

# Social Media and Political Participation among Youth in South-Eastern Nigeria: A Case Study of 2015 and 2019 General Elections

**ABDULRASHEED ABDULYAKEEN**

ORCID: 0000-0002-8467-8710

Department of Political Science, Al-Qalam University, Nigeria  
e-mail: abdulrasheedabdulyakeen90@gmail.com

**YUSUF ABDU YUSUF**

ORCID: 0000-0002-8764-1084

Department of Political Science, Al-Qalam University, Nigeria  
e-mail: ysaye05@gmail.com

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## **Abstract**

The study examines the role of social media and political participation among youth in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections. Both primary and secondary data were used. The instruments used for data collection were a validated questionnaire and guided interview. The data were analyzed using content analysis. Against this backdrop the Public Sphere and Political Campaign Theory was adopted as a framework of analysis. The findings of the study show that the social media have a very crucial role to play in the promotion of accountability in any democratic society. It was also discovered that for twenty years now, the democratic journey has remained tortuous because of the reckless pursuits of power by the political class. It was concluded that the Nigerian social media need to overcome some of the above mentioned challenges that limit their performance as a credible institution entrusted with the role of serving as the watchdog of the society without flouting the media ethical standards and squander imperatives for objectivity. The study recommends a need to address good governance that would position fundamental governance and create an enabling environment for self-participation. Electorates should critically analyze the situation and make inquiries before voting for a candidate who will not bring about growth and development in the country.

## **Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all forms of media and their tools are considered important factors that promote democracy and good governance. Through the media, the voice of the people, as well as their thoughts on political issues, is resonated. There is also an apparent synergy between the new media tools available today and the political life of people, and it typically sets the stage for a potent, interactive, and virulent version of political communication (Chinedu-Okeke, Obi, 2016).

"Information is power". This is a very popular, almost cliché statement. Access to information enables people to be aware of events, learn new ways of solving their problems, survey the environment, and get involved with happenings around them. Information also helps people make decisions about issues, based on the facts that are available to them. All these attest to the importance of information in the lives of people all over the world, and all through the ages. Access to information through the mass media has become a very intrinsic part of societies. The mass media is saddled with the responsibility of collating information, digging for facts, making sense of events, and transmitting this information to a mass audience. Generally, this is done through either the print or electronic media or broadcast media (Olorunnisola, Douai, 2013; Momoh, 2019).

As digital media have become increasingly ubiquitous, there are increasing concerns over how, and to what social and political ends, youth engage with media Howell (2013), notes that there is particular interest in understanding how participation in mediated environments online fosters civic engagement, knowledge, and civic participation. This work attempts to investigate the trends concerning participation in digital environments, in order to consider the implications for youths to practice citizenship through internet and social media literacy, and how participation in media spaces is negotiated by youth in relation to political practices and its subsequent consequences (Abdulyakeen, 2021).

The use of social media in politics has continued to grow in Nigeria in recent time. Traditional media have been in the vanguard of political communication, mediating even the interpersonal model. With increasing knowledge of the computer and the internet and invention of many devices in Information Communication Technology (ICT), politicians as well as the electorate embrace the use of blogs, websites and other social media platforms for communicating political issues. There is an increase in the use of the internet in Nigeria.

According to the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA, 2015), Nigeria has a population of 178,516,904. The population change is put at the rate of 2.8%. The internet penetration (% of population with access to the internet) of 37.59% has been ranked 8 in the world as of July 2014. The internet users have meteorically risen to 67,101,452, with user growth at 16% and growth of new users placed at 9,365,590, out of the 210,948,420 internet users in Africa per International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The leading global networking site Facebook has 14 million users in Nigeria as of 15 January 2015 out of 35,930,391 users in Africa which means 2.0% penetration rate of Nigerian population. Twitter boasts of 1.8 million users in Nigeria, while YouTube has 800,000 Nigerian accounts (Antoci, Sabatini, Sodini, 2012; Grow Ward, 2013; Kreiss, 2014). The social media is not only empowering people but it is also democratizing human relations. Necessity of social interactions, determined by the requirements of a mixed economy and rapid migration to capitalist economic order has enhanced patronage of the social media by individuals, governments, and corporate organizations. The use of the internet by politicians to communicate with their constituencies has further extended the concept of "mediatization" of politics in Nigeria (Ajayi, Adesote, 2015).

Before the advent of the new media, political campaigns and other electioneering activities blossomed in the traditional media. But the arrival of new media, and lately social interactive

media, has greatly affected the way the game of politics is played, and many democracies across the globe are also affected. Since 2008, when Barack Obama broke new ground by using social media in his political campaigns in ways never seen before, many politicians have toed along this line. In Africa, Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria quickly comes to mind and Muhammadu Buhari. Jonathan on Wednesday 15 September 2010 took the extraordinary step of announcing his bid for the highest political office in the land on Facebook. He informed his 217,000 fans on the world's most popular networking platform of his intent: twenty four hours later, 4,000 more fans joined his page. By the day of the election, on 16 April 2011, he had over half a million followers (Odoemelam, 2011; Adeyanju and Haruna, 2012). Same goes for Buhari and Osinbajo of the APC during the just concluded general elections where the social media became a political coliseum for them and their competing opponent and incumbent, the PDP. In addition to the approximately 14 million registered Nigerians on Facebook and 1.8 Million on Twitter, almost every institution involved in Nigeria's 2015 general elections conducted an aggressive social networking outreach, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Political parties, candidates, media houses, civil society groups, and even the police.

Olorunnisola and Douai (2013) observed that during the elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. They explained that a 33 year old IT consultant and activist Gbenga was one of such Nigerians. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their database; a daily summary was then sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website. This allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube.

The research is important because there is a consistent demand for the detachment of youth from social media servitude, and inclusion in governance as measured by improved social service delivery and accountability from government officials. The elected officials will continue to get away with not serving the people campaigned and sworn an oath to serve, while federal (national) and state level issues affect all citizens.

