

Chapter 5

Social Media and Nigeria's Politics

Silas Udenze

University of Abuja, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The robust contributions of social media to Nigeria's politics cannot be underestimated. The increase in the informal flow of information on social media has reduced the existing gap between leaders and the electorate. This chapter analyzes the effect of social media in a democratic society like Nigeria. It explains the importance of social media in politics and the inherent issues in its adoption in the Nigeria experience. Existing research on social media and politics tend to focus on finding out how social media has marred Nigeria's politics. However, there is little evidence of scholars' presenting robust findings of the impact of social media on presenting a robust framework landscape. Consequently, the chapter provides insights on how social media has impacted Nigeria's politics. Furthermore, it critically analyzes and dissects the synergy between social media and politics, democracy, political mobilization, political education, and political advertising.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made a considerable impact on our daily lives, such as business and politics. The increased use of social media is one of the fallouts in advances in ICT. Social media sites like *Facebook, Instagram, Twitter* and *YouTube* have been described as platforms that allow users to create web profiles for secure communication (Boulianne, 2015). Social media are used in diverse fields such as political communication, advertising,

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public relations and strategic communications (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). Social media have become part of daily life, especially among youths (Gbue, 2014). Nigeria has more than 73 million people actively engaged online. She also comes eight on the world ranking of countries that go online (Jaja, Badey & Brown 2015). These statistics point to the tremendous potential skilful use of social media may have on democracy. Winner (2003) asserts that the Internet may revive democratic processes and empower some individuals to command more political and economic power.

Some scholars have established relationships between social media and politics (Fountaine, 2017; Borah, 2016; David, Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Koppel, & Uzan, 2016). These suggest that deploying social media, specifically into politics, can positively influence political participation (Segesten & Bossetta, 2017; Dungse, Mato, Makinde & Chidozie 2018). Social media have evolved a different type of political processing and campaigning, referred to as digital political campaigns. This requires the political candidates to use social media platforms to connect with the electorate to influence them and society (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). Studies show that social media are now adopted in politics to communicate diverse campaign messages to different people (Borah, 2016; David, Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Koppel, & Uzan, 2016; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012; Williams & Gulati, 2013; Grow & Ward, 2013; Kim, 2011; Gbue, 2014; Uji 2015; Asemah & Edegoh 2012; Omede 2015; Balarabe & Usman, 2015). Aririguzoh (2019) remarks that some political messages are even packaged as music because music is appealing. According to Omede (2015), social media can promote social transformation, promote and advance democracy. Undeniably, there is a relationship between social media and politics (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Abbott, MacDonald, & Givens, 2013). Through social media, people are mobilized, and support garnered (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016; Kreiss, 2016). Ta (2014) points out that social media websites have played critical roles in many elections worldwide, including the US, Iran, and India. However, they also serve to rally people for a cause and have inspired mass movements and political unrest in many countries. An online survey of 1600 Canadians concludes that social networks are fast becoming significant news sources to those that use them (Nielsen & Schröder, 2014).

Interestingly, studies have shown that social media have turned into powerful platforms for political aspirants in Africa. Some politicians propagate different campaign messages to voters (Grow & Ward, 2013). African political leaders have found them useful and thus utilized the same during political campaigns. In this regard, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) share that politicians appeal to the electorate and contact supporters on social networking sites. Politicians in Nigeria are switching to the use of non-traditional media for campaigns. Jaja et al. (2015) add that social media provide the platform for interaction between politicians and their constituents.

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