

Social Media Misinformation and Electoral Violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated social media misinformation and electoral violence in Nigeria. The increasing use of social media during elections in Nigeria has facilitated the spread of misinformation and false political content. This has heightened political tensions, undermined public trust, and contributed to electoral violence. The objectives of the study were to examine the role of social media in the political process in Nigeria and analyse the influence of social media on electoral violence in Nigeria. The study adopted the Political Communication Theory made popular by Harold Lasswell in 1927. The study employed a qualitative research design and applied secondary sources of data; data were sourced from academic books, journal articles, government documents, reports of electoral management bodies, media publications, reports from civil society organisations, and other relevant online materials, among others. The paper revealed that social media has developed as a vital platform in Nigeria's electoral process, improving political communication, voter sensitisation, campaign activities, citizen participation, and the dissemination of election-related information through platforms such as Facebook, X, WhatsApp, YouTube, and online media channels. The study concluded that conducting elections in Nigeria without recording widespread violence has become difficult, so much so that electoral violence is gradually becoming a marker for persistent democratic challenges faced in the country. Although the proliferation of technology, and by extension, social media, has influenced the electoral cycle through planning, strategy, training, information, and campaign, which has increasingly made the process less arduous, encompassing, and more engaging, yet, social media has, in the same direction, contributed to the furtherance of electoral violence in Nigeria, especially through disinformation, hate speech and propaganda. The paper recommended that the electoral body and political stakeholders in Nigeria should leverage social media responsibly by promoting accurate, timely, and issue-focused information while providing digital literacy programmes for voters to ensure that these platforms enhance informed participation without being exploited for misinformation.

Keywords: *Social media, electoral violence, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and online media channels*

Introduction

One of the features of the 21st century is information and technology. The world has progressed from analogue to digital, and this is made possible by the introduction of technology. Technology has made it possible for the rapid dissemination of information using different media such as the internet, telephone and other social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr and YouTube, etc.). These various social media platforms enable one to communicate and interact without physically being present. According to Chinedu-Okeke and Obi (2016), the emergence of social media revolutionised human communication as social media remains an integral part of human existence in contemporary times. This is evidenced in the number of people—800 million—who are ardent users of Facebook and over 200 million who are Twitter users. No doubt, social media is a fantastic tool for communicating with a large audience (Akinyetun et al., 2021). The relevance of social media is that it bridges time and space, which has hitherto impeded communication. Social media has made interactions and communication easy, thereby saving man-hours. People can now communicate, engage in business transactions, and carry out other engagements through social media platforms. Organisations, families and social groups, etc., now carry out engagements such as meetings through social media.

Social media has enabled users to vent their views, with everyone having his/her own opinion as well as a platform to air such opinions even without adequate knowledge of the topic. Opeibi (2019), cited in Akinyetun et al. (2021), aptly captures this view when he avers that, since the turn of this millennium, the internet and social media networks have been opening up new opportunities to energise political participation and civic engagement in advanced and emerging democracies. This new mode of virtual political interaction is creating a new ground for hastened engagements between politicians and citizens in most democratic cultures across the globe. They are particularly operational in encouraging more direct communication channels between the political elites, the politically informed, and citizens, whilst reducing communication lag.

Social media platforms have enhanced citizens' participation in the electoral process. In Nigeria, social media has been pivotal in the dissemination of information to the electorate by the electoral umpire. Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) note that politicians have actively and consciously shifted focus from the use of the old and the electronic media to the use of new media for electioneering purposes. In an effort to gain the confidence of Nigerian citizens and build trust in its electoral process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria, before the 2011 General Elections, set up social media platforms to disseminate information directly to citizens as well as to monitor Election Day processes and procedures.

Due to its faceless nature, social media has become a breeding ground for disseminating unreliable information, fake news and for throwing banter. Social media has been used to promote hate speech and incite violence. This was why Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) argue that, despite the advantages social media holds in political sensitisation and in raising awareness, it is also being used by political opponents as a tool for stirring conflict. Olabamiji (2014) adds that, although social media encourages political awareness and interaction, it is susceptible to intimidation. It can be used to taunt an opposition or provoke electoral violence. Electoral violence generally refers to violence that is directly or indirectly connected to protests against election malpractice during the election processes/period.

