

**Influence Of Political Parties Social Media Voters' Education On Voting Habit Among
Youths In 2023 General Elections In Nigeria**

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Abstract

Since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has recorded high rate of invalid votes coupled with self-disenfranchised people despite the mass media presence in voters' education. Meanwhile, scholars have examined mass media and voters' education, there is dearth of studies on social media and voting habit. This study therefore, examined the influence of social media voters' education on voting habit of Ilorin youths in the 2023 Presidential election. The study is underpinned by Agenda setting and Uses and gratification theories. Content analysis and survey research methods were adopted while coding sheet and questionnaire served as the research instruments. Simple random sampling techniques was used to select 171 posts from the Twitter (X) pages of the three selected political parties while multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 224 undergraduates of University of Ilorin respectively. Statistical package for Social Science version 23.0 was used to analyse the data while charts, simple percentage and frequency table were used to present the data. Findings revealed that social media voters' education posts motivated youths' active participation in the 2023 presidential election as they were able to understand the agenda that each political aspirants has for the masses. The study recommended that civil society such as Socio-Economic Right and Accountability Project, Enough is Enough Nigeria, Center for Democracy and Development, etc. should employ social media to educate the Nigerian youths on civic responsibilities as this can create a robust and inclusive electoral process that promotes transparency, accountability and credibility among citizenry in Nigeria.

Key Words: Political parties, Social media voters' education, Voting habit, youths, Electioneering campaign, 2023 Presidential election

Introduction

Free, fair and credible election in any democratic state such as Nigeria is determined by National Electoral Umpire, Independent National Electoral commission (INEC) who is saddled with effective discharge of all stakeholders' responsibilities before, during

and after the election as contained in the commission's mission statement established by section 15, part 1 of the third schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) (INEC, 2019). Meanwhile, political parties are expected to complement the effort of INEC in enlightening prospective voters on mode of registration for and collection of Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) together with the need to exercise their franchise. This is because Nigeria has recorded series of invalid votes. For instance, the 2015 general election witnessed 844,519 rejected votes as a result of double thumbprint on ballot papers, thumb printing outside the delegated box, using blank ballot paper to vote, disruption at the voting point and using ballot paper that was not officially produced (Uduak-Obong & Ole, 2018). In addition, the 2019 general election witnessed 1,289,607 rejected votes nationwide which constituted 4.5 percent of the total 28,614,190 votes cast in the election (NAN, 2019). The rejected votes in 2019 were higher than the rejected votes in 2011 and 2015 elections by 1.7 percent and 2.8 percent respectively (NAN, 2019). 2023 general election was not exempted as it witnessed 939,278 invalid votes representing 3.8% of the total votes (Ogu, & Abraham, 2023). The invalid votes may be consequential to inadequate knowledge of the process of voting among the voters.

One of the major causes adduced for high level of the rejected votes is low level of voters' education campaign in Nigeria (International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), January 30, 2023). It was therefore, paramount for political parties to exploit pertinent medium to communicate with their supporters and general public at large. One of the relevant medium to communicate with voters is social media (Alade, 2017). Alade (2017) added that social media is encompassing and characterised by instant feedback and multimedia such as images, text, video and audio, and driven by the combination of communication and information technology through the internet. Hence, social media seems to be a potent tool to mobilise and educate prospective voters especially the youths as it enhances users' engagement. For instance, the engagement of youths on social media platforms gave birth to "Not too young to run bill" which was passed into law on May 31st, 2018 (*PremiumTimes*, May 31, 2018). Also, the engagement of youths and government officials on social media led to the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in 2020 (Abimbola, et al., 2021). Hence, social media platforms such as X, Instagram, etc. Provide opportunity for users to exchange ideas. Thus, social media can be harnessed to equip the electorates

