

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AMONG RESIDENTS OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The emergence of social media has continued to change political activities across the world. Today, social media remains a strong political communication platform, giving political actors and their supporters the avenue to sell and promote themselves and their intentions to a wider audience with less stress. Therefore, this study set out to examine the importance and challenges of the use of social media for political campaigns among residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The research utilised the Technological Determinism Theory. The study collected data from 300 respondents through the questionnaire. The study found that Facebook is the most used social media platform for political engagement among the respondents. Findings equally indicated that through social media platforms, electorates get quick updates regarding policy positions from political actors and key players like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Further, the audience can create and share their views and opinions on political campaign issues concerning aspirants, candidates and political institutions like INEC through social media. In addition, social media remains a susceptible communication platform for political hate speeches, a breeding ground for attacks on candidates, aspirants, their supporters and political parties as well as their views on issues. It concluded that, though social media presents some challenges of misinformation during political campaigns, it has proven to be a useful tool in political activities. The study recommended, among others, that the government in Nigeria needs to reassess its media laws and policies to accommodate the peculiarities of new communication platforms like social media. If this is done, Nigeria's democracy will benefit more from the advantages of social media in democratic engagements.

Keywords: Challenges, Importance, Political Campaign, Social Media, Uses

Introduction

Political activities and the mass media remain inseparable. The media depends on political events; likewise, political actors and players continually rely on the media to reach out to voters. One of the primary functions of the mass media is to disseminate political information with the aim that members of the public will be enlightened and educated on different political issues in society (Amenyeawu, 2021). Interestingly, the emergence of social media has continued to widen the scope of political communication. Udanor (2016) argues that social media, presently, serves as a strong political

communication tool, providing a platform for more awareness concerning political activities, good political advertising, debate and mobilisation platform, thereby equipping the citizens with political information concerning different aspirants, candidates and political parties. Odon (2024) affirms that social media communication innovation has changed political communication narratives globally, and Nigeria is not an exception. Okon, Ojedo and Owolabi (2025) further aver that for more than a decade now, social media has altered political communication systems in different

countries. People have leveraged social media networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, X, YouTube, and TikTok to become political informants and sources of political news, which the mainstream media failed to report. This implies that social media allows for a participatory and interactive method of communication, enabling users to generate and disseminate political content.

In Nigeria, for instance, since 2015, the impact of social media on Nigerian political communication has been tremendous (Odon, 2024). Platforms, such as X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, among others, have become powerful political communication platforms, especially for political aspirants, candidates, political parties and political party supporters (Okoro & Santas, 2017; Okon et al, 2025; Odon, 2024). Presently, social media is used to spread and disseminate information; engage with the electorate, and shape public opinion. In recent years, Nigerian politicians and their various political parties have increasingly recognised the potential of social media as a means to connect with voters.

Existing literature in Nigeria and outside Nigeria has demonstrated that scholars have conducted studies on the application of social media for political campaigns (Akporue & Efedeh, 2025; Bassey, 2025; Adams et al, n.d; Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Alen, 2019; Radhakrishna, 2018; Ololade, 2024; Amenyewu, 2021; Odon, 2024; Okon, Ojedor & Owolabi, 2025). For instance, the crux of Akporue and Efedeh (2025) and Okon et al (2025) studies was on the use of social media and political involvement as it relates to the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. That of Amenyewu (2021) focused on the employment of social media for political campaigns in Ghana. Also, Odoh (2024) studied the influence of social media on electioneering processes and voter

attitudes in Nigeria. While Alen (2019) examined the application of social media in political campaigns in Croatian local elections. However, the importance and challenges of the use of social media for political campaigns among residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria will further add to the discourse on social media and political campaigns. This is the focus of this study.

