

Beyond tribal politics for e-participation and development: social media influence on Nigeria's 2023 presidential general election

Tribal politics
and Nigeria's
2023 election

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Abstract

Purpose – The study investigates factors like media, tribal, religious and party politics' influence on Nigeria's 2023 presidential election choice. It confirms dominant social media platforms and examines their influence on election polls, e-participation and political candidate choice. The main objectives of this study are to: investigate if tribal, religious and party politics affect the respondent's choice of a presidential candidate, ascertain the respondent's most used social media platform for political engagement and determine how social media platforms influenced the election polls during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample size of 384 registered voters was used to survey three states in Southeast Nigeria hinged on the technological acceptance model, the instrumentalist theory of ethnicity and the theory of reasoned action.

Findings – The study found that tribal politics did not influence political candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. However, religious and party politics influenced their choices as well as X (Twitter), found as the most used and most influential social media platform vital for enhancing participatory democracy and informing people at real-time.

Research limitations/implications – The researchers experienced challenges such as ensuring that the respondents filled the questions appropriately to reduce the number of void questionnaires and a funding problem since they had yet to receive any grant to enhance the study.

Originality/value – The study commends improved Internet connectivity and accessibility among the citizens for increased political engagement on social media. It also recommends that the Nigerian government enforce the rule of law in politics to enable diverse tribes and religions to experience democratic e-participation and development without marginalisation or subjugation by incumbent power. The findings affirm that social media is apt in political communication during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The study is a contribution to knowledge, timely and original.

Keywords Tribal politics, Social media, Nigerian election, Political development, Political engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Internet is critical in effective global communication and has created opportunities for increased and more diverse civic engagement and political participation (Ohme, 2019). Social media, which is internet-enabled, has become ubiquitous and familiar in Africa, especially in Nigeria, with the introduction of the mobile phone in 1999 (Morah *et al.*, 2016). Bello and Kaufhold (2023) believe social media use is solid and steady in developing countries.

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The social media boom is overwhelmingly changing Africa's economic, educational, social and political landscapes (Morah *et al.*, 2016; [orfonline.org](#), 2019).

However, globally, the use of the internet has increased, with two-thirds of the world's 7.8 bn people already online thanks to social media and social networking sites (SNS), including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp (Kemp, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2018) as cited in (Bello and Kaufhold, 2023). Social media use has enabled people to organise, interact with the outside world and participate in social and political activity, particularly in emerging and developing nations (Howard *et al.*, 2011; Mano and Ndlela, 2020). The prevalence of social media use among young people in Africa is believed to have a connection with their rich history of failed governance that manifests in various forms of marginalisation (Obisesan, 2022). Mano and Ndlela (2020) argue that African people increasingly use mobile and social media to partake in political debates, even in ways that challenge authority. The essence of social media as a political engagement tool was underscored in the above assertions.

Politics in Africa is bedevilled by various factors, including voter apathy and ethnic, religious, tribal and economic influence. In recent times, tribalism is one factor in Nigerian politics that is assumed to dominate and affect leadership selection. In Africa, "the nature of colonial rule was abhorrent to broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political systems" Lechler and McNamee (2018) as cited in Bello and Kaufhold (2023, p. 3). The outcomes of the Nigerian 2023 elections were particularly controversial following the alleged claims of irregularities that occurred during the elections despite the prominent heavy media coverage of the polls. With an approximate population of 202 m people ([worldbank.org](#), 2020) and over 350 ethnic groups and languages, uniformity in ideas, objectives and aspirations is challenging due to political sentiments.

Moreover, violence, rigging and official exploitation in favour of the ruling party were especially prevalent during general elections (Morah and Chiaha, 2021). This explains why African leaders are appointed based on tribal identity, political party or religious group. In support, Oboh (2016, p. 2) listed countries like Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Nigeria as some African countries that are yet to conduct successful elections without external supervision, often because of "the possibility of the government influencing the results of the elections in favour of the ruling parties."

Nigeria's political system, characterized by power zoning among Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba tribes, favours party consensus, leading to party politics where candidates are selected based on their zone. Nigeria's multi-religious nature has led to irregularities in general elections, including rigging, voter disfranchisement, ballot box snatching and collusion between officials and politicians to alter results and subvert popular mandates (Aleyomi and Ajekaiye, 2014; Ibrahim and Ibeanu, 2009). Okunna and Morah (2023) criticize Nigeria's state due to ethnic and religious crises, causing fear and distrust among the populace and highlighting growing political disillusionment due to anti-democratic electoral practices, exemplified by the 2023 general elections.