with necessary information on their right to select the candidate of their choice, when and where to register together with vote casting (Ayinde, 2019). This has made some scholars such as Oduola et al.(2020) to advocate voters education. Meanwhile, some researchers such as Mathew (2020), Apuke and Tunca (2018), Okoro and Santas (2017) submitted that social media were potent tool in disseminating voters' education. For instance, Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) examined the "Influence of social media on political participation by youths in Oyo State" and concluded that social media influenced youths to participate actively in the political process in the State. He recommended that future studies should expand their understanding on how social media usage influences citizen's political participation. Similarly, Chinedu-Okeke and Obi (2016) explored the extent of South Eastern Nigerian electorates' involvement in social media for electioneering process. The researchers found that political campaigns through the social media had a significant effect on South Eastern electorates' decision-making and participation in the Nigeria's 2011 and 2015 elections. They therefore, recommended that Facebook and Twitter should be dedicated to voter education considering the gravity of netizens usage of the two platforms for political discussions. It an attempt to fill the existing gaps, the study examined influence of political parties' social media voters' education on voting habit in the 2023 Presidentiall election among youth in Ilorin metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine the influence of social media voters' education on voting habit of youths. Specifically, the study:

- i. Investigates the level of youths' participation in selected political parties social media voters education post in 2023 presidential election,
- ii. Ascertain the voters education themes that the selected political parties use on their Twitter platforms during 2023 presidential election; and
- iii. Establish the consequences of selected political parties voters' education on voting habit among Ilorin youth in the 2023 presidential election.

Literature Review

Political Party, Political Education And Voter Education

John (2020) viewed political party as an organised group of people who have the same ideology or same political positions and field candidates for elections, in an attempt to

get them elected and thereby, implementing the party's agenda. Similarly, the National Democratic Institute (2021) opined that political parties should offer citizens a choice in the governance while competing for an election. The report added that the opportunity for choice in the governance would enable the opposition parties to hold government accountable. Hence, the participation of citizens in political parties offers unique benefits, including opportunities to influence policy choices, choose and engage political leaders and run for offices. This therefore, implies that political parties are organised group of people who have come together with the main aim of winning at least a seat in the legislative and/or executive arm of government.

Political education on the other hand, has been subjected to different interpretation by various scholars. For instance, Onuigbo et al. (2018) viewed political education as political literacy. In a similar perspective, Dimitrova and Matthes (2018) opined that political literacy or education is the knowledge and understanding of political issues, which enable people to perform their roles as citizens effectively. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2018) also described political education as the basic concept and facts that constitute a necessary condition for comprehending the content of public debate. Hence, educating potential voters, is therefore, necessary. Thus, all stakeholders in politics such as political parties, civil societies, religious and traditional institutions as well as, the National Orientation Agency should also collaborate with the electoral body. Similarly, Green and Gerber (2015) added that the government should embark on voters education campaign especially at the grass root level. This according to him will increase voters turn out, avert the dangers of violence and rigging during election, as well as protect votes. Hence, the level of knowledge of electorates makes electorates understand the essence of exercising their franchise.

Voter education is, therefore, designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing and able to participate in the electoral process in any nation (Onuigbo et al., 2018). This involves election literacy, educational campaign and confidence that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting their representatives through electoral process. It, thus, becomes imperative to state that voters will have confidence in the electoral process when they are properly educated about the procedure(Luwemba Musa maswanku:2022)Thus, voter education has to do with dissemination of information and

materials that can instill knowledge of election before and after election in order to facilitate people's participation in election.

Voting Habit and Social Media

Voting is one of the cardinal principles of any democratic system of government. The term voting refers to the process by which citizens choose candidates for public offices (Stier et al., 2018). Kobayashi (2018) while using a constructivist paradigm, explained voting behaviour as a pattern of political participation mostly taking place in democratic societies where people react to certain laid down values, principles and beliefs based on age, sex, ethnicity, religion and education. They added that voting habit is clearly shaped by short-term and long-term influences. Short-term influences according to them are specific to a particular election and do not allow conclusion to be drawn about voting patterns in general. The chief short-term influence is the state of the economy, which reflects the fact that there is usually a link between government's popularity and economic variables such as unemployment, inflation and disposable income (Odalonu & Ogu, 2022). Another short-term influence on voting according to Odalonu and Ogu, (2022) is the personality and public standing of party leaders. This is particularly important, because media exposure portrays leaders as the brand image of their party. The chief long-term influences are social class, issue voting and geography (BBC, 2022). Both the short-term and long-term are critical in determining the voting behaviour of people.

