilize socialmedia in the 2019 presidential elections?
1. How did social media influence youths' participation in the 2019 Presidential electoral process?
2. Which social media sites are mostly used by youths in Enugu metropolis?
3. To what degree do youths regard social media messages as credible?

Hypothesis

According to Agama (2010, p.10), a hypothesis is a tentative statement that the researcher might prove or disapprove of after testing variables. The following hypothesis will be subjected to an empirical test in the course of this study:

H1:   Youths in the Enugu metropolis utilized social media in the 2019 presidential election to a very high extent.

HO: Youths in Enugu metropolis utilized social media in the 2019 presidential election to a very low extent.

H2:   Social media influenced youth participation in the 2019 presidential electoral process to a very high extent.

HO: Social media did not influence youth participation in the 2019 presidential electoral process to a very high extent.

Literature Review

Review of Concepts

The following concepts were reviewed;

1. Internet
2. Social Media
3. Social Networking Sites

The Concept of Internet

Two schools of thought disagree on the origins of the internet. The first believes the internet is a product of the Cold War. In 1962, the Air Force commissioned a prominent computer scientist to devise the methods to retain the military's ability to communicate information around attack.

However, many scholars and experts contest the idea that the internet was created to defend national security in the event of a nuclear attack, which has gone unchallenged for long enough to be widely accepted as reality (Hafner and Lyon, 2996, p.10).

In the second version, psychologist Licklider, a Marshall Mcluhan enthusiast, ponders the power of citizens as early as 1956; nevertheless, a computer consoles a television set connected in a countrywide network. He wrote and campaigned a whole month series of communication among candidates, propagandists, commentators, political groups, and voters, describing the political process

as simply a huge teleconference. He went on to say that the secret is the self-motivating excitement that allows for truly effective information interaction via a good network computer. (Baron, p. 34, 2012).

The internet (also known as the web) is a more interactive kind of mass media that may be described as a network of various types of computers that link to build a worldwide network that connects people all over the world. The internet is a vast network of networks that functions as a networking infrastructure. It joins millions of computers around the world to establish a network that can connect to any other computer as long as they're both linked to the internet. (Accessed on June 10th, 2022) (http://www.webopedia.com/didyouknow/internet/2012/web-vs.-internet-asp.html)   According   to Okoye (2000), the internet was used by an estimated 50 million people globally in 1999.

Social Effects of the Internet
The Internet has had a significant impact on traditional media, diminishing the anonymity of people and their communications, expanding the storage and accessibility of information, and allowing any individual to control the recovery and dissemination of messages, (John Havick, 2021). The internet has also forced society to adapt to a new communications culture that is vastly different from that dominated by television, newspapers, and radio. As a news source, the internet is becoming increasingly significant. At the same time, the number of individuals who rely on broadcast television, radio, and newspapers as their primary source of news has decreased.

According to studies, some people spend a significant amount of time on the internet. This has resulted in the diagnosis of Internet addiction disorder (IAD) (Melanie B. 2019). People become addicted to the internet in the same way they get addicted to drugs, gambling, or alcohol. Increased tolerance, lack of control, and withdrawal are three characteristics of addiction, according to psychologists (Leah. K 2022). These criteria apply to those who find themselves spending more time online, who are unable to manage their internet use, and who neglect their family, friends, and other social duties in order to spend time online.

The Concept of Social Media
Individuals and communities exchange, collaborate, discuss, and modify user-generated content through social media, which uses mobile and web-based technologies to build highly dynamic platforms (kietzmannn, 2012). The term "social media" is thrown about a lot. It's a website that not only provides you with information, but also interacts with you while doing so. It is a collection of web-based applications that allow users to create and share user-generated content. Because we frequently refer to members of the news as "media," it's easy to mix up social media and social news.

That social news site is also a social media site, to add to the mix. The following are some examples of media websites:
1. Social Book Marketing: Interact with others by tagging websites and searching through websites that have been bookmarked by others (simple blink list).
2. Social News: - Participate in discussions by voting on articles and leaving comments (Digg, propello).
3. Social networking – interact with others by adding friends, leaving comments on photos and profiles, and joining discussion groups (Facebook, 2go, BB chat).
4. Interact with other users by sharing photos or videos and leaving comments on their submissions. (Fliki and Utube).
5. Wikis: Contribute by creating new articles and editing existing ones.

People interact through social media by creating, sharing, exchanging, and commenting on each other's creations in various networks. According to Maya Dollarhide (2021), social media is a computer-based technology that allows people to share ideas, opinions, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is an internet-based platform that allows people to share content such as personal information, documents, films, and images quickly and electronically.

