

Use of Social Media for Political Campaigns during the 2020 Gubernatorial Elections in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper is an examination of the use of social media for political campaigns during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo state. The rationale for the study was to determine the extent to which social media channels were used for political campaign and how it affected the electorate's choice of candidates during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State. Theory used to support this research work was the technological determinism theory. The researchers used the survey method and the instrument of data collected was the questionnaire. Findings showed that the electorate were exposed to political campaigns messages on different social media platforms like the Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube. The most used channel for accessing political campaigns messages was the Facebook. Findings also showed that over 60% of the respondents were influenced by the campaign messages from the two main political parties (APC and PDP). The researchers recommended that candidates should learn to keep the electorate who voted them into power abreast of the fulfillment of their promises made during campaigns using the social media platforms.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Campaigns, Elections, Electorate, Political Parties

Introduction

The role of social media in the political sphere and society at large cannot be overemphasised. Barnes (2008) asserts that social media are applications that enable people interact with each other and build social networks that increase social capital. By this claim, all areas of human existence have been doted by high impact of social media which have taken a centre stage in the Nigerian political sphere. In the turn of the 21st century, the influence of information and communication technology had by extension, pushed boundaries by the media in reshaping democracy as well as political participation by citizens due to its seemingly pervasiveness. Comm (2010) describes how social media have helped publishers to contribute their messages to thousands of people encouraging them to build a strong connection of theme loyalty. This is what makes the social media one of the appropriate media for politicians to campaign for votes from the electorate. Tayo, Adebayo & Yahya (2019) listed the most used social media platforms in Nigeria as Facebook,

WhatsApp, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, LinkedIn and Google plus. With this knowledge, electoral candidates realise that a campaign cannot be effective and productive without the involvement of social media and its different platforms. Over the years, political campaigns in Edo state has been restricted to print media, advertising and broadcasting, which can be seen as money and time consuming, but the involvement of social media will make it easy for candidates to compete for votes from the electorate.

There is no better explanation of the use of social media for political campaign than that of the 2011 general elections where social media/new media technologies like Facebook, blogs, LinkedIn and other social networks were used to seek for votes from the electorate. Ugboaja (2020) posits that Jonathan had on Wednesday, September 15, 2010 informed his 217,000 fans on the world's most popular networking platform-Facebook on his intent; 24 hours later, 4000 more fans joined his Facebook page and by the day of the election, on April 16, 2011 he had over half a million followers. Social media have become a new and better means of political participation, political communication on political campaign and it is on this premise that the study was conducted to determine the use of social media for political campaign during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The emergence of the social media has brought about better and improved ways of reaching more people during political campaigns. The social media are known for their versatility with the advantages of connectivity, getting information and updates at your fingertips, the ability to share almost anything online and building communities. Okoro & Nwafor (2013) wrote a paper on social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: the lapses and the lesson. The paper focused on how the social media platforms contributed a great deal to the elections and how it was used for political participation generally in Nigeria. Kasirye (2021) wrote a paper on using social media for political campaign, communication and its impacts on political polarisation among youth in Uganda. The paper focused on the different type of social media platforms which were often used and the level of social media usage for political communication and political polarisation amongst youth in Uganda. None of these studies examined the use of social media for political campaign in Edo state. During the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State, different social media platforms were used for the campaign and it is on this note that this study sought to investigate the different types of social media used for political campaigns during the 2020 gubernatorial elections and the extent to which the usage of social media for political campaigns determined the choice of candidates among the electorate.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the extent to which social media were used for political campaigns during the 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo state.