Voting behaviour is therefore, a manifestation of partisanship, not a product of calculation influenced by factors such as policies, personalities, campaigning and media coverage. This is because voting behaviour is seen as a rational act, in the sense that individual electors are believed to decide their party preference on the basis of personal self-interest

Social media on the other hand, refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute to user-created content or join communities (Karim et al., 2020). Chen and Xiao (2022) opined that social media is a group of internet-based application that builds on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0 and allows the creation and exchange of user-

generated content. Similarly, Al-Quran (2022) added while comparing social media to mainstream media that unlike traditional media, which offers one-way experience, social media offers a two-way interactive experience. This implies that social media audience interact instantly and directly with the originators of the proffered information. The interaction and cross communication that social media makes possible is precisely what makes social media world changing. Similarly, Istijanto and Purusottama (2023) added that social media in comparison to traditional media differs in that it allows users to actively engage in a communication process not only as information receivers but also as a message creator. This is because the online applications are designed to facilitate information sharing, knowledge distribution and opinion exchange.

Going by the above explanation, it can be deduced that if social media allow users to actively engage in a communication process not as information receiver alone, but also as information creator, social media can serve as a medium where voters can comment their views on areas they want political parties to focus on, in order to achieve effective voter education campaign. This also implies that consistent use of social media by political parties seems to be effective medium to influence voting habits of voters.

Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by Agenda Setting theory and Uses and gratification theory. Agenda setting theory was propounded in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (Wonuola & Akashoro, 2020). Wonuola and Akashoro (2020) added that, the mass media do determine what people think about by setting the agenda for public opinion. Alvernia University (2018) posited that the mass media agenda setting power is reflected in the frequent reportage of certain news stories through the placement, space and frequency. The strength of agenda setting model is amplified by Roger's diffusion of innovation model, where the media, as the first line of change agent follow the diffusion pathways of knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation (Alvernia University, 2018)).

The theory is relevant to the study as it explains how the political parties especially the; APC, LP PDP consistently disseminate voters' education through twitter (X) and this

informed consistent feedback from the prospective voters. Hence, Agenda Setting theory explained the role that social media played in shaping public opinion by consistently discussing three political party presidential aspirants despite the fact that eighteen political parties registered and participated in the 2023 Presidential race.

Uses and Gratification theory on the other hand, was propounded by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s (Quinn,2016). The theory's basic assumption is that people use certain media base on the gratification they aimed to derive from it. This implies that uses and gratification theory assigned power to the media users. This is because the theory adopts audience-centered approach as it assumes that audience has power to determine the media they access based on the benefits they enjoy therein. This has made studies to describe the theory as the benefits that attract and hold audiences to diverse types of media together with the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological demands (Quinn, 2016). Hence, the mass media especially the social media provides social gratification through its ability to create relationships through networks such as Facebook and Twitter (Malloli, 2020). This is because social media users are information seeking, socializing, entertainment, status, pass time, convenience and personal identity.

Underpinning the concept of this theory to the current work, it could be deduced that politicians and their supporters use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc to reach out to electorates in order to influence and induce voting behavior.