Objectives of the Study

1. Find out the most used social media platforms for political campaigns among the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.
2. Assess the degree of social media application for political campaigns among the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.
3. Examine the importance of social media for political campaigns among the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.
4. Find out the challenges associated with the use of social media for political campaigns among the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Social Media

Social media are communication and networking tools such as Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, among others (Odiboh et al, 2022). These social networking sites allow people to form groups with a view to creating and sharing messages, ideas, and content within virtual space (Busl et al, 2021). Edem, Usiere and Obot (2024) opine that social media are digital communication applications that give power to people and establishments to create, disseminate messages aimed at influencing others. These digital platforms provide users with the means to connect, communicate, and engage

with others, facilitating the formation of networks and relationships grounded in shared interests, activities, or personal connections. Therefore, in the context of this investigation, social media refers to platforms used for political campaigns by political actors, their parties, supporters and political institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Political Communication

Political communication is the use of various media platforms by politicians, their parties and supporters with the intention to shape public thinking to align with theirs. Agudosi (2007), as cited in Okoro and Santas (2017), defines political communication as the circulation of messages that have to do with how a political system functions, with the aim of influencing the behaviour of the audience. It deals with the engagement of the public by politicians and the use of various types of mass media to disseminate political agenda. Graber and Smith (2005), also cited in Okoro and Santas (2017), further explains that political communication concerns the sending and exchange of political messages by those who are involved in politics. Rush and Althoff, (1972), as cited in Bassey (2025), conceptualise political communication as the process through which politically-relevant information is transmitted within the political system and between the social and political systems. It involves a continuous exchange of information across various levels of society, encompassing not only the expression of citizens' views and desires but also the means by which those in power convey their perspectives and proposals to society. Furthermore, it encompasses the society's reactions to these views and proposals in the contemporary Nigerian political landscape. The emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have revolutionised political communication.

Review of Empirical Studies

The emergence of social media interactive communication platforms such as Facebook, X, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, YouTube, and the like has brought a new dimension to political campaigns, especially in democratic countries. Asemah and Edegoh (2012), cited in Okon et al (2025), contend that politicians, political parties and party faithful have taken advantage of different social media networking sites to form groups and reach out to the electorate, disseminate their campaign strategies, party ideologies and manifestoes at a quicker and faster rate. Inyang et al. (2021), cited in Okon et al (2025), concur that social communication tools continue to impact the political campaign landscape in Nigeria and elsewhere. Citizens use social media to air their views on political campaign matters, and also, political actors deploy social media to woo voters. This is in tandem with the position of a study by Bassey (2025), which established that social networking platforms create avenue for interactive discussion between politicians and their followers; stressing that social media generates new and evolving ideas, imagery, trends, and distinctiveness, all of which possess potency and are easily mobilised and demobilised. Okoro and Santas (2017) affirm that social media allows people to voice out their perceptions and opinions on political issues, giving them the opportunity to discuss and take part in political activities. Nevertheless, Udanor et al (2016) argue that in spite of the positives that social media has brought to the domain of political communication, it has also been utilised to disseminate unsubstantiated information about political opponents.

Furthermore, Amenyeawu (2021) assesses the use of social media for political campaign engagement in Ghana. The study adopts the document review research strategy and is anchored on the participatory democratic theory. Finding of the study indicates that it

remains an effective political communication platform in the Ghanaian political landscape. Social media has proven to be a strong political tool for dialogue between and among political stakeholders. Also, social media is an important political discussion tool among the youth. The study concludes that the application of social media has yielded desired results of wider coverage and electoral engagement. The study suggests the need for maximum utilisation of social media by politicians and their supporters due to the huge benefits that social media presents in terms of political activities.

Alen (2019) explores the utilisation of social media for political campaigns in Croatia. The study focuses on the extent to which Facebook is used by Croatian political candidates during the 2017 local elections. Content analysis research design is used. The investigation finds that political candidates, party faithful and political parties used Facebook for their political engagements. Moreover, political candidates in the 2017 election applied social media in different ways with the aim of encouraging citizens to take part in the discussion. The study concludes that social media networking sites are exceptional platforms to spot new political developments and strengthen democratic practices. Dimitrova and Matthes (2018) further affirm in a study on the deployment of social media for political campaigns across the globe, specifically on the approaches used and the challenges encountered, that presently, political campaigning is closely tied to the content, uses, and effects of social media. The study highlighted the setbacks with the use of social media in political campaigning to include hate speech, attacks on candidates, their supporters and parties, as well as the spreading of fake political information.