Sumera, Zaeem and Batool (2020), reiterated that it has become very common to participate in online political activities through liking, mentioning, tagging, uploading, commenting, and sharing political content as well as following politicians on Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, in the words of Jha and Kodila-Tedika (2019), social media sites not only empower the general citizens but also politicians.

South-eastern Nigeria was created as 22 states during the civil war of 1967–1970 but the region was changed to one of the six geopolitical zones in the country by the 1990s. Presently, the region consists of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The southeastern geopolitical zone includes 99.9% of population of Igbo people. This zone was home of many groups such as Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibo, and Efik. These groups live in peace with democratic system of government in several kingdoms. The zone has 85 local government areas with a population of over 20 million. The zone has about 10 commercial cities, apart from agriculture as the major economic activities. The zone is

also known as commercial and trading zone with small and medium indigenous industries that are manufacturing goods and services. The main Agriculture products in the zone are yam, cassava, rice, cocoyam, etc. The zone has solid minerals and nature resources such as crude oil, natural gas, bauxite, iron ore, sandstone, lignite, clay, coal, tin, and columbite (Sule, Sani, Mat, 2017). The zone has recently been plagued by crisis as a result of the call for secession and the creation of the State of the Independent people of Biafra (IPOB) by the leader of the movement in person of Nnamdi Kanu. He has recently declared that he doesn't represent the voice of the Igbo nation as well as is lacking capacity to do so. The (IPOB) has recently introduced the sit-at-home order in the zone to press home their demand as well as a gesture of solidarity with their leader Nnamdi Kanu who has been detained by the Nigerian Government. Nowadays, in south-eastern Nigeria social media is providing a new dimension for political leaders to communicate and engage with their citizens. However, the misuse of social media to spread fake news, hate and violent extremism portend grave dangers to the region. Evidentially, extremism, hate speech and fake news have contributed to several societal unrests. Several scholars (Gottfried, 2016) agree that hate speech and fake news play significant role in major outbursts of violence in the society. Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, Martinez (2015) note that a hate speech in itself is wrong and should not be supported by anybody.

### Statement of the research problem

There has been a notable rise in online and offline violent extremism all over the world, Nigeria inclusive (Kreiss, 2014; Ahmed, Lodhi, Shahzad, 2011). The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. have given rise to new problems as it concerns online hate comments (Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, Martinez, 2015; Silva, 2016). Several human rights groups and activists have expressed displeasure over the continuous use of the social media platforms to spread all kinds of discrimination (Anti-Defamation League, 2015; Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2012). Bartlett and Reynolds (2015) maintain that social media platforms have become a useful tool for violent extremists to advance their goals. They use the media to influence the youths with extremist messages aimed at propagating their negative ideology and recruitment (van Ginkel, 2015). Gerstenfeld, Grant and Chiang (2003) observe that the people propagating extremism use the social media. Evidence shows that excessive cases of online hate speeches happen on social media (Hawdon, Oksanen, Räsänen, 2014; Mondal, Silva, Benevenuto, 2017).

The usefulness of social media cannot be overemphasized. Social networking has become a very important tool for political mobilization globally. It is gradually becoming a dependable tool in changing the opinions and influences the public. Realizing the efficacy of this medium, some Nigerian politicians quickly embraced it and exploited it extensively for their political campaigns in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The media are essential social forces that lubricate the engine of democracy. Nevertheless, social media is sometimes used inappropriately, thus, diminishing the positive part it would have played in enhancing unbiased and fair political campaigns. These actions affect the credibility of the media, as well as the politicians who utilize it for misinformation within the society. Buttressing on this, Oyenuga (2015) observes that in the 2015 general elections, webbased social networking turned out to be all the more intense device and

even a deadlier weapon in which various video releases, voice lines, feature reports, headlines, and broadcasts were made to mar many political parties and individuals. For a long time, due to many factors, including the “hegemonic” nature of communication in Nigeria, youths had little opportunity to be active in governance, or make their views heard. However, with improvement in communication technology, the status quo appears to be changed. The internet tools like the social media have revolutionized the way people communicate.

In southeastern Nigeria, youths, who have higher levels of affinity with the social media, are using it to achieve different ends. It holds lots of potential for news, information, entertainment, mobilization, interaction, and expression. Given these potentials, it is pertinent to find out how the social media impacts the issue of governance and political participation by youths in 2015 and 2019 general elections. Some studies have been carried out, mostly focusing on events such as protests. It is, however, pertinent to examine how the leadership and the political atmosphere have been changed, with relation to the role of social media in 2015 and 2019 general elections. This forms the crux of the study.

## Research objective

Having juxtaposed the statement of the research problem, the following research objectives were drawn:

1. To assess the efficiency of social media platforms and political participation in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections.
2. To examine the roles of social media platforms and political participation in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections.
3. To enumerate challenges affecting the usage of social media platforms and political participation in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections.
4. To suggest ways of improving social media platforms and political participation in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections.

## The concept of social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as the “internet based applications that allow the creation and exchange of content which is user generated” (p. 61). They stated that social media was first known in 1979, when Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed internet users to post public messages; and also when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded “Open Diary” in 1998. Open Diary was an early social networking site in which members of a certain community shared their daily diary online and the word “blog” was first used at the same time. Before the second stage of development of the internet, “Web 2.0,” in the late 1990’s, users browsed only for the aim of getting information through reading from various resources and watching videos (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010; Adeyinka, 2016).

According to Al-Deen and Hendricks (2012) users at that time were considered consumers, not participants. Adeyinka (2016) mentioned Web 2.0, representing the second stage of the internet

development, namely “User Generated Content (UGC)”. The internet users were transformed from being consumers and participants to “prosumers” which means that they consume and produce media. These new affordances are what made the applications and dynamic interaction of social networking possible. Some of the common features that qualify a tool to be considered a social networking site are: enabling users to communicate with each other in an easy way and allowing users to exchange information, pictures and messages Al-Deen and Hendricks (2012). There are many forms of social media, presented in the Table 3 below, which allow users to interact with other media users of their choice.