Method

The study adopted descriptive research method of quantitative (survey) and quantitative (quantitative content analysis) methods. For quantitative content analysis, the population comprised all the posts of the three political parties (All Progressive Congress, People's Democratic Party and Labour Party) posted via Twitter between November 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023. The choice of this period was due to the opportunity that the political parties have to create awareness about their respective presidential aspirants through social media prior to the official time announced by the INEC. The three months were selected because when the election was fast approaching the interaction on social media drastically reduced. The three political parties were selected because they were the front runners with presidential aspirants (ABC News,

25 February, 2023). All Progressive Congress had 80 posts, Labour Party had 400 posts and Peoples' Democratic Party had 377 posts. The population of the study for content analysis method amounted to 857 (Instagram, 2023). The population for survey method on the other hand, comprised total number of registered undergraduates students in University of Ilorin for 2022/2023 academic session which is 50,000 (Unilorin, 2023)

For the content analysis method, the sample size was 171 social media post while 224 respondents formed the sample size for the survey method. Random Sampling technique was adopted to select the representative for the quantitative content analysis method of the study. The researcher adopted ratio 1:5 to select 171 posts by dividing 857 by 5. Thus, $857/5$ amounts to 171.4. Hence, 171 voters' education posts were examined to provide answers to the objectives 1 and 2. For survey method, multistage sampling technique was adopted. This is because of the complexity of the population of the study. At the first stage of sampling, the number of faculties that University of Ilorin has was obtained from the University website. According to the University website, the University has 14 faculties. The faculties are: Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Basic Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, Faculty of Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Communication and Information Science, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Life Sciences, Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, (UNILORIN, 2023). Simple random sampling (ballot method) was used to select two faculties. The selected faculties were: Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences and Faculty of Management Sciences. The second stage of the sampling witnessed the selection of departments under each faculty that the study population was drawn from. Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences has five departments: Computer Science, Information and Communication Science, Library and Information Sciences, Mass Communication and Telecommunication Science. Faculty of Management Sciences has six departments: Accounting, Business Administration, Finance, Marketing, Industrial Relations and Personnel Management and Public Administration. Simple random technique (Ballot method) was therefore, used to select Mass Communication department from Faculty of Communication and Information Science as well as, Public Administration Department from Faculty of Management Sciences. The population of the students in the selected departments are 502 and 620

respectively (Unilorin, 2023). At the third stage of sampling, systematic sampling was used to select 20% from each selected department. Table 1 below presents the population of the students in each department.

Table 1: Population and sample size of the registered students for 2022/2023 Academic session in the Department of Information and Communication Sciences and Public Administration

S/N	Department	Total Population	Sample Size
1	Info. & Comm. Sciences	502	20% of 502=100.4
2	Public Administration	620	20% of 620=124
	Total	1122	20% of 1122 = 224.4

Source: UNILORIN 2022/2023 Academic Session

For the survey, the instrument was questionnaire while coding sheet was used for the content analysis. The validated code sheet used to content analyse this study contained the prepared content categories which was employed to objectively record and organise the relevant data available on the twitter handle of the three selected political parties; People’s Democratic Party, All Progressive Congress and Labour Party and place them accordingly.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of the study included text, picture, videos and press release that focused on voters’ education on 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria.