Through services such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WeChat, Tinder, Telegram, and Twitter, social media has become one of the most popular ways to communicate. The use of mobile social media has increased, resulting in new opportunities for browsing.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media into six different classes as follows:
  i.   Collaborative Project (Wikipedia)
  ii.   Blogs and Micro blogs (Twitter)
  iii. Content Communities (U-tube)
  iv.   Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Tinder, Instagram)
  v.   Virtual Game World (World of war craft)
  vi.   Virtual Second World (Second life)

The Concept of Social Networking Service
Social networking services are the use of internet-based social media platforms to stay in touch with friends, family, coworkers, customers, or clients (Will K. 2022). Through sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, social networking can serve a social, business, or both purposes. For marketers looking to engage customers, social networking is a valuable resource. As of December 31, 2021, Facebook is the largest and most popular social network, with 2.91 billion monthly users. 2021) (Meta Report). The next most popular social media platforms are Instagram, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, Pinterest, Reddit, and Snapchat. (Ceci L. 2022).

Websites that allow users to share information inside a certain group are known as social networking sites. It's a fantastic way to stay in touch and share images from your travels. (Awake, 2012 p.4). It consists of a profile for each user, social links, and a variety of other services. The following terms will be addressed in detail for a full analysis of social networking:
  1. Impact of Social Networking Site
  2. Features
  3. Social Networking and Education
  4. Constraints in Education

Impact of Social Networking Site
Online communities are developed through email and instant chat, where a gift economy and reciprocal altruism are encouraged through cooperation. Scholarly study is increasingly focusing on Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and other social networking applications. Scholars from a variety of professions have begun to look into the influence of social networking sites, namely how they may affect issues of identity, privacy, social interaction, youth culture, and education. Several websites are beginning to harness the philanthropic potential of the social networking concept. HCL

Technologies performed study in 2011 that revealed that 50% of British workers are prohibited from using social media during working hours. When chi-chatting, the content of the message, in this view, reveals a lot about the person. Comments, photographs, and status should speak less about an individual when talking. "You may keep a modicum of privacy on a social network provided you are careful of what you are doing," Kim concludes. (p.12 in Awake, 2012). Proverbs 10:19 says, "In the abundance of words, there will always be transgression, but the one who keeps his in control is operating discreetly."

It's a vortex that pulls you in and doesn't let you know you're trapped. Tim is a valuable commodity that can't afford to be squandered, as the Philippians advice: "Make certain of the more important things..." 'One of the ironies of the internet is that it keeps you distant from the most important things,' writes Dan Tap Scott in his book Grown up Digital. It's a terrific method to keep in touch with people, but you must know when to turn it off. Raquel came to the conclusion that when people use social media, they tend to lose their minds (Awake, 2012, p.7).

Social Network and Education
The emergence of social networking sites may also be having an effect on how students interact with technology in general. Prensky's (2021) distinction between "digital immigrants" and "digital natives" has long been seen as a fair representation of how easily people of a given age cohort, particularly those born before and after 1980, use technology.

Numerous researchers are interested in social networking and its applications in education. Social networking sites, like much else on the internet, are a changing target for researchers and policy makers, according to Living Stone and Brake (2021). 84 percent of American adults, according to recent trends, use social networks. According to a 2021 national survey, 82% of online teenagers use social media.

Constraints of Social Networking in Education
Social networking was once thought to be a distraction with no educational value. Blocking this social network served as a method of time management, bullying, and privacy protection for kids. TikTok, Instagram, and similar platforms are viewed by teachers and instructors in a learning environment as frivolous time wasters and distractions from academic work.

Social networking sites have raised concerns about cyber bullying. Online bullying comments were found to be sent to pupils in a study of people aged 9 to 19 and older. Many people believe that social networking widens the door to sexual predators because it frequently includes a lot of personal information that is broadcast publicly and is easy to share.
Despite this, 69 percent of kids who use social media and 85 percent of adults felt that people are generally kind to one another. According to the national school board organization, more than 50% of students who use social media chat about their schoolwork and over 60% discuss educational matters. However, virtually all school districts have tight policies prohibiting the use of social media during school hours.