Electoral violence is any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process, or the process itself, during the election period (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2012). Through social media platforms, politicians attack each other, spread false information and try to demark their political opponents. The spread of false information during

elections can inflame existing political grievances, reinforce stereotypes, provoke fear, and mobilise individuals toward violent actions. In a politically and ethnically diverse society such as Nigeria, the consequences of misinformation can be particularly severe, threatening social cohesion, democratic stability, and peaceful electoral processes. Despite efforts by government agencies, electoral bodies, media organisations, and fact-checking institutions to combat misinformation, the challenge remains persistent, informing the basis for this study.

Statement of the Problem

The intersection of social media and electoral politics has become one of the most significant developments in contemporary democratic governance, with the rapid proliferation of misinformation on digital platforms posing unprecedented challenges to electoral integrity, voter autonomy, and democratic legitimacy across both established and emerging democracies (Obiora, 2025). Nigeria's 2023 general elections were conducted amidst widespread reports of social media manipulation, coordinated disinformation campaigns, and the viral spread of fabricated content targeting specific candidates, ethnic groups, and regional constituencies. Nigeria has witnessed electoral violence since the 1950s, and the media have played some roles in the violence. While the traditional media have been very pivotal in contributing to entrenching democratic governance in the country, some of the media houses have also helped to amplify disinformation during the electoral cycle, which often snowballs into violence. In the same vein, the emergence of digital media, especially social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, just to mention a few), has revolutionised the media space (Ugbudian, 2021).

Previous studies have been carried out on social media and electoral violence; Obiora et al. (2025) analyse Social Media Misinformation and its Impact on Electoral Behaviour: A Comparative Research of Nigeria and South Africa. Obasi (2024) examines the Impact of False Information on Social Media and Its Role in Shaping Voting Behavior in Nigerian General Elections. Akinyetun et al. (2021) investigated Social Media and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Sustainable Development Goal 16, A Panacea. This paper examines the impact of social media on electoral violence. It specifically looks at the influence of social media in the electoral process and its promotion of electoral violence in the Nigerian political system.

Objectives of the Study

The paper is guided by the following objectives, which are to:

1. Examine the role of social media in the political process in Nigeria.
2. Analyse the influence of social media on electoral violence in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Concept of Social Media

Social media is a form of mass media communications on the internet (such as on websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). Social media platforms continue to grow in popularity, with Facebook having over thirty-one million users in the United Kingdom, Twitter with fifteen million users and LinkedIn with 10 million (McRory, 2014). Social media employs mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms to enable people to communicate, share, collaborate and modify user-generated content, thereby providing a platform for real-time virtual interactions (Bagley *et al.*, 2014; King *et al.*, 2013; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike face-to-face interactions, they have a global audience

with almost immediate response times and are cheap and easy to use (Institute of Education, 2011). Social media includes collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia); blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter); social news networking sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn); content communities (e.g., YouTube); and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media, according to Dijck (2013), is an interactive medium that advances from the one-sided communication of predominantly passive viewers to a two-sided communication of active listeners, readers, and participants. For Nnanyelugo and Nwafor (2013), social media are interactive media that allow users to share personal information, interact, and assume the role of content creators. Social media is a platform used to improve social interactions and advance interests or goals. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and even Blogs are persuasive tools for spreading information, promoting freedom of speech, deepening democratic values, facilitating mass involvement in politics and governance, as well as enhancing brand mindfulness.