In addition, the crux of Adams et al's (n.d) research is on the importance of social media

in political discussion, awareness creation and better conduct of elections. Social Media Engagement Theory is used to further explain the thrust of the investigation. The study collects data from the extant literature. Finding indicates that social media has created an avenue for messages concerning political activities, the system, mobilisation and involvement of citizens in political development. The result of the study further establishes that social media is also being used to truncate political processes through the spread of fake and unfounded information about politicians and their followers. The study concludes that social networking platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, X, among others, have given the public avenues to take part in political and other government activities. The study, therefore, advocates for the responsible use of social media by politicians and their supporters, as well as regulations by the government.

Odon (2024) investigates the influence of social media platforms on electioneering and electorate behaviour in Nigeria. The content analysis study establishes that though social media has become useful in political campaigns, it is challenged by disinformation and misinformation. The study, thus, suggests that to effectively utilise social media in election activities in Nigeria, there is a need for political stakeholders across the board to take proactive measures to harness the advantages of social media at the same time mitigating its negative effects. To achieve this, digital literacy becomes important as this will deepen critical thinking skills among citizens so that they can be able to discern credible information from misinformation on social media platforms.

Theoretical Framework

The Theoretical Framework for this study draws upon the Technological Determinism Theory, as developed by Marshall McLuhan

in 1964. McLuhan, a Canadian communication scholar specialising in new media technologies, posited that technological advancements in communication would play a pivotal role in shaping social changes, ultimately leading to the global interconnectedness of the world. He contended that developments and diffusion of technology inherently influence socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations.

At the core of the Technological Determinism Theory is the notion that technology exerts a profound influence on how people think, how societies are structured, and the nature of culture that emerges. In the context of this study, the theory suggests that the emergence of the internet, along with its widespread adoption and relevance in mobilising people for political activities, is bound to have a significant impact on the electoral process and the broader political landscape.

Central to this theory is the role of communication technologies. It posits that changes in society are primarily driven by technological innovations. This perspective interprets technology, particularly communication technologies, as the foundational force shaping society's past, present, and future Chandler, (1995). Importantly, in the realm of communication, we are witnessing a world without boundaries, where technology has revolutionised the way people interact and share information (Kirvan, Awati & Pratt, 2025).

Technological determinism encompasses two main perspectives. The first perspective suggests that technology, particularly machines and their development, is the primary driver of historical, economic, political, and cultural changes. In this view, technology is seen as a force that shapes society, often beyond the control of individuals Baran, (2004).

The second perspective on technological determinism, however, presents technology as more neutral and emphasises that its significance is derived from how people choose to utilise it. This perspective acknowledges that technology is just one of several factors influencing historical, economic, political, and cultural changes. Ultimately, it asserts that technology's impact depends on how individuals and cultures wield it Baran, (2004).

The choice between these two perspectives raises a critical question: Are individuals and societies powerless in the face of technological advancements, as the first perspective implies, or do they have agency in determining the impact of technology, as the second perspective suggests? If technology is viewed as an uncontrollable force, individuals and cultures may feel limited in their ability to shape their destiny. However, if technology is seen as neutral, it empowers individuals and societies to use it responsibly and purposefully to construct and maintain the cultural values they desire.

In the context of this study, the Technological Determinism Theory assumes that while technology plays a significant role in shaping the use of social media, other countervailing factors also influence and restrain its effects. Thus, the second perspective of this theory, which posits that the impact of technology depends on how it is harnessed by individuals and cultures, appears to be more appropriate. This perspective underscores the importance of responsible and thoughtful utilisation of technology, especially social media, in political campaigns and its potential to either enhance or diminish the image and reputation of political candidates, aspirants, parties, supporters and electoral organisations like INEC.

Examples can be found in the use of social media during the 2015, 2019 and 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria. Various social media platforms were employed to convey

campaign messages to the electorate, but not all of these messages were aimed at fostering goodwill for the candidates, aspirants, parties, supporters and electoral organisations like INEC. Some messages sought to attack the personalities of politicians, electoral bodies, political parties and their supporters. This situation aligns with the second perspective of the Technological Determinism Theory, emphasising the role of users and their choices in shaping the impact of technology, in this case, social media, on political campaigns. The Technological Determinism Theory, particularly its second perspective, serves as a valuable framework for understanding the influence of technology, specifically social media, on political campaigns. It highlights the dynamic interplay between technology, users, and the broader socio-political environment, shedding light on how technology can be harnessed to either positively or negatively political campaign.

