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SOCIAL MEDIA AS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS: AN EVALUATION OF FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND YOUTUBE IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study evaluated social media as platforms for political communication during election periods in Enugu State, Nigeria. It examined (i) the extent to which social media are used for political communication and (ii) the contribution of social-media information systems to campaign communication. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The manuscript reports a population of 2,350 users associated with Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and YouTube, and a sample of 342 derived using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% margin of error. Of the 342 questionnaires administered, 340 properly completed questionnaires were analysed. The 17-item questionnaire used a four-point response scale, and the instrument's reported Cronbach's alpha was .86. Data were analysed using weighted means, with 2.50 as the decision benchmark. Twitter (M = 3.43) and Facebook (M = 3.33) received the highest ratings for prominence during election periods, followed by Telegram (M = 2.85); YouTube fell just below the benchmark (M = 2.49). Respondents also viewed social-media pages as preferred campaign sources (M = 3.12) and social media as a strong campaign channel (M = 3.28). However, the low rating for the proposition that politicians achieve their political ambitions through social media (M = 2.30) cautions against equating communication reach with electoral success. The findings suggest that social media are important perceived channels of political communication in Enugu State, although their democratic and electoral effects depend on information quality, audience engagement, digital literacy and the wider political environment. The study recommends platform-specific communication strategies, stronger verification of campaign information, improved digital and political-media literacy,

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and integration of social media with traditional media. The population allocation and standard deviations require confirmation from the original field records before publication.

Keywords: Facebook, Social Media, Political Communication, Twitter, Youtube, Political Campaigns, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Political communication has undergone substantial transformation with the development of digital technologies and internet-mediated communication. Traditional political communication was largely characterised by a one-to-many structure in which journalists and media organisations mediated communication between political actors and citizens. Digital and social media have altered this arrangement by enabling politicians, parties, citizens and interest groups to create, distribute, comment on and recirculate political content with less dependence on conventional gatekeepers. This development is consistent with the hybrid media system, in which older and newer media logics interact rather than one simply replacing the other (Chadwick, 2017; McQuail & Deuze, 2021). The significance of this transformation is particularly visible during election periods. Political actors can use social-media platforms to publicise programmes, mobilise supporters, respond to opponents, frame issues and maintain contact with voters. Citizens can comment on political messages, share campaign materials, participate in online discussions and circulate information within their networks. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube therefore represent not merely alternative publicity channels but components of a changing political communication ecology. At the same time, social media create challenges involving misinformation, selective exposure, political polarisation, unequal digital access and the professional management of political communication (Ibebunjo, 2026). The Nigerian political environment also requires attention to the wider structures within which digital communication operates. Agbaenyi and Ibebunjo (2021) identify structural constraints on democratic participation, while Ibebunjo and Udeoji (2019) illustrate how communication, influence and strategic power operate within Nigeria's regional political environment. Ibebunjo (2026) further demonstrates that social-media communication can facilitate civic engagement while simultaneously intensifying polarisation. Together, these contributions support a contextual rather than technologically deterministic interpretation of social-media political communication.

In Nigeria, the growth of social media has coincided with increasing public interest in digital political communication. Evidence from the 2023 general elections indicates that social media have become part of the contemporary political communication environment. Nigerian scholarship also shows that political communication operates within broader structures of democratic participation and social relations (IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Agbaenyi & Ibebunjo, 2021). The central issue, therefore, is not simply whether social media are used, but how users perceive their contribution to political communication and whether such communication supports meaningful political participation. The problem addressed by this study is not whether social media exist as political communication channels, but the extent to which respondents perceive them as instruments of political communication and campaign engagement in Enugu State. The original study identified three objectives: to determine the extent to which social media are used for political communication; to determine how social-media information systems contribute to political communication; and to examine perceptions of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as mechanisms for mobilising participation in political discourse. However, the available results contain no separate table or sufficient empirical evidence for the third objective. This revised article therefore

addresses only the first two objectives and treats the third as an evidence gap rather than reporting an unsupported finding. This distinction matters because political visibility and online interaction do not necessarily constitute substantive political participation (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). The study addresses two empirically analysed research questions:

i. To what extent are social media used as political communication during election periods?
ii. To what extent do social-media information systems contribute to political communication?