## Political participation

Political participation is the activity by individuals or groups intended to influence those who govern or how they should do so. As a state matures through political freedom and economic upliftment, political consciousness is bound to grow. This is the cause and the effect of political participation. Political participation, as one of the threats of democracy, is found to be liberal and unrestrictive. Subscribing to this, Apam (2010) perceives political participation as “freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and the right to social justice, health services, better working condition and opportunity for franchise”. Political participation is one of the key ingredients of democracy in its real sense. Taking the conceptualization of democracy by Diamond (1996) into cognizance, democracy provides the equal opportunity platform for political participation and fairness in such competition, i.e. a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of a leader and policies, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation. In a similar perspective, Wilson (2000) conceptualizes four indicative domains of democracy which include: “the domain of individual and group rights and freedoms; the domain of popular and equal participation in collective decision; the domain of accountability of government to mass public and constituent minorities; and the domain of the application of the principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life: social, economic, and political.

The running theme of these definitions is that any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, enjoyment of civil and political liberties and popular participation that embraces all groups of the society, i.e. one that is not segregationist or discriminatory. The conceptual underpinnings of the definitions are freedom and equal opportunity for political participation that democracy avails both men and women. If democracy does not ordinarily discriminate on the grounds of race, religion or sex, then restrictions experienced in Africa and Nigeria suggests a level of artificiality and manmade imposition.

## Youth

The term 'youth' is vague. Hence, there is no generally agreed definition for it. The definition of youth varies from country to country, culture to culture, and from continent to continent based on the situations involved. The differences in the concept of youth have critical implications for planning, research, policy, and interventions (Borges, 2020). As it was stated by Apam (2010), "youth is defined in the literature as both an age group and social construct". The United Nations (1992) defined youth as persons aged 15–24 years. The UN definition of youth is followed by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Apam (2010). However, they consider young people and adolescents as those aged 10–24 years and 10–19 years, respectively. In the view of the United Nations Youth Fund, they include the persons between 15 and 32 years of age (United Nations, 2011).

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2010) define youth as a time of evolution from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Besides, youth is defined as those individuals between 15 and 35 years of age Van-Morgan and Morgan (2010). This definition is in line with the meaning of youth endorsed by the African Union (AU) (Altschuler, Strangler, Berkley, Burton, 2009). As was observed by the Van-Morgan and Morgan (2010), this definition was adopted by AU in the realization of the shortcomings associated with UN age division (Ashiru, 2010; Xenos, Vromen, and Loader, 2014). The argument is that based on the social, political, economic, and cultural context, the evolution from childhood to maturity and the process of defining a youth can occur at various ages, and over various times. In the understanding of Apam (2010), the extension of those considered as a youth to 30 years and beyond in Africa is an indication of the evolving phenomenon of a protracted time for the dependence of youth. The age range 15–24 years is utilized by the United Nations and others for statistics purposes. However, for Nigeria, considering numerous circumstances, this classification is too restricted.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) adheres to the international standard of 15–24 years in terms of the age range. Each country determines the definition of youth based on a national situation. Alongside GuineaBissau, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo, the persons aged 18 and 35 years are regarded as youth in Nigeria. This definition is in line with the political, historical, and current socio-economic happenings in the country. However, for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the upper age range for young people is thirty years.

## Role of social media in elections and political participation in Nigeria

Asad (2014) asserts that social media have great potential for encouraging collaborative political participation. Accessible social media platforms offer ordinary citizens the opportunity to interact more directly and actively with their political systems. Social media tools also possess the potential to allow diaspora communities to get involved in social-political processes. People engage in social media for various reasons which include airing their views and expressing (in some cases) anger and dissatisfaction. Mobilizing citizens to become engaged in politics is more than getting people out to vote at a poll on the Election Day.

Various Nigerian political actors and aspirants who are engaged in electoral processes are increasingly using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and blogs in their campaigns. Political parties and independent political advocacy and interest groups have recently used Facebook, Twitter, and political blogs as mediating platforms to engage citizens. Similarly, citizens have employed social media to participate in the electoral process. There are some pertinent examples of social media being widely used across Nigeria, most especially in the Fourth Republic, to encourage citizens' political involvement. It is widely known that running an election campaigns through social media platforms is a tactic that has been successfully employed in developed countries.

For example, the former US President Barrack Obama ran a widely popular election campaign in 2008 that employed social media to good effect. In the US, the 2008 election of Barrack Obama as President reflected unprecedented use of social media in a political campaign. The Obama campaign served as a stunning demonstration of a skilled team's use of widely available tools. The Obama campaign participated actively in more than 15 social networks and had 5 million active supporters through these media (Aleyomi, Ajakaiye, 2014; Williams, Gulati, 2013).

Likewise, the US President Donald Trump is a popular and daily user of Twitter to communicate to his political base and American audience. Also, President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria successfully utilized Facebook and Bulk SMS to interact with Nigerian citizens during the 2011 presidential elections. Jonathan even took the unprecedented decision of announcing his presidential candidacy on Facebook. The bid was announced on 15 September 2010 to his 217 000-plus fans through his Facebook page. By the Election Day on 16 April 2011, Jonathan had over half a million fans on Facebook (Aleyomi, Ajakaiye, 2014; Auger, 2013).

In Nigeria's electoral process, social media tools were not only employed for political campaigns but also various institutions involved in the elections conducted their own social media initiatives. Institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties like the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Congress (APC), and others, candidates, media houses and civil society groups engaged with citizens on various social media platforms. During the month-long election process in April 2011, INEC posted almost 4000 tweets, many in response to voters' queries; a report on the role played by social media platforms during the electoral process revealed that Twitter ultimately proved to be the most efficient way to interact with INEC (Aleyomi, Ajakaiye, 2014; Momoh, 2019). Similarly, during the election, the Nigerian mainstream media struck a relationship with social media platforms that enhanced both citizens' participation and professional journalistic practices. Journalists from various media organizations interacted with citizens on Facebook and the citizens' contributions informed the journalists' questions during interviews and debates with aspirants and institutions such as INEC.