When considering the application of social media tools to a healthcare setting, McNab (2009) suggests 'social media is an opportunity for health professionals to explore, listen and engage. In relation to midwifery practice, Stewart *et al* (2012) suggest social media encourages the dissemination of evidence-based research to inform practice, creates an international network of practice and collaboration, and provides opportunities for informal learning within a life-long learning paradigm. Social media afford greater flexibility with regards learning opportunities and professional networking as they are free and can be accessed from any location (Cleary *et al.*, 2013); whereas traditional methods of meeting CPD requirements have limitations in relation to costs (travel and attendance fees) and organisational barriers where service needs must take precedence over study leave requests (Ousey & Gallagher, 2010; Carroll *et al.*, 2009).

Concept of Electoral Violence

Elections are the mechanism through which citizens choose their representatives. Its centrality to democratic governance can therefore not be overemphasised. In contemporary times, the nexus between free, fair and credible elections and good governance is so strong that any attempt to subvert the process often invokes the wrath of the people.

Scholars seeking to define and categorise practices that undermine the electoral process have generally used one or two basic approaches, which we have termed inclusive and restrictive" (Vickery & Sein, 2012). They conceived inclusive ' (violence) to be as broad as possible, no matter the imprecision. Some writers in this category, such as Vickery & Sein (2012), situate their definitions normatively, finding that electoral wrongdoing violates domestic norms or internationally accepted standards for free and fair elections. A restrictive approach focuses only or mostly on the letter of the law (i.e., violence can be identified by whether it violates existing domestic legal provisions). This enables a context-specific approach to combating various kinds of electoral violence, and it makes obvious sense for the election management body to use a country's domestic laws as benchmarks in its violent control activities (Vickery & Sein, 2012).

Electoral violence has been categorised into three types: pre-election, election period and post-election period (Norris, 2012; Olawole *et al.*, 2013; Ugwuja, 2015). Birch (2010) referred to electoral violence as the manipulation of rules, the manipulation of voters and the manipulation of voting. By manipulation of rules, electoral laws are distorted so as to favour one party or contestant in an election. For example, when the rules administering candidacy prevent certain political forces from contesting elections, or when large sectors of the adult population are excluded from voting (Birch, 2010). The manipulation of voters is either to distort voters' preferences or to sway

preference expression. The first one involves “illicit forms of campaign tactics that are deceptive and that violate campaign finance laws or severe bias in media coverage of the election. The second form consists of the alteration of how preferences are expressed at the polling station, through vote-buying or intimidation, to increase the vote of a specific political force. Voting manipulation consists of political maladministration, such as ballot box stuffing, misreporting, underprovision of voting facilities in opposition strongholds, lack of transparency in the organisation of the election, bias in the way political disputes are adjudicated in the courts, and so on (Birch, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Political Communication Theory made popular by Harold Lasswell in 1927. Lasswell emphasised the role of mass media in influencing public opinion, particularly in shaping attitudes toward political leaders and policies (Lasswell, 1927). Political Communication Theory explains the purposeful processes in which elected and appointed leaders, the media, and public citizens use messages to construct meaning about political practices. When people exercise power in support of public interests, their messages and interactions are a strategic means for influencing public policies. According to Putnam (2000), the conceptualisations of who has power and how they exercise it are prevalent in political communication theories. Power consists of political actors' abilities to acquire, maintain, and exercise authority in governmental affairs and to influence relationships and policies. Political elites (elected officials, party leaders, legislators, and agency directors) possess the power to influence large populations because they create laws and sanction behaviours, convey and withhold social and economic benefits to citizens, and influence mass media sources. The power of citizens comes from their legal rights, knowledge of political processes, and ability and willingness to engage in deliberations about public policies. Because the public often depends on mass media for political information, media sources use this power as part of their agenda of telling people what and how to think about political leaders, issues, and policies. In the view of Bennett and Segerberg (2012), political elites are the trustees of public interests; they share visions and ideals, promote policies with the consent of those being governed, and justify policy benefits by claiming they serve constituents' interests. According to them, the public assumes that the government will pay attention to their needs and problems and create beneficial policies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). A keen awareness of the power of political elites and citizens is one reason that media sources frame policy issues in terms of public rather than organisational and material interests. It is common for political elites to infuse the content of their messages with justifications emphasising public benefits. One impact is to reassure the public that their elected and appointed representatives are acting on their behalf. Another impact is less obvious; it is to enhance the personal credibility and authority of political elites. Political communicators exercise power and secure persuasive effects by selecting political symbols, creating strategic messages, and engaging in purposeful interactions.