New media technology has, however, revolutionised the transmission of messages and information, enabling ease of dissemination through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. Scholars (Morah and Uzochukwu, 2020; Okunna and Omenugha, 2012) agree that social network sites allow users to present themselves, articulate their networks and establish connections with others. In other words, social media platforms share political manifestos and talk shows, which have enhanced self-awareness and active political e-participation. The emerging technology, which comes in the form of digitisation, has also improved the face of the Nigerian electoral process by reducing the incidence of electoral fraud and inaccuracy (The Vanguard, November 24, 2023).

During the 25th February presidential election exercise, Nigerians strongly demanded that the result be uploaded to the BVAS and IReV machines. The former is a technology that allows for voter identification and accreditation through fingerprints and facial recognition.

At the same time, the latter helps with an online portal where polling unit results are uploaded directly from the polling unit, transmitted and available for public monitoring [The Vanguard, November 24 \(2023\)](#). Moreover, due to the increase in social media use and escalations in smartphone ownership, more people seem interested in online activities, especially politics ([Morah and Chiaha, 2021](#)). They form family forums on social media platforms, where people rightly express their opinions and support, not minding the tribal or ethnic connotations.

Research also indicated that social media platforms enhance political participation ([Morah and Uzochukwu, 2020](#); [Anyanwu and Orji, 2020](#); [Abraham and Tibebe, 2019](#)). [Morah et al. \(2019\)](#) found that Facebook and WhatsApp were popularly used for political news and information. [Sumera et al. \(2020\)](#) concluded that social media creates awareness, builds political efficacy and increases youth participation. These studies were done in the past and need revalidation. However, most of these studies did not give a premium to tribal politics, e-participation and development, which is the essence of this study. Hence, the present study is apt and timely, focusing on "Beyond Tribal Politics for e-participation and Development: Social Media Influence on Nigerian 2023 Presidential General Election" focusing on the three states in the East.

Research objectives

The main objectives of this study are to:

- RO1.* Investigate if tribal politics affect the respondent's choice of a presidential candidate.
- RO2.* Ascertain the respondent's most used social media platform for political engagement.
- RO3.* Determine if social media platforms influenced the 2023 Nigerian presidential election poll.

Statement of research problem

From the onset, tribalism has had a stronghold in Nigerian politics due to the nature of the terrain and the amalgamation of three major tribes – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. This arrangement made the selection of a president highly sentimental and has kept the political arena of Nigeria in a very controversial situation. However, the February 25, 2023 election came with a different force and ideology. Due to the economic hardship reminiscent of the last regime, most Nigerians are tired of the old politicians and decided to elect a younger candidate that will change the situation. The political crisis has led to increased use of social media platforms for information sharing, communication and understanding between political aspirants and the masses. Social media has also been credited as a lead pressure in the wake of political change, and exploratory/investigational studies generally submitted that social media platforms influence the citizenry ([Morah et al., 2019](#)). However, despite the recorded advantages of the media and social media in political mobilisation and engagements, it remains uncertain if social media platforms can coax the Nigerian electorates and influence the democratic elections polls to gain a strong positive result for national development despite tribal and religious affiliations. Since there is little literature on social media use in the Nigerian 2023 presidential election in synergising e-participation and development in the face of Nigerian tribal, party and religious politics, the researchers consider this a significant knowledge gap that motivated this study.

Tribe, ethnicity and political development in Nigerian terrain

Tribalism refers to a cultural term, a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribes than to their friends, countries or social groups. It implies the possession of

a solid cultural or ethnic identity that separates one group member from the other group based on solid relations of proximity; the members of a tribe tend to possess a strong feeling of identity. Many tribes refer to themselves by their languages. Tribalism in Africa evolved as a group with unique cultural values, beliefs and attitudes that guide their living. Africans act on ethics among the tribal groups; it is their way of existence. They regard their members as relations and blood ties and are ready to sacrifice to cater for and protect them. In Africa, tribal groups are highly respected by their members as they regard their groups as a priority in crossing their daily activities (Morah and Omojola, 2020).