Okoro and Nwafor (2013) also agrees that the use of social media during the 2011 elections enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections. The importance of the above medium for citizens' political mobilization and participation notwithstanding, the current political climate all over the world has witnessed a shift in attention to the social media. For instance, the recently concluded 2019 general elections



witnessed a remarkable use of social media as a political communication tool in Nigeria. Indeed, several aspirants, especially at the presidential level, engaged robustly on social media campaigns. Three major issues underline the tremendous use of social media tools during the 2019 general elections.

Firstly, it reflects a global trend towards “internet elections” or “e-electioneering”. Around the world, rapidly expanding access to the internet increased availability of internet ready smart-phones and other communication devices, as well as the evolution of web-based new media – personal websites, social networking sites, blogs, newsletters, have redefined methods of political communication, leading to a significant shift towards the use of social media in the electoral process. Previously, network television and newspapers dominated coverage of electioneering and were the primary sites of election-related information. But today, the social media has become a major election information sharing platform globally. Because of its ease of use, speed, and reach, social media is revolutionizing the efficiency of election administration, coverage and reporting (Chandrappa, 2012)

The second issue that underlines the use of social media in Nigeria’s 2019 elections is the tendency of some Nigerian politicians to tap the opportunities offered by the social media for online campaigning. During the 2019 general elections, many politicians, particularly the presidential aspirants, used social media tools to connect with the voters and constituents. Facebook and Twitter appear to be the most widely used social media platforms by the politicians. Presidential aspirants like Atiku Abubakar, Tony Moghalu, Oby Ezekwesili, Sola Sowore, among others, all had Twitter and other social media accounts. Political parties also maintained Facebook accounts. Social media offered politicians and their parties the opportunity to broadcast messages and recruit a huge number of volunteers to support their campaigns.

The third issue that underscores the use of social media in Nigeria’s 2019 general elections was the tendency of the Nigerian civil society and the electorate to take up social media as a tool for improving the efficiency of election observation. Prior to the conduct of the 2019 elections, elections in Nigeria had been largely flawed by vote rigging and other electoral malpractices. The 2019 general elections offered a unique context and opportunity to examine the use of social media in elections, especially the usefulness and applicability of social media in the electoral environment. Although it seems obvious that social media contributed in no small measure to the success of the 2019 elections, it is pertinent to understand specifically how particular stakeholders in the 2019 elections, like INEC, politicians/political parties, the electorate, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) used the social media during the elections and the impacts these had on the elections (Adamu, Abubakar, 2020).

In recognition of the ever increasing role of the social media in the elections, many world leaders now communicate and update their citizens via Twitter, Facebook, and others platforms. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Donald Trump, the former President of the United States of America, constantly “tweeted” and “retweeted” on Tweeter and he is even regarded as “being too social media savvy”. In Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari, though not a social media savvy president recognizes the influence and impact of social media. Consequently, he appointed Loretta Onochie and Bashir Ahmad to manage his social and new media platforms (Adamu, Abubakar, 2020).

## Role of social media in political awareness

In a modern democracy, social media can be used by governments to involve citizens in decision making, and by civil society to engage people in specific issues. However, social media can also be used to broaden political participation by helping citizens to communicate with their representatives and with each other Kocak, Kaya and Erol (2013). The use of social media as a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned.

The role of youth in electoral activities cannot be overemphasized. They play active role in mobilizing support for candidates and actual voting. They are the active participants of election violence and also the active users of social media. Disseminating useful information to youth in form of voter education is a means of forestalling incidences of election violence and electoral manipulations. Data released by statista.com indicated that there are 84.3 million internet users in Nigeria and that by 2019, there would be 93 million internet users. Chukwuemeka Afigbe, Manager Developer programme at Facebook, revealed that about 26 million Nigerians now login on Facebook every month. Social media is indeed the best avenue for reaching out to majority of the voters.

## Empirical review

Lawal and Muhammed's (2018) work entitled "The role of mass media in political socialization which focus on the 2015 general election in Nigeria" demonstrated that the mass media has done a lot in its role as a watchdog and public opinion shaper. The study, however, unraveled that ethnicity, ownership structure, sensationalism, and corruption are some of the fundamental factors that have compromised the efficiency of the media in fostering effective political socialization in Nigeria. In view of this, the study recommends that the media in Nigeria must assist in building and maintaining an environment conducive for effective political socialization in the country. However, Lawal and Muhammed (2018) did not examine the influence of mass media on electioneering campaign in the 2019 governorship elections in Lokoja, Kogi state.

Udeze and Akpan (2013) in their study of the influence of political advertising on the choice of governorship candidates in Imo State during the 2011 governorship election, revealed that majority of the electorate in the State were exposed to political advertising, mainly on radio which to a large extent influenced the choice of candidates during the governorship election. However, the above studies do not examine the influence of mass media on electioneering campaign in the 2019 governorship election in Lokoja, Kogi state.

In another related research conducted by Auger (2013) critically investigated fostering democracy through social media and evaluated the usage of Twitter, Facebook and You Tube among the nonprofit advocacy organizations and they were ethically motivated people to their point of view. The study also found that Facebook, Twitter and You Tube were facilitated organizations for different purposes in two-way communication. Unfortunately Auger, accentuate the gap and impact for which the youth on social can make for their communities.

Moreover, Abbott (2014) investigated the ICTs impact on social as well as politically generated issues and the role of social media in East Asia. Both researchers were interested to observe the internal political impact and new digital usage in political discussion. Study findings reveal that the internet itself doesn't support democratization process it does limit the authoritarian regimes, but now technology some extend empowers the citizens for political mobilization than ever before. This is partially in agreement to the point raised. However, the two studies above were inadequate to identify youth awareness, engagement and contribution on civic governance and public accountability through social media.