Theoretical review of the study
This study's foundation is media theory since, according to (Ohaja 2003, p. 63-64), "knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. There is a body of theories in every discipline that explains observable facts in that area. The uses and gratifications philosophy was used to guide this project.According to a source referenced by Klapper (1963), the uses and gratifications theory primarily emphasizes how and why the public uses media (Haridakis& Hanson,2009 p.7). The primary question raised is "why do people use media, and what do they use them for," according to McQuail (2010) on page 423 of his exposition of the theory. He goes on to say that: Functionalist sociology, according to Wright (1974), saw the media as meeting a variety of societal needs, such as social control, cultural continuity, cohesion, and the wide dissemination of all forms of public information. This in turn assumes that people utilize media for other relevant objectives as well, such as self-direction, relaxation, adjustment, information, and identity development.

The Theory acknowledges and upholds the fact that audiences have a variety of demands that drive them to consume media or media material. The theory's basic tenet is that there are specific advantages that media message consumers expect to derive from every medium they choose to engage with. The audience tends to turn away from the very channel or content that does not satisfy them whenever the medium fails to provide the people with the aims, wants, and/or benefits they expect from the organ.

Once more, the theory might be seen as being extremely pertinent to this study, which examines why youth in the Enugu Metropolis utilize social media. This study therefore focuses on identifying the goals and advantages that new media supply for their consumers and that inevitably maintain their usage. It assumes that the public receives certain satisfactions from new media, without which their use would have declined. Because social media has been used for so long, it is clear that individuals who utilize it receive real value from it. The purpose of this study is to identify the advantages or satisfactions that the numerous student users of social media or new media in Enugu Metropolis receive from using these platforms. All media and/or its contents are intended to play specific functions for their users, much like all commercial commodities have specific needs that they satisfy for the consumers. If not, the audience may decide to discard the media itself or a piece of media material that tends not to promote "profitable consumption." In the context of this study, such lucrative consumption is referred to as the gratifications, purposes, benefits, or satisfactions that social media offer their users.

The main focus of the uses and gratifications theory is that the user or audience has a significant influence on the media or material they choose to consume, and this choice is influenced by the gratifications the media or content gives. The theoretical relevance of the uses and gratifications theory to this study has been established by the aforementioned reasoning.

Social Networking and Nigeria
In the area of information and communication, social networks are gaining popularity. Undoubtedly, it has changed how news is often gathered and disseminated, confirming what appears to be a paradigm shift away from print and broadcast media and toward the more effective and efficient buzz of the moment. Social networking was crucial to information and communication in Nigeria during the recent#EndSars protest, which happened about two years, a memorable event that will live on in our memories forever. Given that this nationwide protest began on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms before hitting almost all states in Nigeria and a threat to the Nigerian government, the role of social networks in this situation is quite overwhelming. The demonstration truly astounded everyone. It demonstrated how social networks are evolving into potent instruments for giving voice to common people and holding the government responsible.Contrary to most other news outlets, social networks allow for and depend on user feedback and participation, providing efficient communication that has undoubtedly gotten us this far and will, hopefully, help us on our road to the "New Nigeria."

Positive Influence of Social Media
(Dave Parrack, 2022), in agreeing with Oshenye's argument, outlined that social media have influenced Youths in many positive ways, these include helping them to start an online business, improved and faster communication, making and maintaining friendships, fostering empathy etc.

According to statistics available, it can be concluded that the majority of online writers are young people who want to express their own theories and points of view on a variety of societal and academic concerns (Okoro&Agbo, 2003). (Andrew, 2005) argues that social networking sites have given all young writers and bloggers the chance to connect with their tech-savvy clients in order to share their experience, expertise, and articles. This argument is made in support of Okoro and Agbo's viewpoint. It is abundantly obvious that social media still has a significant positive impact on Enugu youths despite its negative effects. In addition to serving as a social platform, it has had a big impact on how much Enugu Youths participate in politics daily. a place where ideas are quickly voiced.

The Negative Influence of Social Media
In addition to its many advantages, social media also has several drawbacks. According to a study conducted by the Cybersmile Foundation in June 2020, 89% of users between the ages of 16 and 24 believe that social media is harming their mental health. Similarly, (Oye, 2012) argues that rather than

using social networking sites for academic purposes, the majority of younger students utilize them primarily for socializing activities. Another study by Shana (2012) found that students use social networks primarily for conversing and creating friends. Only 26% of the respondents (students) indicated using social media for academic purposes, according to the results.

Methodology

Research Design
The research method adopted in this study is the survey research method. According to Shona McCombes.2022, survey is a research method which focuses on a getting information from a group of population by asking the population sample questions and analyzing their answers.In order to assess the study and provide an accurate and legitimate result, this research method entails the researchers going into the field to distribute structured copies of questionnaires to the respondents.