In Nigeria, tribalism is regarded as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The communal factor may be language, race, religion or shared history. Tribalism in Nigeria involves the demand of one tribe to compete with another tribe or tribe. Chinua Achebe defined tribalism as “discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of birth” (Achebe, 1997). Buttressing the point, Achebe insisted that tribalism has elevated to dominate a large percentage of the nation; it controls how people think and talk and determines what they support or oppose. It is promoted by political leaders and adopted by the young and old; it is passed from generation to generation. One of the problems we face in Nigeria is conflict due to ethnic competition. The ethnic diversity of Nigeria has been a threat to the nation rather than a source of pride and development for the nation. Tribalism is more powerful and dangerous than a political party. People choose to follow and support someone, not because they are good as leaders or because they have credibility but because they are from the same tribe.

Nigerian tribal politics began before Nigerian Independence, with three major ethnic groups forming political parties based on their ethnic group. The first set of parties was formed in 1959, with the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) led by Ahmmadu Bello and Obafemi Awolowo. The NPC and NCNC formed the national government, with Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as prime minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe as Governor-General of Independence in 1960. Azikiwe became president in 1963, while Tafawa Balewa remained as prime minister. The 1963 census showed Hausa–Fulani’s preference, and dissatisfied Igbos led to the NCNC split with the NPC. The Nigerian political landscape continues to evolve; with the NCNC and AG led by Obafemi Awolowo joining forces to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). The NNDP, led by Akintola, later formed the Social Democratic Party (SCP) and National Republican Party (NRP). However, in 1999, the People’s Democratic Party emerged and the Action Congress (AC) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) were formed. AC won most states in the southwest, while CPC won most seats in the northern part.

2015 AC allied with CPC and some APGA to form APC – All Progressive Congress. The Labour Party, National Conscience Party, Hope Democratic Party and United Progressive Party also participated in the 2015 election. In 2019, the major political parties were PDP, APC and YPP, according to a report on Nigerian Finder (2023). The 2023 elections in Nigeria saw a struggle between the APC, PDP, LP and NNPP, significant political parties. Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kashim Shettima represented the APC; the PDP by Atiku Abubakar and Ifeanyi Okowa; the LP by Peter Obi and Yusuf Datti Baba Ahmed, while Rabiu Kwankwaso and Isaac Idahosa represented the NNPP. Controversies emerged, with some parties demanding the Igbo presidency, while religious politics caused chaos, with some parties advocating for a Christian vice president. Party politics also arose, with some demanding the APC to allow another party to produce presidential candidates. These controversies led to different ideologies among Nigerians, with some focusing on tribal politics, religious politics and competence. Ozan Varol’s famous saying suggests that tribalism can be dangerous when it turns rivals into enemies, suppresses diverse thinking and pushes individuals to do things

they would not do on their own. He believes that this dangerous tribalism thrives in a sea of disconnected people looking for belonging:

Tribes are the magnet that attracts the metal of our craving to belong. They assure us that we are correct and morally superior. They force us into a different reality where it becomes impossible to see—let alone comprehend—another worldview. We become *the few, the proud, the more or less constantly appalled of everyone else* (Varol, 2023).

Ozan Varol's mindset portrays what is happening in Nigerian politics today. Political candidates and the masses mostly believe in tribal politics, not minding if the candidate is competent, if the constitution allows it and if the decision is fair to the majority of the masses. In all, Gavin Nascimento, in his famous quote, insists that; "Never pledge uncompromising allegiance to a religion, flag, skin colour, political party or race. The only thing you should ever pledge allegiance to is upholding that which is morally and ethically right – that which is aligned with humanity, integrity and truth." Tribal politics also has an impact on the Nigerian national development.

Tribalism remains a significant factor in Nigeria's economic and political failure, as it often leads to the suppression of nonruling groups through economic or political extraction (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). The phenomenon is prevalent in Nigeria due to cultural decadence, fragile political structures, poor leadership and frequent ethnoreligious crises. Tribalism has also led to conflicts related to ethnicity or religion, such as the formation of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Arewa Forum and Boko Haram (Morah and Omojola, 2020). However, people often do not perceive it as a cause for the nation's decline. It seems Nigeria's tradition prohibits citizens from exposing or prosecuting tribe members for corrupt practices, leading to marginalisation and distrust among citizens. Some tribes are considered sacred cows, while others face immediate sanctions. The condition creates political tension between democracy and tribal interests, causing a divide and problems. In 2011, the Boko Haram insurgency was exacerbated by tribal suspicion of Northerners, highlighting the ongoing political divide in Nigeria (Morah and Omojola, 2020). Tribalism has negatively impacted Nigerian development, including economics, society, education, politics and infrastructure. It has led to hatred and physical and psychological barriers, hindering modern civilisation and opportunities for technology and artificial intelligence advancements.