Methodology

The study employed the survey research approach. This research design method was adopted due to the arguments put forward by scholars such as Creswell and Creswell (2018), who emphasise the value and importance of survey when they note that survey is probably one of the best research methods available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population too large to be observed directly. The population of the study consisted of residents of the six Area Councils of Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Data obtained from Macrotrends (2025) indicated that Abuja Municipal Area Council has an estimated population of 1, 693, 400. That of Bwari Area Council is 500, 100, Gwagwalada Area

Data Presentation

Council is 346, 000. Kuje has 212, 100, Kwali 188, 000, Abaji 127, 900. Therefore, the total population is 1,537, 500. From the total population, the researcher made use of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to collect data from only social media users. A sample size of 384 was used, which was determined through Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table method of getting sample size. 64 copies of questionnaire was distributed in each Are Council.

Furthermore, the first draft of the questionnaire was face validated by the researcher who, after personal scrutiny, made comments and observations after which the questionnaire was subjected to two other research experts, who equally vetted to modify the instrument before it was administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established through the test-retest method using sub-scale of 20, and after an interval of two weeks, it was re-administered to people who have knowledge of social media and political advertising. The administration of the research instrument was done on a face-to-face basis by the researcher and three trained researcher assistants. The justification for the adoption of the direct method of data collection was that such a technique ensured a high return rate of the questionnaire administered as well and waiting for the respondents to send their responses was avoided in this form of data collection. The collection of data took three weeks. Data were presented and evaluated through the application of frequency distributions, percentage tables and charts, as well as mean deviation on a measuring scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagree (SA) and Disagree (D). Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis.

The study distributed 384 copies of the questionnaire to respondents, of which 283 were returned and found useful for analysis. The percentage representation of this is as shown in Figure 1.