2. Ascertain the social media channels mostly used for political campaigns during the 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo state.
3. Determine the extent to which the use of social media for political campaigns influenced the choice of candidates

Conceptual Review

Kaplan & Haenlien (2010) defined social media as a group of internet-based applications to build on the ideological and technical conditions of web 2.0 and that allow the creation of an exchange of user-generated content. Drury (2008) asserts that social media encompass the busy characteristics of the media and users of the media. In the same line of thought, these online resources enable people, groups and organisations to share content, including videos, photos, images, texts, new ideas, insights, humours, opinions and gossips. They facilitate social interactions and enable development and fusion of information (Kavanaugh, Fox, Sheetz, Yang, Li, Shoemaker & Xie (2012). Chan-Olmsted, Cho & Lee (2013) citing Mayfield observed that participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness are the five distinguish features of social media. Neelamalar & Chitra (2009) classify them into features. Taprial & Kanwar (2012) identified the property of social media as accessibility, interactivity, longevity/volatility, speed and reach.

On the other hand, political campaign is sometimes referred to as electoral campaigns. Electoral campaign is an organised effort which seeks to influence the choice of the electorate during an election. Norris (2000) identifies three types of campaigns; namely: pre-modern, the modern and postmodern. The impact which social media has brought to politics cannot be ignored. Politics are the activities associated with governance of a country. Adibe & Odoemelam (2012) observed that the new media of communication have in no small major helped human society to be aware of each other. With the advent of social media, politicians can easily appeal to citizens and that gives them advantage of keeping in constant contact with the electorate.

Asemah (2017) carried out a study titled use of social media in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. The aim of the study was to investigate the extent to which the different social networking sites were used for political campaign during the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria and also, the political parties that mostly used them. The researcher adopted the survey method, using questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The findings showed that the social networking sites were used to a great extent and that social media contributed to the choice of candidates during the 2015 presidential elections. Obono (2016) conducted a study on the architecture and use of social media in the 2015 Nigerian general elections. The essence of the study was to determine the socio-technological structures that permitted social media use in 2015 elections. The findings showed that the emergence of social media has transformed communicative events and activities. They have revolutionised the political environment based on new communication technologies, evolving technological architecture and human technical competencies. Kasirye (2021) carried out a research on the use of social media for political campaigns and communication and its impact on political polarisation among youth in Uganda. The study sought to

determine the social media platforms mostly used during the elections, level of polarisation and political campaign communication among youth of Uganda. The researcher gathered that youth of Uganda usually make use of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram while looking for political-related information and as a result, they become polarised because of the information the politicians feed them with.

This research work is anchored on technological determinism theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan in (1962).The major assumptions of this theory is the media technologies shape how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act and how society operates as we move from one technological age to another. Asemah, Nwammo & Nkwawuoma (2017) observed that technology has the ability to drive human interaction and create social change and this concept focuses on the effects and impacts that ICTs have on users, organisations and society. This theory explains how the usage of these new technologies /social media platforms could affect our decisions. Thus, political parties in Edo State could make use of it to influence the choices of the electorate during the election.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the survey research design. Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo & Okpanachi (2022) described survey as a process of searching for something or verifiable responses gained through questionnaire. The researchers used the survey design because it can be used to make assertion about large populations and can also be used in generalising sampled opinions about human behaviours. The population of registered voters in Edo State during the 2020 gubernatorial elections was 2,210,534 (INEC 2020). To get the total number of registered voters in Benin City, the researchers summed up the total number of registered voters in Oredo LGA, Egor LGA and Ikopa-Okha which was 1,839,882 voters. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination which says that once your population is one million and above, you simply adopt 384 as your sample size, the researchers arrived at a sample size of 384 (Asemah *et al* 2022).The researchers used the quota and simple random sampling techniques to arrive at the selection of respondents from the 3 LGAs in Benin quota sampling was used to get 128 respondents from each of the 3 LGAs, while simple random sampling was used to select the respondents

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Responses on the Extent of Exposure to Political Campaigns via Social Media during the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Edo State

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	94	26.86%
High	69	48.28%
Can't tell	12	3.43%
Low	49	14%
Very low	26	7.43%
Total	350	100%

The implication of the data in table I is that majority of the voters had access to campaign messages on social media channels during the 2020 election campaigns in Edo State.