Literature Review

Social Media and Political Communication: Social media are web-based communication environments that permit users to create, share and interact with content. Their political significance derives partly from their interactivity. Whereas traditional mass media have often been described as predominantly one-to-many channels, social media allow many-to-many communication in which users can simultaneously function as audiences, producers, commentators and distributors of information. This changes the speed and direction of political information flows and reduces some of the barriers associated with conventional media access. The literature links social media with information diffusion, political discussion, mobilisation and public communication. Social-media analytics can reveal patterns in information circulation and public attention, although the political meaning of such data requires contextual interpretation (Agrawal et al., 2011; Zeng et al., 2010; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Political actors can construct and disseminate messages without waiting entirely for conventional editorial selection, while citizens can react publicly through likes, comments, shares and replies. This changes the speed and direction of political information flows, but it also creates opportunities for strategic persuasion, selective exposure and polarisation (Conover et al., 2011; Hermida, 2010). The hybrid media perspective is useful for understanding this process. Chadwick (2017) argues that political communication is shaped by interaction between older and newer media logics rather than a simple replacement of traditional media by digital media. Political campaigns may therefore use television, radio, newspapers, rallies and social media simultaneously. This is particularly relevant in settings where internet access and digital literacy are uneven.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in Political Campaigns

Facebook provides political actors with pages, profiles, groups and multimedia functions through which campaign information can be distributed and discussed. Research on political parties and Web 2.0 indicates that digital platforms can create architectures of participation, although the depth of participation depends on how citizens actually use those opportunities (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). Twitter is particularly associated with rapid, short-form political communication and electoral visibility. Studies of politicians and electoral communication show that Twitter can strengthen the connection between political actors and citizens, while network structure may also reinforce partisan clustering (Hong & Nadler, 2011; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Conover et al., 2011). Twitter (now X) is particularly associated with short-form, rapid political communication. Hashtags, replies, reposting and networked visibility enable political issues to gain attention quickly. Research on political campaigning indicates that Twitter can strengthen communication between political actors and citizens, although partisan clustering may also limit cross-group communication (Conover et al., 2011; Lassen & Brown, 2011). This pattern is consistent with research showing that micro-blogging can contribute to a distinctive campaign style (Vergeer

et al., 2013). YouTube differs from Facebook and Twitter through its emphasis on video. Political actors can use video for speeches, campaign advertisements, interviews and debates. Its lower ratings in the present study suggest that technical capacity does not automatically translate into perceived political influence. Audience habits, content format, internet costs and campaign practice may shape the effectiveness of individual platforms.

Social Media, Democracy and Participation

The democratic promise of social media lies partly in their potential to lower communication barriers. Participatory democratic theory emphasises citizens' active involvement in political processes and decision-making. Carole Pateman's influential account argues that participation can develop citizens' political capacities and strengthen democratic practice, while C. B. Macpherson situates participatory democracy within a broader critique of liberal-democratic arrangements (Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970). Applied to digital communication, this perspective suggests that social media may widen opportunities for citizens to receive information, express views, respond to political actors and participate in public discourse. Such opportunities, however, do not by themselves demonstrate that meaningful participation has occurred. However, participation should be distinguished from visibility and interaction. A like, share or comment may represent political interest, but it does not necessarily indicate informed deliberation, voting behaviour, volunteering or sustained civic action. Research on digital political participation shows that online engagement can be relatively low-cost, making it important to distinguish communicative activity from deeper forms of participation (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Another concern is fragmentation. Networked political communication can facilitate communities of shared political identity, but it can also produce partisan clustering and polarisation. Evidence from Twitter networks demonstrates ideological separation in political communication, reinforcing the need to consider both the participatory opportunities and the risks of information disorder (Conover et al., 2011). Social media should therefore be understood as ambivalent democratic infrastructure.

Empirical Literature

The reviewed literature contains substantial international evidence on digital political communication, but Nigeria-specific evidence remains context dependent. A study of the 2023 general elections in Omu-Aran demonstrates the relevance of social media to political communication in Nigeria (IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023). Related Nigerian scholarship points to the wider institutional and social environment within which political communication operates, including democratic participation, strategic influence, civil society and national integration (Agbaenyi & Ibebunjo, 2021; Ibebunjo & Udeoji, 2019; Iroye & Ibebunjo, 2019; Shaibu et al., 2022). Ibebunjo (2026) further highlights the capacity of social-media communication to facilitate engagement while also creating possibilities for discord in Nigeria's plural society. Evidence from Ghana similarly demonstrates the growing role of social media in election campaigning in an African context (Penplusbytes, 2017). The present study contributes local survey evidence from Enugu State.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in participatory democratic theory (PDT). Participatory democracy is associated particularly with Carole Pateman's Participation and Democratic Theory (1970), which argues that participation is not limited to choosing representatives but can also develop citizens' political competence and capacity for collective decision-making. C. B. Macpherson (1977) further developed a participatory critique of liberal democracy. The