Tribalism also correlates to religion and politics, especially in a multiethnic country like Nigeria. Umeanolue's 2019 paper explores the influence of religion on Nigerian politics, highlighting its presence among the country's three main ethnic groups. The study suggests that good influence can be achieved by upholding the Constitution, which guarantees free expression and faith practice. Moreso, Adeleke and Uche (2015) research on Nigeria's political development reveals that ethnic gangstering and attitudes drive alliances and coalitions, while corruption and incompetent leadership are correlated with ethnicity, highlighting the complexity of political parties in Nigeria.

Social media. E-participation and political engagement

Social media has revolutionised every facet of the globe, affecting every human endeavour and business. Interactivity and participation have made social media acceptable in social communication and mobilisation, just like mainstream media. It has been playing a crucial, unprecedented role in political communication and campaigns since the days of the first Obama Presidential campaign. Social media is social network sites integrating technology, social interaction and user-generated content (Siapera, 2018). Carr and Hayes (2015) explain social media as inter-based channels of mass-personal communication that allow users to interact opportunistically and selectively present themselves to broad and narrow audiences,

deriving value primarily from user-generated content. Other scholars describe social media as online technologies that support the production and reproduction of the networked and influential public (Hjorth and Hinton, 2019). Networked publics here mean that social media enable the formation of online communities of people who come together as an imagined collective to interact and organise. Agbo (2015) note that social media helps to create participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage.

However, social media platforms revolutionise political communication by enabling direct communication among actors like governments, citizens and politicians. These platforms enable citizens to self-publish, produce and circulate content, promoting democracy and creating a networked public for social, political and cultural purposes (Uzuegbunam, 2020). It also enables professionals, civil societies and the government to engage with like-minded people at a minimum cost, saving on venue costs (Dunu and Uzochukwu, 2015). Social media played a vital role in the 2019 Nigerian general election, as it informed and mobilised voters, potentially adding value to future elections (Adesola and Audu-Bako, 2019). According to Bhagwat and Goutam (2013), social media offers numerous advantages, including open communication, enhanced information discovery, free messaging, blogging, photo storage, games and creative expression, bringing people with common interests together, creating new relationships and reducing costs.

Greenhow *et al.* (2017) note that recent social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok and WeChat enable local, national and international knowledge mobilisation through connecting and messaging features. Facebook is the most active social media platform globally, with 2.95 bn active users, according to Ruby (2023). YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram follow closely behind, with WeChat and TikTok having 1.26 and 1.2 bn, respectively, while Twitter has 436 m users.

On the other hand, social media's advantages in political space are limited, but it also has dysfunctions and misuse. Fake news, disinformation and misinformation are information pollution caused by the digital media landscape. Fake news refers to disguised and misleading information, while misinformation is false, and the person who disseminated it believes it is true (UNESCO, 2018, p. 43). Disinformation is deliberate but is spread by the person who knows it is false. Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm inflicted through electronic devices and online social relations (Siapera, 2018; Hinduja and Patchin, 2015). Trolling is malicious behaviour aimed at causing pain and causing disruptions in interactions. Cybercrimes involve dangerous attacks using digital technologies, while cyberterrorism involves hacking enemy sites or accounts to spread terrorist information (Coles and West, 2016; Lindgren, 2017). According to (Morah *et al.*, 2019), hate speech is a precursor to discrimination, harassment and violence based on specific identifiers, such as race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

Social media and elections

Research has shown that social media influences different areas, even in elections and political communication. Elections, according to (Singh and Mishra (1991), as cited in Rasak *et al.* (2022)), are critical to democracy's operation. Elections are the bedrock of a genuinely democratic system. It is commonly described as a "formal" act of aggregate choice that occurs in a chain of associated antecedents and subsequent actions. It entails individuals' participation in the election of their representatives as well as their participation in governance (Rasak *et al.*, 2022).

The 2019 study by Morah, Udeze and Ekwenchi examined Facebook user reactions to election results, finding high mobile Facebook usage for political information but no influence on voting decisions using technological determinism and the agenda-setting theory. Also, Sumera *et al.* (2020) study on social media's role in Pakistan's democratisation found social

media significantly influences political engagement among youth, creating awareness, building political efficacy and increasing participation, with platforms like Facebook and Twitter providing crucial information.