Sule, Sani and Mat (2017) in their study examined the extent to which the 2015 Presidential Election differs from the previous Presidential Elections in Nigeria. The study revealed that the 2015 Presidential Election was different to some extent with the previous Presidential Polls in Nigeria in term of voters' influence. The influence was attributed to factors such as: religious affiliation, ethnicity, regionalism, nepotism, issue-based politics including corruption, insecurity, poverty, unemployment, among others which influenced political behavior of the electorate. However, the study does not examine the influence of mass media on electioneering campaign in the 2019 governorship election in Lokoja, Kogi state.

Kachii (2018) assessed the impact of political advertising on voting behavior of electorate in Benue State. The study was conducted to unravel the influence of politically motivated campaign songs during the 2015 elections on electorate in Benue State. The study revealed that campaign songs only created the political atmosphere and promoted political candidates, but did not guarantee electoral victory. Moses (2019) in his study of Electoral violence and its implication on Nigeria's democracy in Bayelsa state unraveled that the election was characterized by violent activities which no doubt flawed the electoral process. In fact, the election was marred with all sort of sharp practices such as intimidation, vote buying, rigging and destruction of both sensitive and non-sensitive materials and so on. As a result of this, the research recommended among others that there should be massive re-orientation of the electorates and politicians on the need to accept defeat and embrace dialogue in any electoral contest. Nevertheless, the above studies do not examine the influence of mass media on electioneering campaign in the 2019 governorship election in Lokoja, Kogi state.

Lawal and Momoh (2019) in a study entitled "Vote buying and electoral integrity in the 2018 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State" identified key implications of vote buying on the conduct of credible elections in future elections in Ekiti State such that present situation has provided poor voters the opportunities to see election as a period when their vote can be sold to the highest bidder. On the whole, the implication of vote buying on Nigeria's electoral processes has resulted to various degrees of irregularities that have questioned the level of electoral integrity in the country. The researchers therefore recommended that there is need to strengthen the existing legal framework to guide against vote buying such as the electoral Act 2010 (as amended 2015) in order to address some of the notable inconsistencies and potential loopholes in the Electoral Act. Despite, the contributions of Lawal and Momoh's study, it does not examine the influence of social media and political participation in 2015 and 2019 general elections in south-eastern Nigeria. It is against this background; this study seeks to make contributions to this research area.

## Research methodology

This paper adopts a mixed method of research design which entails collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The population of the study consists of respondents in south-eastern Nigeria which is made up of five states, namely: Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. The total population, according to National Bureau of Statistics (2017), of these states is 21,955,400. The sample size of 380 at 95% confidence level was used based on the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were deployed to select respondents who have social media account(s) from one of the Local Government Areas located each of the five state capitals. In Awka, Anambra state, Awka North LGA was selected, Abia – Umuahia (Umuahia South LGA was selected), Ebonyi – Abakiliki (Abakiliki LGA was selected), Enugu – Enugu (Enugu North LGA was selected) and Imo – Owerri (Owerri Municipal LGA was selected) respectively. Meanwhile, one key informant was purposively selected per state making a total of five participants for the key informant interviews to complement quantitative survey. The reason for the small number of participants is due to the fact that in qualitative research method the number is usually small, as Khan, Anker and Patel (2016) observe that qualitative study usually involves small participants in an in-depth discussion in which small number of people from the target population deliberate on issues that are of relevance to the study. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire and interview guide. The questionnaire comprised of Likert scale questions. The results of the distributed questionnaire were presented in tables using simple frequency, percentage and mean analysis.

## Data presentation and analysis

As shown in Table 1 above, 28.68% of the respondents are between 18–25 years of age, 27.12% are between 26–32 years, 39.74% are aged between 33–39 years, 40–46 years are 3.16%, 47–53 years are 0.79%, and the remaining 0.53% are 54–60 years and above. This shows that the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 33 and 39 years. From this Table it can be concluded that the research received response from all the adult categories in the study area. The sex distribution of the respondents, on the other hand, indicates that out of the 380 respondents, 366, representing 96.3%, were males while 14, representing 3.68%, were females. This, therefore, implies that majority of respondents are males, however, the views of females were not left out. The Table 1 also indicates that 366 of the respondents, representing 96.3%, were affiliated to Christian religion, while 14 of them, representing 3.68%, were said to be affiliated to Islamic religion. None of the respondents claimed affiliation to traditional religion. This indicates that Christianity is the dominant religion in the study area. With respect to occupation, the Table shows that 23.4% are civil servants, 18.68% are engaged in various types of business, 7.89% are farmers, 18.9% are teachers at various levels, 24.5% are students, while 18.68% are into different occupations such as artisans, mechanics, tailors, drivers, barbers, etc. The majority of respondents therefore are businesspersons.

**Table 1.** Respondents' bio-data

List	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18–25 years	109	28.68
26–32 years	103	27.12
33–39 years	151	39.74
40–46 years	12	3.16
47–53 years	3	0.79
54–60 years	2	0.53
Total	380	100.00
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	198	52.11
Female	182	47.89
Total	380	100.00
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
Christianity	366	96.3
Islam	14	3.68
Traditional Religion	0	0.00
Total	380	100.00
<b>Occupation</b>		
Business	71	18.68
Farming	30	7.89
Teaching	72	18.9
Students	93	24.5
Civil Service	89	23.4
Others	25	6.57
Total	380	100.00

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

**Table 2.** Use of social media

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	352	92.6
No	28	7.4
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 2 shows that 352 (92.6%) use social media for its influence one's way of life, one's thinking as regards the public accountability and democratic process, 28 (7.4%) answered in the negative. This implies that significant proportion of the respondents use social media platforms.

**Table 3.** Forms of social media

Social media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	281	73.9
WhatsApp	13	3.4
Instagram	10	2.6
Twitter	73	19.2
Others	3	0.8
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 3 above shows that 281 (73.9%) of the respondents opted for Facebook as the form of social media they are familiar with, 13 (3.4%) choose WhatsApp, another 10 (2.6%) went for Instagram, 73 (19.2) went for Twitter, another 3 (0.8) choose "Other" option. This implies that majority of the people who participated in this research are familiar with the use of social media.