central proposition relevant to this study is that democratic life is strengthened when citizens have meaningful opportunities to access information, express views, deliberate and influence political processes. Applied to social media, PDT suggests that platforms may lower some communication barriers and enable more direct exchanges between political actors and citizens. Previous research on political parties' use of Web 2.0 and government social-media communication illustrates how digital platforms can support public interaction and information sharing (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Kavanaugh et al., 2012). PDT is relevant because the first two research questions examine the perceived use and contribution of social-media systems to political communication. The relatively high means for Twitter, Facebook and campaign communication indicate that respondents perceive these platforms as useful channels. They do not, however, establish that social media automatically produce democratic participation or electoral success. Meaningful participation depends on the quality and reliability of information, equitable access, citizens' capacity to evaluate messages, willingness of political actors to engage, and institutional responsiveness. The theory is therefore used as an interpretive framework, not as proof of a causal relationship.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study was conducted in Enugu State and focused on users of social-media platforms relevant to political communication. The manuscript reports a population of 2,350, allocated as Facebook (520), Twitter (650), Telegram (600) and YouTube (580). These figures sum to 2,350. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% margin of error, yielding approximately 341.8 and therefore a target sample of 342 respondents. The source and procedure used to construct the population frame were not specified in the material available for revision. Before publication, the authors should identify the source of the frame, the date of compilation, the eligibility criteria and how users were counted. The allocation of respondents across platforms should also be checked against the original sampling records because the original document contains inconsistent platform labels. The instrument was a structured questionnaire containing 17 items. It used a four-point response scale: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1. Experts reviewed the instrument before administration, and a trial test involving 15 participants was used to assess reliability. Cronbach's alpha was reported as .86, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The manuscript reports that 342 questionnaires were administered and 340 properly completed questionnaires were returned and analysed. The reported means were checked against the weighted totals and a denominator of 340 where the underlying totals were available. Means are presented to two decimal places. In particular, the YouTube item in the first results table is 2.49, not 2.4, and the YouTube-account item in the second table is reported as 2.44. The 2.50 decision benchmark is applied consistently: means above 2.50 indicate agreement, while means below 2.50 indicate disagreement. The data were analysed using weighted means. A mean of 2.50 was adopted as the decision benchmark: scores above 2.50 were interpreted as agreement and scores below 2.50 as disagreement. Standard deviations cannot be calculated from the manuscript as supplied because item-level response distributions or respondent-level data are not included. They should be added only after checking the original questionnaires or dataset. The reported population allocation also requires verification against the original field records; no replacement figures have been invented in this revision.

Results

Use of Social Media as Political Communication: The first research question examined the extent to which social media are used as political communication. The reported results show generally positive assessments. Twitter obtained the highest mean score (3.43) for dominance in political programmes during election periods, followed by Facebook (3.33). Telegram recorded a mean of 2.85, while YouTube recorded 2.49 and therefore fell below the 2.50 decision benchmark. Respondents also agreed that social-media pages were a preferred source of political campaign information (3.12), that politicians continued to use social media during election periods (3.03), and that politicians maintained Twitter profiles (3.17).

Table 1: Respondents' Ratings on the Use of Social Media as Political Communication Platforms During Election Periods in Enugu State

Indicator	Mean	**Decision**
Twitter dominates political programmes during elections	3.43	Agree
Facebook dominates political programmes during elections	3.33	Agree
YouTube dominates political programmes during elections	2.49	Disagree
Telegram dominates political programmes during elections	2.85	Agree
Social-media pages are preferred campaign sources	3.12	Agree
Politicians continue using social media during elections	3.03	Agree
Politicians have Twitter profiles	3.17	Agree

Note: M = weighted mean. Standard deviations are not reported because the underlying response-level data were not supplied; calculate and insert them from the original dataset before submission. Decision benchmark = 2.50. The pattern suggests that respondents perceive Twitter and Facebook as particularly prominent channels during election periods. The relatively lower YouTube rating is important because it demonstrates that respondents did not regard all platforms as equally influential. The overall pattern supports the study's conclusion that social media are established components of political communication in Enugu State, while also indicating differences between platforms.

Contribution of Social-Media Information Systems

The second research question examined how social-media information systems contribute to political communication. Respondents agreed that many voters follow politicians through Twitter (M = 2.97), Facebook (M = 3.06) and Telegram (M = 3.01). The mean for following politicians' YouTube accounts was 2.44, below the 2.50 benchmark. Respondents also agreed that social media support campaign advertising (M = 3.16) and constitute a strong campaign channel during election periods (M = 3.28). The item stating that politicians achieve their political ambitions through social media received a mean of 2.30.

Table 2: Respondents' Ratings on the Contribution of Social-Media Information Systems to Political Communication in Enugu State

Indicator	Mean	**Decision**
Many voters follow politicians' Twitter accounts	2.97	Agree
Many voters follow politicians' Facebook accounts	3.06	Agree
Many voters follow politicians' Telegram accounts	3.01	Agree
Many voters follow politicians' YouTube accounts	2.44	Disagree
Social media support campaign advertising	3.16	Agree
Social media are a strong campaign channel	3.28	Agree
Politicians achieve political ambitions through social media	2.30	Disagree

Note: M = weighted mean. Standard deviations are not reported because the underlying response-level data were not supplied; calculate and insert them from the original dataset before submission. Decision benchmark = 2.50. The results indicate that respondents

recognise the communication reach of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter. They also regard social media as useful for campaign advertising. However, the low score on the item concerning the achievement of political ambitions is a caution against interpreting platform use as evidence of electoral success. Communication effectiveness and electoral effectiveness are related but distinct outcomes.