The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how political information is created, transmitted, and received among political actors, the media, and the electorate. The theory helps to understand how social media platforms influence political opinions, voter behaviour, and public perceptions during election periods.

Empirical Review

Obiora et al. (2025) analyse Social Media Misinformation and its Impact on Electoral Behaviour: A Comparative Research of Nigeria and South Africa, arguing that the proliferation of social media misinformation during electoral cycles has emerged as a critical threat to democratic integrity

across the African continent, with Nigeria and South Africa representing two of the most digitally connected and politically significant nations. The research examines the impact of social media misinformation on electoral behaviour through a comparative analysis of Nigeria and South Africa, employing a cross-national survey of 540 registered voters (270 per country) conducted during the respective 2023 and 2024 national election periods. The research adopted a quantitative approach utilising structured questionnaires with data analysed through descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, chi-square tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and binary logistic regression using SPSS (version 29.0). The findings revealed that 78.3% of Nigerian respondents and 64.7% of South African respondents reported encountering electoral misinformation on Facebook, with WhatsApp serving as the second most prevalent vector (72.1% Nigeria; 58.3% South Africa). A statistically significant difference was observed between the two countries in misinformation susceptibility ($U = 28,463$, $p < 0.001$), with Nigerian respondents demonstrating higher vulnerability. The research found that 32.4% of Nigerian and 26.8% of South African respondents reported that misinformation influenced their voting choices. Logistic regression analysis indicated that misinformation exposure significantly predicted changes in electoral behaviour in both countries (Nigeria: $OR = 3.12$, $p < 0.001$; South Africa: $OR = 2.47$, $p < 0.001$). The research concluded that social media misinformation represents a substantial and measurable threat to electoral integrity in both nations, necessitating collaborative interventions involving electoral commissions, civil society, technology platforms, and educational institutions.

Obasi (2024) examines the Impact of False Information on Social Media and Its Role in Shaping Voting Behavior in Nigerian general elections. The author argues that the proliferation of fake news on social media platforms has emerged as a significant concern impacting democratic processes worldwide, particularly during electoral periods. The study investigated the effect of fake news on social media and its influence on voting patterns during the general elections in Nigeria. Despite extensive research on fake news in various global contexts, there is a notable gap in understanding its specific implications within the Nigerian political landscape, where misinformation could disproportionately affect public perception and behaviour due to socio-economic and educational disparities. Utilising a qualitative research methodology, this study gathered data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse array of stakeholders, including voters, political analysts, and social media influencers. The findings revealed a complex interplay between misinformation and voter decision-making, highlighting how fake news shapes public opinion, reinforces pre-existing biases, and mobilises certain sociopolitical narratives. Notably, the study identified crucial gaps in media literacy among voters, which exacerbates the vulnerability to misinformation. Furthermore, the research underscores the role of social media algorithms in amplifying misleading content, which, in turn, skews electoral outcomes. The analysis revealed that the emotional appeal and sensationalism of fake news often overshadow factual reporting, leading to distorted perceptions of candidates and policy issues. The study contributed to the broader discourse on electoral integrity and democratic governance, emphasising the urgent need for interventions that enhance media literacy and accountability in social media platforms. Ultimately, it calls for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to mitigate the impact of fake news and safeguard the electoral process in Nigeria.