**Table 4.** Roles of social media during electioneering campaign

Roles	Frequency	Percentage
Provision of information events	49	12.9
Provision of comments including guidance and advice in relation to events	61	16.1
Provision of a forum for access channels for diverse views and for political advocacy	79	20.8
Provision of a two-way channel between citizens and government	82	21.6
Acting as critic or watchdog in order to hold the government to account	109	28.7
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 4 show the collective rank order of the social media roles, according to how important the respondents see each of them. It can be observed that 109 respondents, representing 28.7%, ranked acting as critic or watchdog in order to hold the government to account as the most important mass media role, followed by 82 representing 21.6% choosing providing a two-way channel between citizens and government, providing access channels for diverse views and for political advocacy was 79 representing 20.8%, and provision of comments including guidance and advice in relation to events ranked 4 representing 61 (16.1) and provision of information about events ranked 5 representing with 49 (12.9%).

**Table 5.** Social media influence efficiency of 2015–2019 general elections

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	292	76.8
No	79	20.8
I don't know	9	2.4
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 5 shows that 292 (76.8%) of the respondents believe that social media influence efficiency of 2019 general elections. 79 participants (20.8%) answered in the negative and the rest 9 (2.4%) went for the “I don't know” option. This revealed that social media has influenced the efficiency of the 2019 general elections.

**Table 6.** Stage of using social media

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Campaign	222	58.4
Voting coverage	9	2.4
Distribution of election material coverage	39	10.3
Counting of voter's coverage	110	28.9
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 6 shows that 222 (58.4%) of the respondents uses social media for campaign, 110 (28.9%) uses social media for counting of voter's coverage 39 (10.3%) for distribution of election material coverage, while 9 (2.4) uses social media for voting coverage. This result shows that majority of the respondents used social media during campaign.

**Table 7.** Motive for using social media

Motives	Frequency	Percentage
My political party	125	32.9
Political candidate	195	51.3
N.G.O.	11	2.9
Freewill	49	12.9
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 7 shows that 125 (32.9%) of the respondents uses social media for political party activities, 195 (51.3%) uses it for promoting their political candidate, 49 (12.9) uses it for free will, 11 (2.9) uses it's for N.G.O. This shows that significant population use social media to promote their candidate during the 2015–2019 general election.

**Table 8.** Social media used during the 2015–2019 general elections

Social media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	281	73.9
WhatsApp	13	3.4
Instagram	10	2.6
Twitter	73	19.2
Others	3	0.8
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 8 above shows that 281 (73.9%) of the respondents opted for Facebook as the form of social media used during the 2015–2019 general elections, 13 (3.4%) choose WhatsApp, another 10 (2.6%) went for Instagram, 73 (19.2) went for Twitter, another 3 (0.8) choose “Other” option. This implies that majority of the people who participated in this research opted for Facebook as the form of social media used during the 2015–2019 general elections.

**Table 9.** Electronic device used during the 2015–2019 general elections

Electronic device	Frequency	Percentage
Android phone	281	73.9
IPhone	51	13.4
Palm tablet	39	10.3
Computer	9	2.4
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 9 shows that 281 (73.9%) of the respondents use Android Phone, 51 (13.4%) use IPhone 39 (10.3%) use Palm Tablet while 9 (2.4) uses computer. This shows that Android Phone was the most used electronic Device used during the 2015–2019 elections.



**Table 10.** Social media influence efficiency of 2015–2019 general elections

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	366	96.3
No	10	2.6
I don't know	4	1.1
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 10 shows that 366 (96.3%) of the respondents believe that social media influence efficiency of 2015–2019 general elections, 10 (2.6%) answered in the negative and the rest 4 (1.1%) went for the “I don't know” option. This shows that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that social media influenced the efficiency of the elections.

**Table 11.** Rating the role of social media in the democratic processes

Option	Frequency	Percentage
High	194	51.1
Very high	9	2.4
Low	90	23.7
Very Low	84	22.1
I don't know	3	0.8
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

In response to the question on the impact of social media in the Democratic Press in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 194 (51.1%) of the respondents said that it was high, 9 (2.4%) said very high and 90 (23.7%) of the respondents said it was low. Also, 84 (22.1%) of them said it was very low and the rest of the respondents who rated social media in the Democratic Press as high is 51.1% and that of those who rated it as low stands at 23.7%. Thus, majority believed that the impact of social media in the Democratic Press in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is high.

**Table 12.** Level of preparedness of social media

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	366	82.5
No	10	12.5
I don't know	4	5.0
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

It could be observed from the Table 12 that the social media in Nigeria are well equipped to carry out their functions effectively. 10 (12.5%) participants answered in the negative and 4 respondents (5%) went for the “I don’t know” option. This implies that social media platforms are capable of transforming election.

**Table 13.** Social media has an effective role to play in a democratic process

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	222	58.4
Agree	131	34.5
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Disagree	17	4.5
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

Table 13 shows that 222 (58.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the social media has an effective role to play in Nigeria’s democracy, 131 (34.5%) agreed to this, 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed and 17 (4.5%) of the respondents disagreed. Majority of the respondents opined that social media have an effective role to play.

**Table 14.** Social media can contribute to the credibility of election

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	292	76.8
No	83	21.9
I don’t know	5	1.3
Total	380	100.0

Source: Abdulyakeen, Yusuf (2021), field survey.

From the above Table we can conclude that 292 (76.8%) confirmed that social media can contribute to the credibility of election, 83 (21.9%) said no, and 5 (1.3%) did not have an opinion on this matter.

### Summary of an in-depth interview (qualitative data)

Codes were ascribed to the participants from the five south-eastern states Anambra (ANA1), Enugu (ENU2), Imo (IM3), Abia (ABI4), and Ebonyi (EBO5). Questions were asked to further help answer the research questions posed in the study.