The 2020 research by Anyanwu and Orji confirms Sumera *et al.* (2020) findings on social media's effectiveness in promoting political engagement in Southeast Nigeria, finding that it positively impacts 70% of inhabitants' lives. Similarly, in their study "Social Media Use and Political Communication Challenges among Selected Entrepreneurs in Nigeria," Morah and Uzochnikwu (2020) employed a survey to look into how 200 entrepreneurs use social media for governance-related activities. The study relied heavily on the theories of agenda-setting and technological determinism. Their results show that social media – particularly Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter – dramatically increases interest in, participation in, connection with and socialisation among traders and artisans.

According to Olubunmi and Folorounso's (2020) report on "Use of Social Media for Political Participation by Youths, "Facebook was the most widely utilised social media platform among youth in the last elections." The specific goals here were to find information about the respondents' use of various social media platforms, their activity patterns and the variables influencing their use of social media for political engagement. The study, involving 322 respondents, found that Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter were the most popular platforms for youth political participation, aligning with previous Sumera, Zaeem and Aaima and Anyanwu and Orji research.

In their 2019 study, "The Role of Social Media in Citizens' Political Participation," Abraham and Tibebe employed a qualitative research design to investigate how citizens utilise social media to engage in politics. Relevant research showed that social media has taken the role of traditional media because it boosts political engagement and strategic synergy, which can influence governmental political policy. Meanwhile, Akindutire and Oluwatosin's 2023 survey study found that 71% of Nigerian youth rely on Twitter for election updates, and 39% believe the platform effectively persuaded them to support a candidate during the election period. Additionally, 56% of respondents agreed that Twitter effectively supported and influenced their choice.

Although research has demonstrated the role of social media in politics, the relationship between social media and tribal politics and religion needs to be adequately investigated and underscored. Moreover, there is a dearth of literature on the relationship between tribal politics, religion and social media use in political communication in the 2023 elections in southeastern Nigeria. None of the studies looked into e-participation. This study sought to fill in this gap in the literature and make recommendations on the way forward in a multiethnic Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the technology acceptance model (TAM), instrumentalist theory of ethnicity and theory of reasoned action. Fred (Davis, 1989; Bogazzi *et al.*, 1992), as cited in (Morah and Okunna, 2020), propounded the TAM. The model proposes that when users are presented with new technology, several factors influence their personal decisions about how and when they will use it. According to Davis (1989), an individual's attitude towards and use of a new technology can be influenced by their perceptions of its usefulness and simplicity. TAM and the theory of reasoned action (TRA) are connected. "The purpose of TAM is to simplify TRA and provide a generalisation model that possesses theoretical foundation, parsimony and the tools that a manager uses," Wu *et al.* (2008, p. 925) emphasised. They also concur with Venkatesh *et al.* (2003) that TAM enables users to assess the adoption of new technology and subsequently forecast and elucidate the user's information technology-

acceptance behaviour. In addition, the researcher can comprehend how outside influences impact their beliefs, mindset and desires when using the technology.

The implication is that an individual is most likely to use a particular technology if it is easy to manipulate and valuable to him/her. The theory explains why people use a particular new technology rather than another based on its perceived ease of use and usefulness. [Nasri and Charfiddin \(2012\)](#) studied the adoption of Facebook among 240 university students in Tunisia. Their study aimed to propose a conceptual framework better to understand the factors in Facebook adoption in Tunisia. The results confirmed a relationship between perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in adopting Facebook. They revealed that attitudes and social norms were essential factors in Facebook adoption. Therefore, in this study, the technology acceptance model means that people speedily accept the new technology, which enhances and facilitates their participation in Nigerian politics.

The instrumentalist theory of ethnicity believes that people with ascriptive characteristics can effectively organise and mobilise to influence public policies. In other words, individuals who believe that they can obtain access to valuable resources or state services by electing a fellow ethnic member to the political position are likely to do so to achieve their goals (Why ethnic parties succeed, 6). Here, the members of an ethnic group feel they have a common goal in life and people use their ethnic identity as an interest group. Instrumentalists also argue that people with a shared history, language, religion and customs feel strong cohesion with another group member. Thus, ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs can mobilise their ethnic groups to commit violence by convincing them that another ethnic group threatens them ([Camaroff and Stem, 1994](#)). They can do this by magnifying the differences between their ethnic group and people from the out-group by blaming the other ethnic group for their misfortunes, and this may resort to violence. In this study, the instrumentalist theory best explains the political scenario in Nigeria, where tribal or nepotism and religious sentiments play a significant role in the choice of a political candidate.