Akinyetun et al. (2021) investigated Social Media and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Sustainable Development Goal 16, A Panacea. Argue that social media has changed the way people interact, transact, share information and participate in political activities. Of course, the electoral process in Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, has been remarkably impacted by the proliferation of social media. However, despite the enormous advantages it holds, social media has also proven to

be a tool for inciting electoral violence through disinformation, misinformation, hate speech, and propaganda. Indeed, it is imperative to adopt an alternative framework in addressing the grave danger inherent in social media and the fomentation of electoral violence in Nigeria. It is on this premise that Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, is recommended. The study adopted a descriptive approach and argued that peace is a requisite for health, well-being, and sustainable development, while strong institutions are pivotal to the attainment of peace. Therefore, the promotion of peace, justice, inclusion, and strong institutions must be treated as society's latest tall order. Consequently, the research recommended the establishment of an Electoral Peace Commission, Justice Commission, strengthening of electoral institutions, and the censorship of inciting words on social media platforms as plausible solutions to electoral violence caused by social media in Nigeria.

Ugbudian (2021) analyze the Dynamics of Disinformation in Electoral Violence in Nigeria examines the dynamics of disinformation in electoral violence in Nigeria. Many studies have been done on the role of disinformation in electoral violence in the Western world, yet the role of disinformation in electoral violence remains understudied in Nigeria. This was the gap the study filled. Data for the study were collected from archives, newspapers, journals, books and internet sources, including social media platforms – Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram, which are analysed qualitatively using a historical approach. The study interrogates the change and continuity in the role of disinformation in electoral violence from the era of traditional media to the emergence of digital technology, 1964 to 2019. The study also suggested measures to tackle the menace posed by disinformation, especially in the Nigerian political space.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a qualitative research design; the choice of this design was informed by its suitability for providing a detailed understanding of the issue through the examination of existing literature and documented evidence. Data were sourced from secondary materials such as academic books, journal articles, government documents, reports of electoral management bodies, media publications, reports from civil society organisations, and other relevant online materials. The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which involved the systematic examination, interpretation, and categorisation of information in line with the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

The Role of Social Media in the Political Process in Nigeria

According to Dunu and Oraka (2004), the remarkable trend of social media has equipped the communication industry with unprecedented innovative positive changes. Nigeria, like other countries of the world, has also profited in terms of improved technology output, better resources, and quality output induced by the new media revolution. This media revolution seems to be gaining more ground in the Nigerian political scenery. Thus, political public relations is today carried out online (Kur & Melladu, 2007). Social media technologies have undoubtedly improved the political communication process and are revolutionarily undergoing a global sensation (Nwabueze & Ezebuonyi, 2012). For instance, citizens of all ages, education levels and from most parts of the country used social media during the 2011 election process (Asuni & Farris, 2011). Anyways, the upsurge in subscription to social media and its use in the political process emphasises the role of

social media in the contemporary world. In Nigeria, for instance, the distasteful dependence on godfatherism is gradually giving way to online strategic shaping of campaign messages and festering of propaganda by political parties to deliberately coerce Nigerian voters to support their candidates (Ezebuonyi & Ejezieh, 2012). Besides, the Arab Revolution was given credibility by social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Asuni and Farris (2011) aver that social media changed how information was disseminated in Nigeria...the accessibility, low cost, and possible anonymity of social media also meant that some were able to cross-group lines to interact with ‘others’ of different orientations. Stating the role of social media in the electoral process, Ikem (2011) contend that social media is a useful political tool used to mobilise political support, rally political support, and induce political conversation. The point flowing from Ikem’s submission is that social media is indispensably relevant to the electoral process in Nigeria. For instance, social media can be used to host a thought-provoking debate about the programmes, ideology, and vision of political parties, as well as to build an online and offline support base for their candidates. It is also useful in promoting remote and virtual political participation by streaming political rallies and broadcasting party conventions.