The first question was: What is the extent of usage of social media platforms in political participation among youth in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections? Responding to this question, ANA1 said: “To the best of my knowledge I think social media have not been well deployed in combating extremism, hate speech and fake news because if you go out there you will notice this issue is still prevalent in the cyberspace”. EBO5, in a similar vein, noted that: “No doubt, efforts are being made to combat this problem but I think it should be intensified because if it is not checked there is going to be a big problem”. ENU2 answered: “It is being used but the extent is at moderate level and at moderate level I don’t think much can be achieved”. In the opinion of IM3 social media platforms are well utilized to a large extent in combating the menace of extremism, hate speech, and fake news through the help of government agents of change”. ABI4 said: “No, no, no! Social media has not been used to large extent. If it has been used, then the issue of hate speech and fake news should be dying by now. Now look at the society every now and then – sections against sections in a verbal war. Does that show it is being used? Well, I think you know the answer.” The majority of comments from participants revealed that social media platforms have not been used to a large extent in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news during the 2015 and 2019 general election.

The next question was: How effective are social media platforms in political participation among youth in south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 general elections?

Responding to this question EBO5 noted: “Social media platforms, to the best of my knowledge, have never been effective political sensitization in Nigeria. When you go on Twitter or Facebook you will see what I am telling you. If you see the hate in people through their comments you will marveled”. ANA1 words were in consonance with those of EBO5’s: “Truly, I must say social media platforms have even fuelled the heat on hate speech, fake news and extremism because of the presence of no censorship. Anyone can just come and post anything, portraying hate or even post misleading information”. ENU2 said: “How effective? I think social media platforms have not been so effective because every day we wake up and see hate speech, fake news. Gentleman, I mean it when I say it is not effective in combating fake news, hate speech, and extremism: ABI4 explained: “In my own opinion I don’t think it has been effective because social media platforms are like a market with dirt where anyone can come and dump garbage and leave”. IM3: “Even though I am of the opinion that social media platforms are used to a large extent to combat fake news, hate speech or extremism, I don’t think it is that effective because this issue keeps reverberating despite calls from government and other institutions to shun hate speech, fake news spread and all that”. From all the responses it follows that social media platforms are not seen as effective in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news.

Concerning the question on challenges ENU2 opined: “The absence of law regulating these platforms will definitely pose a big problem. Not only that, the free access to these platforms gives people the leverage to use the medium to do whatever they like, such as posting misleading information.” In similar vein, IM3 maintained: “When the people are not happy as a result of government attitudes towards certain issues of national importance, people who are aggrieved will use the quickest way – in most cases the social media – to express their displeasure and in such

situation how can the social media be of help in curtailing hate speech or extremism?” ANA1 and ABI4 shared similar view: “The free access to social media by just anyone can serve as a stumbling block in using the platform in combating hate speech, fake news, and extremism”. EBO5 pointed towards government policies and law on some issues: “Truly, I must say that when governments are not doing things right, people will react and in recent times the social media is the first point where they go to vent their anger”. From these comments it is obvious that there are numbers of challenges that affect the usage of social media platforms in political participation among youth in south-eastern Nigeria.

## Discussions of the major findings

Findings from the data analysis revealed that the social media platforms were used in political sensitization during the 2015–2019 general elections. However, 52% of respondents confirmed that the extent to which social media platforms are being used in political sensitization in Nigeria is moderate. This is supported by the fact that 45% of respondents were of the view that the social media platforms are used less than three times in political sensitization in Nigeria. The qualitative finding equally revealed that the extent to which social media platforms are being used in political sensitization in Nigeria is moderate. This is in line with Nagi (2018) study which revealed that the use of social media has made it easy to produce and disseminate news, and as such has become a fertile ground for electioneering campaign. Supporting the finding of this study, Boulianne, (2015) noted that the use of social network for influence has birthed new ideological dimensions that motivate an individual or a forum to access channels for diverse views and for political advocacy.

Communicating findings from mean analysis revealed that social media platforms have not been effective in political sensitization in Nigeria. On the other hand, the qualitative finding is also in line with the quantitative finding. Corroborating this finding, Adeyanju and Haruna, (2012) in their study revealed a two-way channel between the citizens and the government. In the study of Auger (2013); Abbott (2014) on effectiveness of combating fake news on social media with source ratings revealed that among the expert rating, user article rating, and user source rating, source ratings influenced social media users’ beliefs in the articles and that source rating is a viable measure against fake news. From the theoretical perspective, the public sphere theory explains that there is a “space” which provides open 17 fora for public discussion and accessing it is usually free. Given that anyone can access them and use them, they could give the opportunity for fake news to be spread and hate speech to be promoted, and by implication dampen the effectiveness of social media in combating fake news, hate speech, and extremism.

Findings also revealed that some of the challenges affecting the usage of social media in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news, as confirmed by the respondents, were that since hate speech bill has not been passed, it posed a challenge to the use of social media platforms in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news, because everyone will be at liberty to do anything without regulation as the case may be. Also, the free access to social media platforms that encourages anyone to use the platforms constitutes a challenge, too. Furthermore, the lack of respect for the federal character prevents the use of social media platforms in combating

extremism, hate speech, and fake news, as confirmed by the respondents. Government's attitude and some of its policies pose a challenge to the use of social media in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news. The qualitative findings were no different from the quantitative findings, as the participants expressed similar concerns as identified in the quantitative findings. In line with these findings, Ajayi and Adesote (2015) in their study, revealed that authorities of many countries today are rapidly recognizing hate speech as a grave challenge, because it is difficult to create obstacles on the internet to prevent the spread of hate across countries. In the study of Ross, Jung, Heisel and Stieglitz (2018) it was revealed that social media have made it easy for fake news to thrive because of the free access to them.