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by their intention to perform the behaviour, and this intention is, in turn, a function of their attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms ([Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975](#) in [Morah and Okunna, 2020](#)). The best predictor of behaviour is intention or instrumentality (believes that the behaviour will lead to the intended outcome). Three things determine instrumentality: their attitude towards the specific behaviour, subjective norms and perceived control. The more favourable the attitude and the subjective norms, the greater the perceived control and the stronger the person's intention to form the behaviour depending on his/her attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norm. Generally, positive attitudes and positive subjective norms result in greater perceived control and increase the likelihood of intentions governing changes in behaviour. Concerning this study, people make conscious choices based on how strongly they perceive a particular action's benefits or positive outcomes. Thus, they vote for a candidate because they believe that the person will protect their interest.

Methodology

The researchers used a survey design. This design allows a researcher to simultaneously collect quantitative data and use the result to explain a research problem. The method ensures accuracy and credibility in data collection ([Wimmer and Dominick, 2013](#), p. 126). The study population comprises all adults who have reached the official voting age of 18 years and above in Southeast Nigeria. This population was taken from three states in south Eastern Nigeria: Anambra, Enugu and Imo state. The three states were selected because they are in the country's southeastern part and are among the Igbo tribes agitating against marginalisation in governance and politics. Also, the three states are predominantly high in student populations that are assumed to be heavy social media users and are likely to be

influenced to vote due to social media political campaign messages. The population of registered voters as of the 2023 general election is as follows: Anambra state: 2.266 m, Enugu state: 2.11 m and Imo state: 2.42 m (Dataphyte.com, 2023).

A sample size of 384 was drawn using an online sample size calculator advanced by Wimmer and Dominick (2013) with a confidence of 95% and a confidence interval of 5.0%. Using the proportionate method, the number of copies of questionnaires to be shared in each state is as follows: Anambra: 128, Enugu: 119 and Imo: 137. The researchers used the purposive sampling technique to select the 384 respondents. The choice of purposive sampling was made on three conditions – the respondent resides in the South East, is eligible to vote and uses social media. The use of purposive sampling for this study aligned with (McNabb, 2008) suggestions that purposive sampling can be used when a researcher targets a specific group quickly, in this case, selected broadcast stations in the South East. Questionnaire devices were used to generate the quantitative data for this study. Both open and close-ended questions were used in designing the questionnaire. They made it easier for response categorisation and analysis. The copies of the questionnaire were self-administered one-to-one with the assistance of three research assistants to the selected sample under supervision. After consenting to be interrogated, each respondent fills out their responses within five minutes and returns the filled copies of the questionnaire accordingly.

Data presentation

For data analysis, the researchers used a statistical table with frequency and mean (X) to provide answers to the research questions. The determination of a decision point depended on the cutoff point. The cutoff point for regarding an item as agreed was determined using the following formula: $V = SA + A + D + SD$. N Where V = Decision Point SA = Strongly Agree = 4 A = Agree = 3, D = Disagree = 2, SD = Strongly Disagree = 1. N = Number of Response Unit

$$(X) = \text{Mean Therefore } (X) = 4 + 3+2 + 1 \text{ divided by } 4 = 10/4 (X) = 2.5$$

(X) = 2.5 Decision rule: After analysis, any item with a mean value “2.5” and above was accepted, while any value below “2.5” was rejected.

It is important to note that, after data collection, 19 out of 384 questionnaires shared needed to be better filled, leaving the researchers with 375 correctly filled questionnaires used for data analysis.

The above data on Table 1 revealed that the dominant age bracket was between 41 and above, representing 57% of the respondents. The table also indicated that most respondents were males, representing 55%, while the females represented 45% of the study population. The findings here imply that most respondents are likely interested in politics since they are primarily male.

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age	19–30	65	17
	31–40	97	26
	41 and above	213	57
	Total	375	100.00
Gender	Male	205	55
	Female	170	45
	Total	375	100.00

Source(s): Data collected by authors through Survey, 2023

Table 1.
Demographic data

RQ1. Do tribal politics affect the respondent’s choice of presidential candidate during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election?

Again, all the figures in parentheses inside [Table 2](#) stand for the alternative response scale values. [Table 2](#) above revealed items in cluster “A” for [research question one](#), which investigated Whether tribal, religious and party politics affect the respondent’s choice of a presidential candidate. The mean score for item one was 2.3, showing that most respondents indicated that tribal politics did not influence their choice of a political candidate. Respondents disagreed that ethnic politics influenced their political choice, believing in a candidate’s credibility rather than their tribe. In contrast, others chose to vote for their ethnic group.