Ikem (2011) further observes that, although the reliance of politicians on traditional media for political campaigns cannot be completely ignored, social media is fundamental in reaching a large number of people. The point being made here is that in a rapidly changing world, it is difficult to bring about democratic change with obsolete tools. Today’s leaders must understand the role of technology in politics and society. That is, they must realise the use of social media in the area of governance and political development to intensify citizens’ involvement in the political process. Through the transmission of the internet, social media have been variously intricate in the reformation of political, economic, social, and cultural relationships and societies all over the world (Nkala, 2012). This, according to Nwabueze and Ejezieh (2012), has been apparent in the prevalence of user-generated content and the ways it is used to enhance social networking. The dispersion of this development is already revolutionising all aspects of human exertion, and the political process is not left out. With the rise of social networking technologies, secluded actors with common aims progressively use online tools to connect, plan, share, discuss, orient, and organise. The use of social media was quite noticeable in Nigeria’s 2019 and 2023 general elections. For instance, Channels TV created a “Poll Stream” to allow Nigerians in the diaspora to engage in the political dialogue in the country, as well as to promote the involvement of those in the country (Akinyetun et al., 2021). Twitter became a very relevant tool in providing election updates. Online news platforms such as Sahara Reporters, The Cable, and Premium Times were some of the most ardent users of this platform. Using their stations and social media platforms, live coverage of the polls and situation analysis was carried out by television stations like Nigerian Television Authority, Silverbird, Channels, TVC News, and African Independent Television (Akinyetun et al., 2021).

More so, newspaper Companies such as BusinessDay, Punch, The Nation, Thisday, Daily Trust, Vanguard, and Guardian made use of their website, blogs, and social media to provide real-time updates on the electoral process. Various outlets also engaged their followers in the conversation using the hashtag method, such as #TheVerdict by Channels TV and #CivicDuty by Proshare. To facilitate ease of understanding, infographics, documentaries, and short stories were also used to analyse the results of the election by international media outlets like CNN, Al Jazeera, and BBC (Akinyetun et al., 2021).

Influence of Social Media on Electoral Violence in Nigeria

The increasing use of social media in the political process can lead to disinformation, which can trigger electoral violence. This has manifested in several election cycles in Nigeria. The 2003 and 2007 electoral cycles were dominated by intra-party conflicts and poor election administration by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as well as squabbles between President Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Abubakar Atiku. The 2003 election was largely a period when most of the political parties denigrated INEC for poor handling of the registration process. The ruling PDP used control over the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) to engage in disinformation and dominated the political space (Ugbudian, 2021). However, alarming rates of distrust of INEC and the security agents manifested when the election was described by sections of the media as a low-intensity war. In the same vein, the 2007 general election was regarded as the worst election in the history of the country, following the malpractices that marred the process. The struggles between Obasanjo and Atiku led to a media war. Then, President Olusegun Obasanjo attacked and described Atiku as corrupt and desperate for power. In the same vein, the Atiku camp mocked the President about the truncation of his third term and the removal of the term limit clause in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution. The tension and conflict in the pre-election period arising from media war culminated in widespread manipulation of the process. The apparent disinformation in the entire process was manifested by INEC, which claimed to have conducted a transparent election even though the electoral body failed an integrity test because the ballots were not serialised.

The 2011 election remained the most violent in the Fourth Republic due to the mass destruction and deaths in the post-election cycle. (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Ugbudian, 2020) put the number of deaths at over 800 persons. The background to the violence could be seen in the process that led to the emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as the president of the country in May 2010. Goodluck, who was the deputy to President Umaru Yar'Adua, assumed the office following the death of his principal. The ascension to the office by Goodluck Jonathan was seen by a section of the Northern Part of the country as the usurpation of the period allocated to its region under the so-called zoning principle of the ruling political party, PDP (Ugbudian, 2021). The 2011 election was replete with disinformation by diverse interest groups, ranging from political to socio-cultural. The major political parties in the election were the People's Democratic Party and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). The PDP got embroiled in internal struggles that culminated in regional and ethno-regional animosity. This scenario created animosity, which was amplified by waves of disinformation that led to large-scale destruction of property, deaths and displacement of hordes of Nigerians, mostly in the North. It must be said that the major political parties in the election were the PDP and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), led by Muhammadu Buhari. The most destructive disinformation was within the PDP, which became factionalised along ethno-religious and regional lines. The level of the disinformation led Adibe (2012) to aver that hate speech employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatise others based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. It is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. In other words, hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence, as well as a precursor to serious, harmful criminal acts. It is doubtful if there will be hate-motivated violent attacks on any group without hate speech and the hatred it purveys (Adibe, 2012).