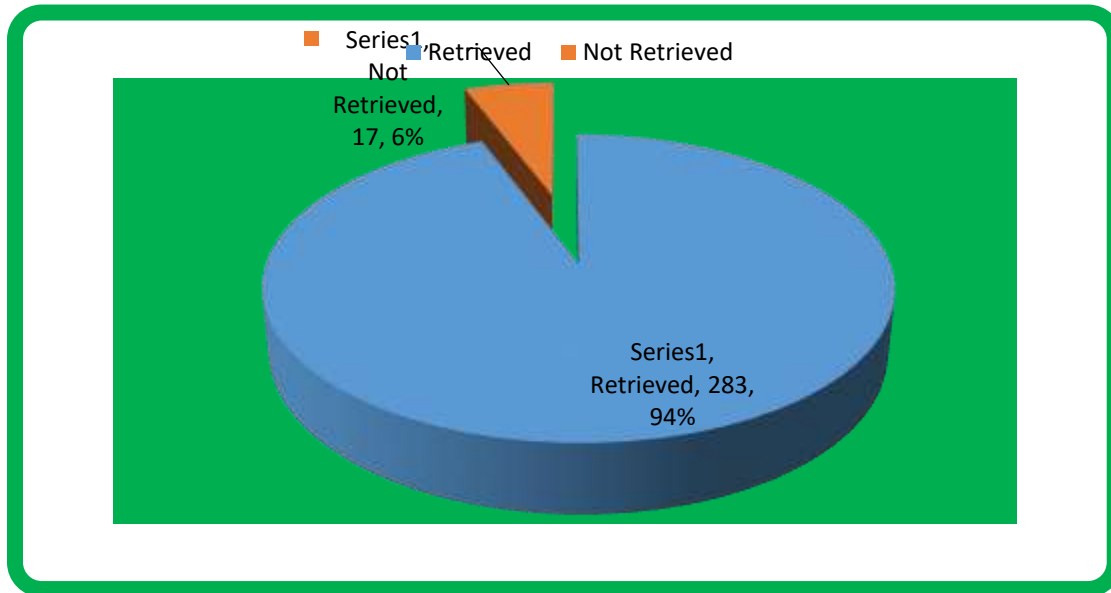


Figure 1: Response Rate

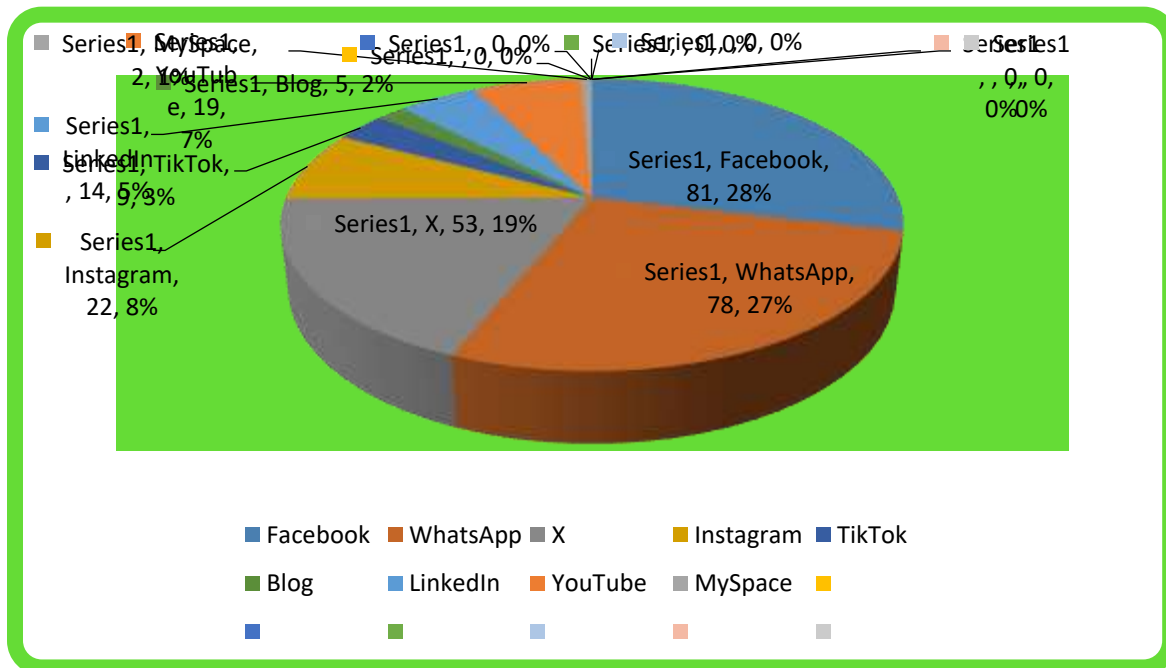


Figure 2: Respondents' most Used Social Media platforms for Political Campaign

The result in Figure 2 shows that Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram are the most frequently used social media platforms with Facebook leading. Facebook being most used is not surprising due to the fact it has been a major social media platform among Nigerians.