RQ2. What was the respondent’s most used social media platform for political engagement?

The analysis shows in [Table 3](#) that Twitter was the most used social media platform for political engagement during the Nigerian 2023 presidential election. However, the mean score for items 2, 3 and 4 was 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, indicating that only Twitter was the most used platform.

RQ3. Do social media platforms influence election polls?

Analysis from [Table 4](#) above indicated that the mean score for item one was 3, showing that most of the respondents agreed that social media platforms influenced the election poll during the election. For item 2, the mean score was 3, showing that respondents agreed that social media platforms help political aspirants get followers during the election. The mean score for item 3 was 2.4, showing that respondents slightly disagree that social media news influences their choice of a political candidate. For item 4, the mean score was 3, indicating that respondents agreed they could modify political choice views due to social media exposure. Since all the mean scores for the four items except for the I item in the cluster were within and above the decision point, it is safe to say that most of the respondents

Table 2. Mean distribution of questionnaire: do tribal politics affect the respondent’s choice of a presidential candidate?

Cluster I tems	F	SD (1)	D (2)	A (3)	SA. (4)	Total score	Mean score X	Remark (R = reject, A = accept)
1. Tribal politics affects my choice of a political candidate 1i. Any other, specify	375	150 (150)	50 (100)	90 (270)	85 (340)	860/375	2.3	R

Source(s): Data collected by authors through Survey, 2023

Table 3. Mean distribution of questionnaire: what was the respondent’s most used social media platform for political engagement?

Cluster items	F	SD (1)	D (2)	A (3)	SA. (4)	Total score	Mean score X	Remark (R = reject, A = accept)
Twitter	375	41 (41)	70 (140)	62 (186)	202 (808)	1175/375	3	A
WhatsApp	375	48 (48)	200 (400)	65 (195)	52 (208)	851/375	2.2	R
Instagram	375	30 (30)	218 (436)	44 (132)	73 (292)	890/375	2.3	R
Facebook	375	33 (33)	206 (412)	80 (240)	56 (224)	909/375	2.4	R

Source(s): Data collected by authors through Survey, 2023

Cluster items	F	SD (1)	D (2)	A (3)	SA. (4)	Total score	Mean score X	Remark (R = reject, A = accept)
Social media platforms induced election polls during the Nigeria presidential election	375	15 (15)	88 (176)	91 (273)	181 (724)	1188/375	3	A
Social media platforms help people to get followers	375	6 (6)	34 (68)	110 (330)	225 (900)	1304/375	3	A
Social media news influenced my choice of a political candidate	375	80 (80)	140 (280)	92 (276)	63 (252)	888/375	2.4	R
I have modified views about the choice of candidate due to social media exposure	375	33 (3)	98 (196)	167 (501)	77 (308)	1038/375	3	A

Source(s): Data collected by authors through Survey, 2023

Table 4. Mean distribution of questionnaire: do social media platforms influence election polls?

agreed that social media influences election polls of the political candidate during the Nigerian presidential election.

Discussion of findings

The study evaluated the influence of social media on Nigeria's 2023 presidential general election, revealing that 57% of respondents were male and 55% were female, indicating that the study accurately represented the population.

Research Question One: investigated if tribal politics affect the respondent's choice of a presidential candidate. The mean score for item one (2.3) shows that most respondents indicated that tribal politics did not influence their choice of a political candidate (see [Table 2](#)). The implication is that the respondents believe in the credibility of a particular political candidate instead of tribe alignment. The TRA suggests that people make conscious choices based on their perception of an action's benefits or positive outcomes. This aligns with Nigeria's political scenario, particularly during the 2023 presidential primaries selection. The diverse and controversial perceptions were influenced by presidential zoning to the Southeastern states, with some ethnic groups opposing it. Additionally, the nonruling party argued for government control due to their long-standing power. [Adeleke and Uche \(2015\)](#) concluded that the alliances and coalitions among political parties to have an overall majority to win the majority are based on sentiments and ethnic gang-ups, leading to the incompetence of leaders and corruption.

Nevertheless, the ruling party, APC, was reluctant to hand over power to other parties, insisting they had the structure of ruling Nigeria. [Okunna and Morah \(2023\)](#) rightly agree with Punch Newspaper's editorial assessment of Buharia's two terms in office as dismal. They argue that the era witnessed a relentless upsurge in human misery, rising national debt, two recessions, record unemployment, inflation levels and receding foreign direct investment.