This research employed a descriptive research design. According to (Orji, 2020), descriptive research is concerned with the gathering, showing, analyzing, and interpreting of data in order to vividly describe the current circumstances, prevalent practical belief, attitude, and ongoing process.
The population of this research work consists the residents of Enugu Metropolis. According to the National Population Commission, the population census of Enugu Metropolis as at 2006 census is 722,664, this population according to National Bereau of Statistics has a 3% percent annual growth, therefore, the population of Enugu Metropolis in 2021 is 1,125,886.

The areas that we covered in Enugu metropolis include the following:
1. Enugu South Local Government
2. Enugu North Local Government
3. Enugu East Local Government

Research Sample
The sample size was determined using Morgan and Krejcie formula method, hence the population of the study is known. The formula for the determination of the sample size as given by Morgan and Krejcie (1970) is stated as shown below as

$$n = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{e^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

N = population size
e^2 = acceptable sampling error
P = proportion of population
X^2 = At 95% confidence level with degree of freedom 1 – chi-square (X^2)is 3.841
For the purpose of this study, N will equal to 1,125,886,e^2at 95% confidence level for margin of error is 0.05. p is 0.5 if unknown and x2 is 3.841. Therefore, the sample size of this research work will

be:

$$n = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{e^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$
$$n = \frac{3.841 \times 1,125,886 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{(0.05)^2 \times (1,125,886 – 1) + (3.841 \times 0.5 \times 0.5)}$$
$$n = \frac{10,811,320}{281,45 + 0.96025}$$

n = 10,811,320

28,146

n = 384

Sampling Technique

A sample size of 384 was drawn out of the population of 1,125,886. The systematic sampling technique was used to select a sample on the basis of equal representation from the respondents.

Measuring Instrument

In this study, the researchers used questionnaire as the research instrument. The researchers made series of visits to the respondents and confirmed certain understanding about their opinion regarding, the influence of social media messages on the voting/political behavior of youths.

Method of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary methods of data, collection were used in this study for gathering information. The primary method of data collection used for this research work is the questionnaire.

The secondary method of data collection used for this research work include the following:
1. Periodicals and Journals
2. Textbooks
3. Internet

Method of Data Analysis

In analyzing data collected, extensive use of tabular and percentage method will be paramount. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed with percentage. The hypotheses were tested by the used of chi-square formula.

Discussion of Findings

The summary of the result has been outlined below
1. The respondents between the ages of 18 – 25 were more
2. The majority of respondents were females
3. In qualifications, the majority of respondents were undergraduates
4. The single people were more than the married and divorced ones
5. Majority of the respondents resided in Enugu North local government area
6. Those that responded positively that they use social media were more than those that responded negatively.
7. Majority of the respondents are more exposed to Facebook
8. Majority of the respondents agreed that they always use social media
9. It has been observed from this study that majority of respondents are always online on social media on a typical day
10. According to observation by the researchers in this work, majority of respondents responded positively to the idea that they see political messages on social media.
11. A good number of people agree that they often see campaign messages on social media
12. A good number of people agreed that they pay attention to political messages to a very high extent.
13. A good number of respondents strongly agreed that social media contributed to their political awareness.
14. From the result, majority of respondents responded positively to the idea that they voted during the 2019 presidential election.

15. Majority of respondents strongly agreed that social media determined their choice of candidate and party during the last election.
16. It has been observed in this study that majority of the respondents agreed that social media messages are credible.

Summary of Findings

From this research, it can be deduced that the majority of respondents believe that social media messages influence the voting behavior of youths.

In essence, social media messages are powerful and are capable of influencing the voting behavior of youths. Politicians utilize social media platforms to disseminate political messages to youths in order to influence their voting behavior or create a connection between the political party or candidate and the youths.

It was also seen that social media political messages are credible. Social media political messages are cogent messages that explicitly influence the voting/political behavior of youths.

Conclusions

Social media political messages have powerful and positive influence on the voting behavior of youths. Social media influence youth participation in the 2019 residential electoral processes. Electoral processes. Political parties or candidates utilize social media as a veritable mobilization tool for electioneering. Social media messages are credible and contribute to powerful awareness.

Recommendations
1. The media should work harder to increase the adequacy of the content in powerful messages to achieve more positive influence.
2. The youths should develop empathy towards electoral process for the sustenance or sustainable development of democracy in the country.
3. The federal government and the media should work together to encourage youths of eligible age to participates in the electoral process and vote for candidates of their choice
4. All media type should work harder to ensure that there media message are credible.
5. Youths should utilize social media more and pay more attention to political messages when they come across it online.

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