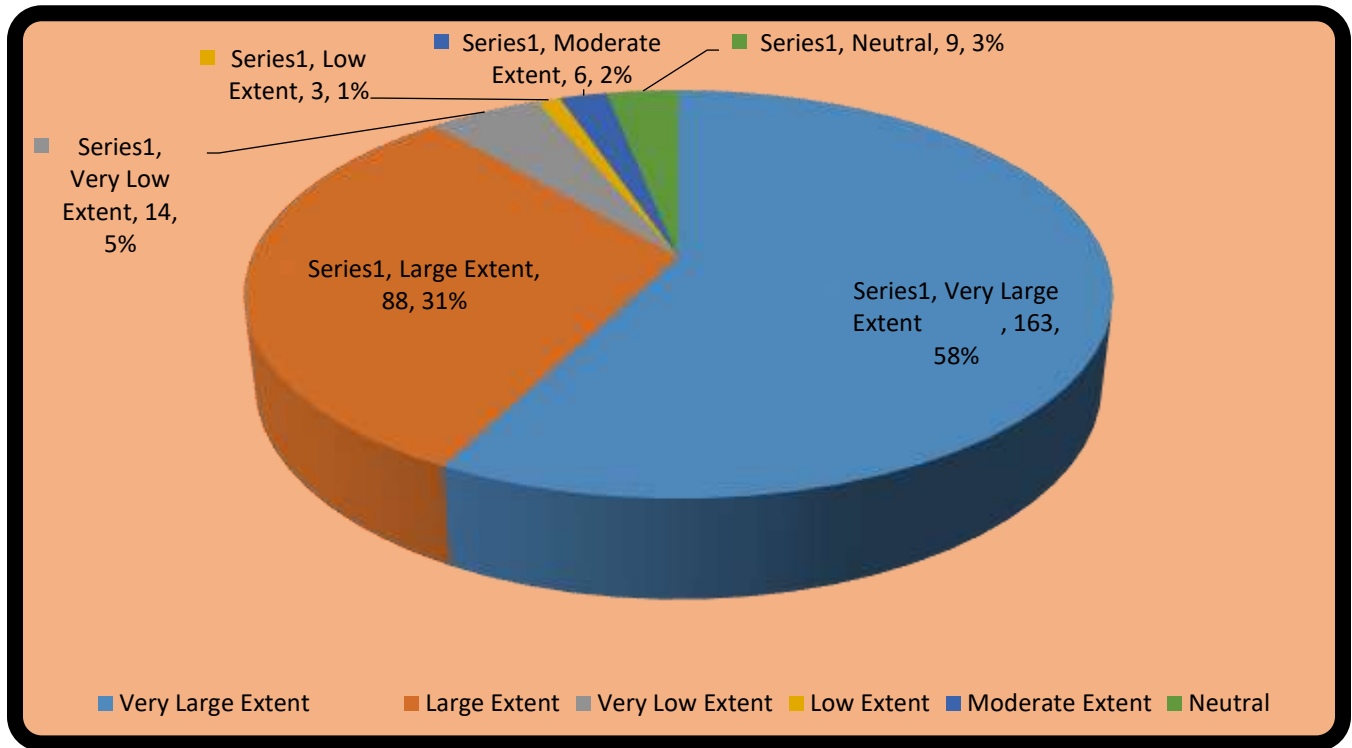


Figure 3: Respondents' Extent of Social Media Application for Political Campaign

The data regarding the extent of usage underscores the important role that of social media in daily interaction, conversation and circulation of messages, reinforcing its value in modern political communication dynamics.

Table 1: Importance of Social Media Use for Political Campaign

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Social media platforms allow political campaign messages to get to a large and wider population at a faster rate	191	77	7	3	5	283	4.5	Accepted
Through social media platforms, electorates get quick updates regarding policy positions from political actors and key players like Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	155	117	11	0	0	283	4.5	Accepted
Audience can create and share their views and opinions on political campaign issues concerning aspirants, candidates and political institution like INEC through the social media	229	50	4	0	0	283	4.7	Accepted
Social media paves way for mobilising people to support a particular candidate, political party or a political campaign message	197	86	0	0	0	283	4.6	Accepted
Social media tools give the opportunity for a two-way communication method during political campaign activities	192	91	0	0	0	283	4.6	Accepted
Political campaign messages on social media can specifically target a demographic like youth, women etc	201	75	7	0	0	283	4.6	Accepted
Use of social media for political campaign is more cost-effective compare to the use of conventional media	234	33	16	0	0	283	4.7	Accepted
It allows for quick fundraising to support a particular candidate, his or her political party compare to traditional media	222	61	0	0	0	283	4.7	Accepted

Social media is a good platform for monitoring and gauging of public opinion regarding political campaign as well as tracking of the effectiveness of a campaign message	165	95	23	0	0	283	4.5	Accepted
Social media provides the avenue to quickly counter a misleading message disseminated by a political opponent, allowing politicians, their supporters and political parties to control negative comments about them as well as shape public perception	66	217	0	0	0	283	4.2	Accepted

The data suggest that social media has become an important political communication tool not only to political aspirants and candidates but to election campaign organisers and moderators like INEC.