Table 2: Responses on the Social Media Channels used in accessing Political Campaign Messages during the 2020 Gubernatorial Elections in Edo State

Social Media Channels	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	179	51.14%
Twitter	71	20.29%
YouTube	22	6.29%
WhatsApp	37	10.57%
Instagram	9	2.57%
Snapchat	5	1.42%
TikTok	13	3.71%
LinkIn	8	2.29%
Pinterest	4	1.14%
Others	2	0.57%
Total	350	100%

The implication of the data in the above table is that the electorate used the Facebook channel more than any other channel to access political campaigns messages during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State.

Table 3: Responses to the Political Party that mostly used Social Media for Political Campaign during the Gubernatorial Elections in Edo State

Political Parties	Frequency	Percentage
PDP	205	58.57%
APC	129	36.86%
Others	16	4.57%
Total	350	100%

The data in table 3 showed that the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) really got a lot of attention from the electorate through their campaigns on the Facebook channel.

Table 4: Perception of Social Media Campaigns during the 2020 Gubernatorial Elections in Edo State

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	105	30%
Effective	192	54.86%
Can’t tell	26	7.42%
Less effective	17	4.86%
Not effective	10	2.86%
Total	350	100%

The data in table 4 showed that social media campaigns were effective. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents answered to that effect.

Table 5: Extent to which the Campaigns influence the Choice of Candidates

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very great	102	29.14%
Great	153	43.71%
Can't tell	59	16.86%
Low	14	4%
Very low	22	6.29%
Total	350	100%

The data in table 5 showed that the campaign messages greatly influenced the choice of candidates.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study have clearly shown that social media have a vital role to play in political campaigns and the importance of the social media as tools for carrying out political campaigns cannot be underestimated. This is in line with the works of Obono (2016) and Kasirye (2021) who found that social media channels were used to a large extent for carrying out political campaigns messages. These new media helped in shaping the way the electorate act and this strengthens the assumptions of the technological determinism theory as technology determines the way we feel, think and act. The data in table a greater percentage of the respondents (60%) were exposed to political campaigns messages via the social media during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo state. This high level of exposure to different social media channels, may perhaps, make the messages to positively affect the electorate.

Findings from table 2 showed that the social media channels used by voters to access political campaign messages were Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkIn, Pinterest and others of which Facebook had 51.14% making it the most used social media channel to accessed political campaigns during the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo state. This findings tandem with the position of Edegoh & Asemah (2014) which reported that the most viewed social media by students of privately owned universities in Anambara State is Facebook.

The findings further showed that the political party that mostly used social media for political campaigns during the election was the PDP with an above average of 58.57%. The APC had a respondent of 36.86% and other political parties in the state had 4.57% respondents which by implication, meant that a lot of campaign activities were carried out by the two popular political parties (APC& PDP) and most of it were recognised by the respondents of PDP. The data from table 3 also implied that PDP and APC were the leading political parties in Edo state which carried out social media campaigns. Findings further revealed that 54.86% of respondents viewed social media campaigns as effective and 30% saw it as a very effective tool for political campaign during the elections. This translates to the social media being an effective channel through which campaign messages were sent out to electorate and also a good media which voters sought for information concerning elections just as Kasirye (2021) rightly posits. Findings showed that over 60% of the electorate through the messages on social media were influenced to voting candidates of their choice.

Conclusion

Findings from the study showed that Facebook was the most used social media channel to access political campaigns messages and the electorate were influenced by the campaign messages put up on social media by the candidates. Based on the conclusion, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Other candidates and political parties should grab the opportunities of other social media channels as they present themselves in other to be able to compete with the two leading political parties during their campaign activities
2. Political parties and their candidates should use more of other social media channels in other to reach out to more electorate and put in a place the facilities needed for easy access of network in remote areas.

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