Content Categories

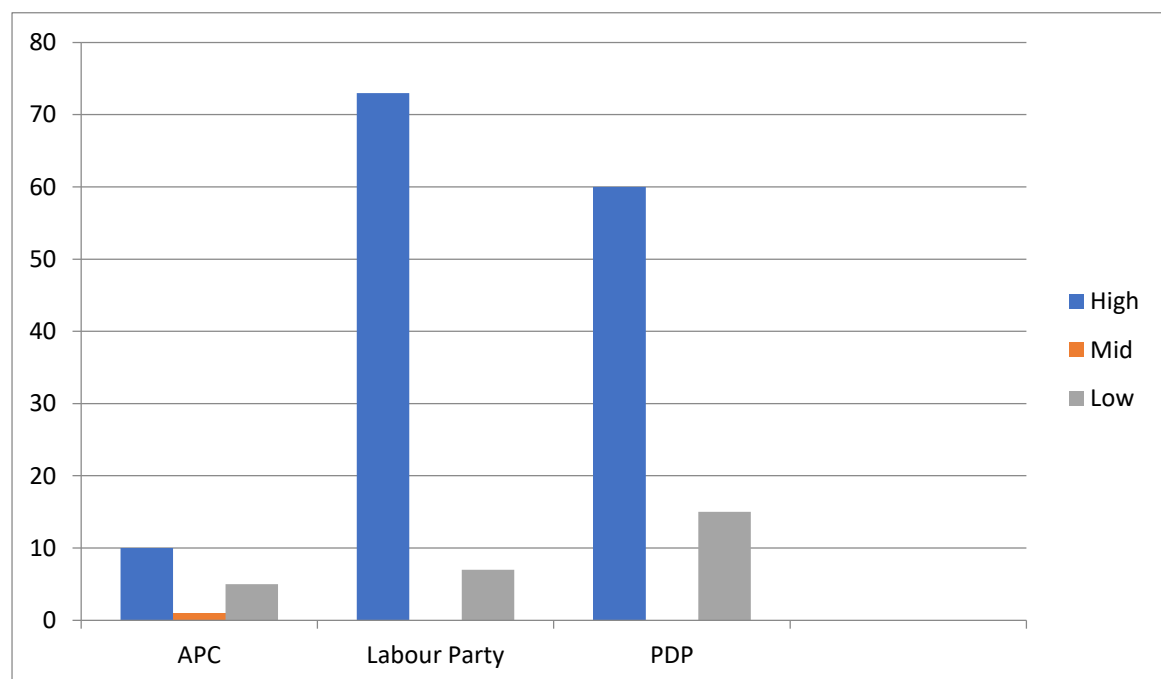
The content categories included the level of participation of Twitter (X) user on Political parties social media voters education post, frequency of Political Party Voters’ education post, post on qualification to register for Permanent Voters Card (PVC), post on place, date and time of voting, post on mechanism for voting, post on pattern of voting, post on frequency of voters education and level of interaction between selected Political Parties and Nigerian X users, post that focuses on agenda of the presidential candidate, post on National interest and National building, post that tilted towards candidate interaction with X users, post on disregarding hearsay or rumour, post on acknowledging support of X users, post on the voting right of people with disabilities.

Data gathered from the questionnaire items were collected, coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Simple percentage and frequency tables were used to present the findings and discussion followed immediately. Data gathered through coding sheet were also analysed with the aid of SPSS version 23.0. Graphs and text were used to present the findings and discussion followed suit.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Data on the Research Questions

Figure 1: Level of Youths' participation on selected political parties' social media voters education post on Twitter



Source: Field Study, 2025

The findings from figure 1 indicated the level of youth participation on political parties social media voters education post on Twitter during 2023 presidential election. It was discovered from the three selected political parties that the level at which youth participated and interacted with political parties voters' education on Twitter ranges from High to Mid to Low in which the high represents posts that has above 1000 likes, insight and re-tweet, Mid represents posts with 500 and above likes, insight and re-

tweet while Low represents posts with less than 500 likes, insight and re-tweet. It was discovered from figure 1 that All Progressive Congress (APC) had total number of 16 posts with 10 posts having high level of participation and interaction representing 5.8%, one post had Mid level of participation and interaction representing 0.58% and five posts had low level of interaction and participation representing 2.92%. Labour Party (LP) has a total number of 80 posts with 73 posts with high level of participation and interaction, representing 42.69%, no post with mid level and seven posts representing 4.09% had low level of participation and interaction while Peoples' Democratic Party had a total number of 75 posts with 60 posts having high level of participation and interaction representing 35.09%, no post with mid level and 15 posts with low level of participation and interaction representing 8.77%.

The foregoing findings showed that APC voters' education post had the lowest level of participation followed by PDP while LP had the highest level of participation. However, all the three selected political parties' posts had participation and interaction with the people on their Twitter handle. Thus, there is high level of youths' participation on selected political parties, social media voters' education post on twitter. This submission validates the findings of Folorunso and Folorunso (2020) which discovered that social media is highly used by youths for political participation like political advocacy , reporting electoral malpractices and public consultation.