Table 2: Challenges Associated with Political Campaigns on Social Media

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Through social media, a political candidate or aspirant and his supporters can spread false and misleading messages about other candidates and aspirants	191	77	7	3	5	283	4.5	Accepted
Social media remains a susceptible communication platform for political hate speeches, a breeding ground for attacks on candidates, aspirants, their supporters and political parties, as well as their views on issues	155	117	11	0	0	283	4.5	Accepted
Social media creates an avenue for echo chambers, where social media users tend to follow and engage with messages that resonate with their existing attitudes and beliefs, potentially limiting exposure to opposing viewpoints	229	50	4	0	0	283	4.7	Accepted

It is implied by the data in Table 2 that even though social media is significant to political campaigns, it has been flooded with misleading information concerning political aspirants, candidates, political parties and supporters.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study indicates that Facebook is the most-used social media platform for political campaigns, followed by WhatsApp and X. This prevalence emphasises the dominance of these platforms in facilitating social interaction and information exchange, particularly in the context of political engagement and discourse (Figure 2). The data of the study further revealed that the respondents use social media frequently for political campaign discourse (Figure 3). The finding here is in tandem with the position of Okon, Ojedor and Owolabi (2025), who opine that social media are certainly part of people's daily lives, and they have become vital in political debate among Nigerians. The finding thus infers a broader trend in the deployment of social media for political campaigning, where communication is increasingly employed to maximise reach and effectiveness.

The study, in addition, shows that social media platforms allow political campaign messages to get to a larger and wider population at a faster rate. Likewise, through social media platforms, electorates get quick updates regarding policy positions from political actors and key players like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Similarly, the audience can create and share their views and opinions on political campaign issues concerning aspirants, candidates and political institutions like INEC through social media. In the same vein, social media paves the way for mobilising people to support a particular candidate, political party or a political campaign message. Equally, social media

platforms allow a two-way communication method during political campaign activities. In the same vein, political campaign messages on social media can specifically target a demographic like youth, women, etc, and the use of social media for political campaigns is more cost-effective compared to the use of conventional media.

Moreover, social media allows for quick fundraising to support a particular candidate, his or her political party, compared to traditional media; and social media is a good platform for monitoring and gauging public opinion regarding a political campaign as well as tracking the effectiveness of a campaign message. Additionally, social media provides the avenue to quickly counter a misleading message disseminated by a political opponent, allowing politicians, their supporters and political parties to control negative comments about them as well as shape public perception. The finding thus implies that social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp today have become more vibrant, dynamic and people-centric, in order to facilitate people to communicate well across borders, including political campaign-related issues. The finding agrees with the study of Odon (2024), which found that social media has become helpful in political campaigns. The findings here also align with the Technological Determinism Theory, which states that the emergence of the Internet and its subsidiaries like social media, along with its widespread adoption and relevance in mobilising people for political activities, is bound to have a significant impact on political campaign activities.

The findings of the study, in addition, reveal the issues that are associated with the use of social media for political campaigns. This indicates that through social media, a political candidate or aspirant and his supporters can spread false and misleading messages about other candidates and aspirants. Also, social media remains a susceptible communication platform for political hate speeches, a breeding ground for attacks on candidates, aspirants, their supporters and political parties as well as their views on issues. Lastly, social media creates an avenue for echo chambers, where social media users tend to follow and engage with messages that resonate with their existing attitudes and beliefs, potentially limiting exposure to opposing viewpoints. In consonance with the result of this study is that of Udanor et al (2016), who state that in spite of the positives that social media has brought to the domain of political communication, it has also been used to spread unconfirmed information about political opponents.

Conclusion

The focus of the study has been on the Importance and challenges of the use of social media for political campaigns among residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. From the findings, the study therefore concludes that though social media presents some challenges of misinformation and hate speech during political campaigns, it has proven to be a useful tool in political campaign activities. Political campaign on social media reaches a large audience, provide an avenue to get political messages

fast, and voters and political actors can create and share their opinions on social media.

Recommendations

To ensure proper use of social media for a political campaign, the research put forward the following suggestions:

1. The Nigerian government should ensure laws and regulations concerning the spreading of misleading political messages about aspirants, candidates, political parties, supporters and institutions like INEC are strengthened and strictly adhered to. Those who go against such laws should be made to face the repercussions.
2. Furthermore, political actors and players, as well as party followers and political parties, should be cautioned by the relevant agencies of government against the misuse of social media during political campaign activities.
3. There is also the need for the government, through its relevant agencies and ministries like Ministry of Information and the National Orientation Agency, civil society organisations and other institutions and organisations that support democracy in Nigeria to constantly educate members of the public on the proper use of social media networking sites for political purposes.

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