## Conclusions

The introductory aspect of the research laid the foundation for the work by expatiating on the statement of the research problem, the methodology, and the research objectives. The researchers examine and scrutinize works of different scholars from different countries across different continents in connection with our research topic and the related terms and concepts. The scholars generally discussed the roles the social media are expected to play in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study noted that continuous rise in extremism, hate speech, and fake news spread in contemporary Nigeria is problematic. These issues are capable of causing tension and then disintegration if not properly handled. Based on the findings, it is therefore safe to conclude that the extent to which the social media platforms are being used during the 2015–2019 general elections could be the reason for not being effective in combating extremism, hate speech, and fake news in Nigeria. The role of the social media in the consolidation of Democracy in any particular country is facilitative, supportive and determined by the nature of the society itself. To be effective, the social media need an enabling environment.

## Recommendations

Based on the reported findings the researchers recommend that:

Social media platforms should be used very often so as to raise the consciousness of people towards the dangers of extremism, hate speech, and fake news. Social media contents should be designed in such a way they will be very effective in influencing people to disengage from extremism, hate speech, and fake news. Other measures need to be introduced to go hand-in-hand with social media in order to curb the scourge. Those who use the social media platforms to promote extremism hate speech, and fake news as a result of its free access should be reorientated so as to desist from the act. On the other hand, government should be advised to introduce policies that will not fuel extremism, hate speech, and fake news among the people.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and National Orientation Agency (NOA) should carry out massive improved political education program to educate the electorate on how to decipher between true facts spread by the media by critically analyzing the reports by media organizations and social media handlers.

National Broadcasting commission (NBC) and Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) should ensure that there are presidential debates ahead of the elections to enable the citizenry to evaluate the candidates and determine who is competent to rule the country. This would make the electorate more objective instead of relying only on social media reports.

The electorate themselves should learn to be objective and not just flow with the wind and caprices of whatever individuals or the social media give out information. They should critically analyze and make inquiries before voting on a candidate that will not bring about growth and development in the country.

The Nigerian Press Council and Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON) should monitor hate speech and attacks on personalities that could lead to violence, and sanction media houses, social media handlers that go against the regulations and code of conduct of the broadcasting and press institution.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Department of State Security should collaborate to monitor the electioneering campaigns of candidates of various political parties to ensure that they do not engage in hate speech. Offenders should face stiff sanctions up to disqualification from contesting election for repeated abuse.

## APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Please tick your response (✓)

*Respondents' Sex*

	Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	Coding Categories	Skip to
1	2	3	4
101	Sex	Male ..... 1 Female ..... 2	
102	Age	18–23 years ..... 1 24–29 years ..... 2 30–35 years ..... 3 36–Above years ..... 4	
103	Educational Qualification	Primary School Cert ..... Secondary School Cert..... Tertiary Certificate ..... Other, Specify .....	
104	Employment Status	Civil Servant ..... Unemployed ..... Retired..... Self-Employed..... Others, Specify.....	
105	Occupation	Farming ..... Trading ..... Politician..... Other, Specify .....	

## Section B: Role of Social Media in Political Participation/Sensitization

1	2	3	4
201	Do you use Social Media?	Yes..... 1 No..... 2	Skip to
202	On What forms of social media are you familiar with?	Print Media ..... 1 Electronic Media ..... 2 Others ..... 3 None ..... 4	
203	What are the roles of the social media during election campaign?	Provision of information events ..... 1 Provision of comments including guidance and advice in relation to events ..... 2 Provision of a forum for access channels for diverse views and for political advocacy ..... 3 Provision of a two-way channel between citizens and government ..... 4 Acting as critic or watchdog in order to hold the government to account ..... 5	
204	In what form do you use Social Media at the 2015–2019 Election?	Campaign..... 1 Voting Coverage ..... 2 Distribution of election material coverage..... 3 Counting of voter's coverage..... 4	
205	What motivated you to use social media during the election?	My Political Party ..... 1 Political Candidate..... 2 N.G.O ..... 3 Freewill ..... 4	
206	Which of the following Social Media do you use during the 2015–2019 General Election?	Facebook..... 1 WhatsApp..... 2 Instagram..... 3	
207	Which electronic device do you use during the 2015–2019 General Election?	Android Phone..... 1 Iphone..... 2 Palm Tablet ..... 3 Computer ..... 4	
208	Does the social media influence efficiency of 2015–2019 General Election?	Yes ..... 1 No ..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	
209	How would you rate the impact of mass media in the Democratic Processes in Nigeria's 2015–2019 General Election?	High ..... 1 Very High ..... 2 Low ..... 1 Very Low ..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	
210	Do you think the social media are well equipped to carry out their function effectively?	Yes..... 1 No..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	
211	Do you agree that the social media has effective role to play in the Democratic Processes?	Strongly agree ..... 1 Agree ..... 2 Strongly Disagree..... 3 Disagree..... 4	
212	Would you say that media reports on election contributed to the credibility of the election?	Yes..... 1 No..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	

1	2	3	4
213	Do you perceive media reports during 2019 General Election as credible?	Yes..... 1 No..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	
214	Do you think that the passage into law of the Freedom of Information Bill will enhance public accountability issues in Nigeria's Democratic Press?	Yes..... 1 No..... 2 I don't know ..... 3	

*Thank you for your cooperation.*

## APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions were asked to participants:

The interview guide helped to answer research questions framed in the course of the study. These questions were posed to participants drawn from government institution, NGO, agency and ministry.

- The researcher will ask questions in relation to the efficiency of social media platforms and Political Participation in South-Eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 General Elections. Follow up question will be asked.
- The researcher will like to know the extent of usage of social media platforms in combating extremism, hate speech and fake news in South-Eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 General Election. Follow up question will be asked.
- The researcher will like to know how effective is social media platforms Political Participation in South-Eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 General Elections. Follow up question will be asked.
- The researcher will like to know the challenges affecting the usage of social media platforms and Political Participation in South-Eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 General Elections. Follow up question will be asked.
- The researcher will like to suggest ways of improving social media platforms and Political Participation in South-Eastern Nigeria during the 2015–2019 General Elections. Follow up question will be asked.

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