Discussion

The findings provide support for the central proposition of the study: social media have become significant channels of political communication in Enugu State. The high ratings for Twitter, Facebook, campaign pages and continued political use indicate strong perceived communicative value. This is consistent with the hybrid media perspective, which views political communication as an interaction between traditional and digital media rather than the simple replacement of older media (Chadwick, 2017; McQuail & Deuze, 2021). The Nigerian evidence is also consistent with research showing that social media have become part of contemporary political communication and civic discourse in Nigeria (IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Ibebunjo, 2026). The prominence of Twitter and Facebook is consistent with research on political campaigning and digital participation. Twitter's rapid circulation and networked visibility make it useful for campaign communication, while Facebook's pages, groups and interpersonal networks provide opportunities for sustained audience engagement (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). The lower YouTube rating in this study suggests that platform affordances should be considered alongside audience habits and communication objectives rather than assuming equivalent political value across platforms. The findings also have implications for participatory democratic theory. Respondents perceive social media as platforms through which voters can follow political actors and access campaign messages. This indicates an expanded opportunity structure for participation. Yet participation should not be inferred solely from access or exposure. The findings are better interpreted as evidence of increased communicative opportunity than as conclusive evidence of strengthened democratic participation (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017).

The relatively low YouTube rating is another important finding. Video has substantial communicative potential, but platform effectiveness depends on user habits and campaign strategy. A platform may be technically capable of delivering rich political messages but still have less perceived campaign prominence among a particular population. This reinforces the argument that political actors should select platforms on the basis of audience characteristics, communication objectives and content format rather than assuming that all social-media channels have equivalent political value. The study's findings also suggest the importance of social-media analytics. Political actors and institutions can monitor audience responses, identify emerging issues and assess campaign communication through systematic analysis of user-generated content (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Zeng et al., 2010). Government use of social media also demonstrates the importance of moving from routine broadcasting to responsive communication (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Such monitoring should nevertheless be guided by transparency, privacy, ethical standards and respect for legitimate political participation. A further implication concerns the relationship between social media and traditional media. The study should not be interpreted as evidence that radio, television and newspapers have become irrelevant. A hybrid strategy remains appropriate because social media provide speed and interaction while conventional media can support broader reach, professional verification and access to audiences with limited connectivity (Chadwick, 2017; McQuail & Deuze, 2021). In the Nigerian context, communication also needs to be

sensitive to wider issues of democratic participation, civil society and social inclusion (Agbaenyi & Ibebunjo, 2021; Iroye & Ibebunjo, 2019; Shaibu et al., 2022). Finally, the study illustrates the importance of distinguishing political communication from political outcomes. Respondents' agreement that social media are useful campaign channels does not establish that they determine voting behaviour, electoral victory or democratic quality. The low score for the proposition that politicians achieve political ambitions through social media is particularly instructive. Communication reach should therefore be treated as an enabling condition rather than as evidence of electoral causation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Facebook, Twitter and other social-media platforms have become important components of political communication in Enugu State. The empirical evidence shows particularly strong perceptions of Twitter and Facebook as election-period communication channels, while YouTube received comparatively lower ratings. Respondents also regarded social media as useful for campaign advertising and for maintaining contact with voters. The central contribution of the study is therefore empirical rather than technological: it demonstrates that political communication in the study area is increasingly networked, interactive and platform-based. At the same time, the evidence cautions against equating online visibility with electoral success. Social media can create opportunities for political communication and participation, but democratic outcomes depend on the quality of communication, the credibility of information, citizens' media literacy, institutional responsiveness and the broader political environment.

Recommendations

i. Strengthen platform-specific political communication. In response to Objective 1, political parties and candidates should develop communication strategies around the platforms that respondents perceive as most prominent.
ii. Integrate social-media communication with hybrid media practice. Also responding to Objective 1, political communication teams should coordinate social-media activity with radio, television and other established media. This is particularly important where digital access, data affordability or digital literacy limits online reach. Social media should extend, rather than automatically replace, conventional political communication.
iii. Build evidence-based social-media information systems. In response to Objective 2, political parties and campaign organisations should establish systematic mechanisms for monitoring audience engagement, identifying recurring public concerns and evaluating the reach of campaign information.
iv. Improve the quality and credibility of campaign information. Because Objective 2 concerns the contribution of social-media information systems to political communication, campaign organisations should strengthen fact-checking, source verification, correction procedures and responsible content management. This would help ensure that increased communication volume also produces more useful political information.

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