Religious politics in Nigeria caused uproar and indifference among citizens. Nigerians demand Muslim presidential candidate must have Christian vice president, but some parties do not comply. Constitution should clearly outline rules for multiethnic functioning. This view aligns with the outcome of [Umeanolue's \(2019\)](#) study, which indicated that Nigeria, right from inception, has been an amalgamation of three major ethnic groups, which have three major religions in practice, and this influences political participation positively or negatively. The study then recommends ways of ensuring positive influence and maintaining adherence to the Nigerian constitution, which allows freedom of speech and religion.

Research Question Two: This research question investigated the respondents' most used social media platform for political engagement. The finding as shown on [Table 3](#) implies that though the respondents used WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, the mean score needs to be more significant to affirm that the social media X(Twitter) was their most used platform for political engagement during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The study aligns from [Akindutire and Oluwatosin's \(2023\)](#) findings, which found Twitter significantly influential in Nigerian elections. 56% of respondents agreed, 71% depended on Twitter for election updates and 39% believed Twitter persuaded them to support a candidate. It is, therefore, evident that the 2020 #EndSars Protest, which boomed on Twitter and the subsequent ban of Twitter by the Nigerian Government, garnered more interest in this social platform. The lifting of the ban inadvertently increased the popularity and usage of the Twitter-sphere. These significant findings show the high use of Twitter on mobile and smart devices for political news and information during the election period.

Research Question Three: Do social media platforms influence election polls during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election? Here, the finding implies that, though social media platforms can suggest what to think about, the actual process of adoption depends on how the respondents accept or rebuff an idea. Here, the finding is in tandem with [Morah et al. \(2019\)](#) findings, which indicated that most respondents' voting decisions were not influenced by social media messages (see [Table 4](#)). Also, the TRA supported this finding. The study found that social media exposure can modify political choice views, with most respondents agreeing that it influences election polls and people's choice of political candidate during the Nigerian presidential election, with the mean score for item 4 being three. The findings align with [Morah and Uzochukwu \(2020\)](#), who found that social media play functional and remarkable roles in mobilising, integrating, organising and delivering campaign messages to voters at a meagre cost. The findings are also in line with the outcome of [Anyanwu and Orji \(2020\)](#), which revealed that social media had influenced residents of the Southeast up to 70% positively.

The TAM applies here and confirms social media handles as the most used platform during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, despite other platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. The findings align with [research question three](#), which aimed to determine if social media platforms influenced election polls and people's choice of a political candidate. Most respondents agreed that social media platforms influenced election polls and political aspirants' followers, but social media news did not significantly influence their choice of a candidate. This suggests that people are more likely to use technology if it is easy to manipulate and valuable to them.

The instrumentalism theory of ethnicity supports the study's findings, as it suggests that people with common history, language, religion and customs can form strong cohesion with another group member, leading to violence by ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs. This theory best explains Nigeria's political scenario.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the selected respondents indicated that tribal politics did not influence their choices of political candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

Twitter was the respondent's most used social media platform during the period, and social media platforms increase election poll engagement, enhance participatory democracy and keep people informed about political discourse. Thus, Social media platforms have established new ways for commitment that help the masses to associate and join modern methods of political participation, which enhanced development. To move a country forward, scholars like [Acemoglu and Robinson \(2013\)](#) said that nations fail because of extractive economic and political institutions. Buttressing this point, the scholars maintained that these extractive economic/political institutions do not create the incentives needed for people to save, invest and innovate. Such things occur because the ruling class uses their veto power to protect those who benefit from the extraction. The implication is that people of the same tribe, ethnic or religious group at the seat of power use their privilege to suppress the nonruling group through extraction, which can be economic or political.

Recommendations

The study, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian Government should enforce the rule of law in politics to enable the diverse tribes and religions we have in the country to experience democratic participation, which is accessible from the marginalisation of the minority or subjugation of the nonruling party/religion by the incumbent power. There should also be a reduction in the cost of Internet connectivity to enable easy access to social media to help improve citizens' e-participation in political affairs and engagement for good governance and national/political development. Also, further research should be done in other geopolitical zones to investigate ethnicity, religion and tribal roles in political communication and social media use.

Limitations

The researchers experienced challenges such as ensuring that the respondents filled the questions appropriately to reduce the number of void questionnaires and a funding problem since they had yet to receive any grant to enhance the study.

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