In effect, the resort to disinformation was aimed at giving undue advantage to the candidate while destabilising the country. Thus, the media was filled with press releases and interviews by the various candidates. The disunity and discord that dominated the pre-election and election-day events of the 2011 election played an important role in the post-election violence in several states

in the northern parts of the country. The violence was triggered by imaginary assumptions that Buhari of the CPC had been rigged out of the presidential election, while the final returns of the election were yet to be collated. The violence, no doubt, was destructive and dangerous due to the instability, insecurity and lives lost as the role played by disinformation remained strong and incontestable. A similar scenario played out during the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria. For instance, during the 2015 election, there was the deployment of disinformation that stoked tension and violence as politicians in Nigeria used traditional and new media in a desperate quest for power. The political parties, candidates and supporters used the media and campaign and rally venues to explain their programmes to the Nigerian people. However, most of the platforms offered to the political actors were not used judiciously to drive the issues that would improve the welfare of the people; there were deliberate attempts to mislead, deceive and lie as well as create fear. Put differently, the political parties placed documentaries, songs, and advertorials in the media to denigrate their rivals in the political contest, while press conferences and rallies were used to abuse and curse without addressing issues on development and welfare of the people (Ugbudian, 2021). Advertisements, songs, rallies, and documentaries were aired by television stations to attack and condemn the personalities of people, other parties and ethnic backgrounds. The media recorded numerous hate speeches being sent across them by enthusiasts of these two political parties in the country. A good example was the statement by Ibrahim Shema, the then Governor of Katsina State in Northwestern Nigeria, requesting PDP supporters to retaliate against any acts of the members of the APC and also kill them the way “cockroaches” were killed (Mohammed, 2014). The incident occurred when Governor Shema addressed his supporters in a video, which went viral on social media, encouraging his supporters to attack and lynch members of the opposition, whom he described as cockroaches, while his supporters agreed that they should be crushed. This level of disinformation laid the ground for widespread violence in several states across Nigeria. Similar disinformation trends occurred during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. The truth is that social media has increased participation and dissemination of information; it has also created room for the promotion of electoral violence in the political space in Nigeria.

Findings

1. The paper revealed that social media has developed as a vital platform in Nigeria’s electoral process, improving political communication, voter sensitisation, campaign activities, citizen participation, and the dissemination of election-related information through platforms such as Facebook, X, WhatsApp, YouTube, and online media channels.
2. The research found that the growing use of social media has aided the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech during elections, thereby intensifying political tensions, deepening public mistrust, and contributing to electoral violence witnessed during the 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Conducting elections in Nigeria without recording widespread violence has become difficult, so much so that electoral violence is gradually becoming a marker for persistent democratic challenges faced in the country. Although the proliferation of technology, and by extension, social media, has influenced the electoral cycle through planning, strategy, training, information, and campaign, which has increasingly made the process less arduous, encompassing, and more engaging, yet, social media has, in the same direction, contributed to the furtherance of electoral violence in Nigeria, especially through disinformation, hate speech and propaganda. The

proliferation of disinformation through social media, coupled with socio-economic and educational disparities, has increased vulnerability to misleading narratives. Social media algorithms further amplify the problem, making it difficult for voters to discern credible information. Enhancing media literacy is crucial to equipping voters with the necessary skills to critically evaluate information and make informed decisions. As the study argues, emphasising peace, justice, and strong institutions is highly relevant in curtailing electoral violence in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

1. The electoral body and political stakeholders in Nigeria should leverage social media responsibly by promoting accurate, timely, and issue-focused information while providing digital literacy programmes for voters to ensure that these platforms enhance informed participation without being exploited for misinformation.
2. Nigeria government should implement comprehensive media literacy programmes in schools and communities to equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate information and identify fake news.

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