Figure 2: Voters' education theme used by political parties on their Twitter platforms

In measuring the themes used by the political parties on their Twitter pages during 2023 presidential election, agenda of aspirants, enlightenment of people with disabilities, disregard of hearsay, ethnocentric, pattern of thumbprint and electoral malpractices were used. Therefore, figure 2 presents the findings.

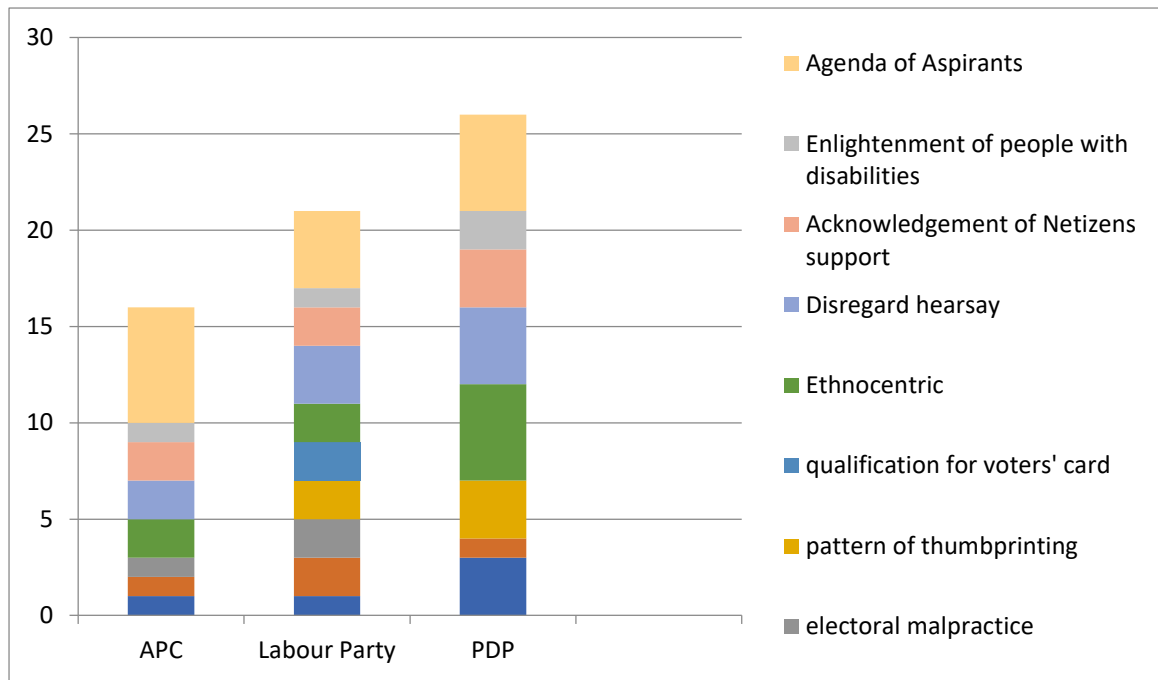


Figure 2 focused on voters education themes used by the three selected political parties on their Twitter handles. The figure indicated that APC posted six contents representing 3.51% about the agenda of the presidential aspirant; Bola Ahmed Tinubu whose followers were popularly referred to as *BATified*. One post on Enlightenment of people with disabilities theme representing 0.58%, two posts on acknowledgement of Netizens’ support representing 1.17%, two posts on disregard of hearsay or rumour about the political party representing 1.17%, two posts on ethnocentric representing 1.17%, no post on qualification of Netizens to register for voters’ card, no post on pattern of thumbprint, one post on theme against electoral malpractices representing 0.58%, one post on qualification to vote which represented 0.58% and one post on theme that related to voting date which represented 0.58%. The chart also showed that Labour party had four posts (2.34%) on Agenda of the Presidential aspirant; Peter Obi whose supporters were popularly known as *OBIdient*, one post (0.58%) on enlightenment of people with disabilities, two posts(1.17%) on acknowledgement of supporters, two posts (1.17%) on theme related to disregard of hearsay or rumour, two post (1.17%) on theme related to ethnocentric, two posts (1.17%) on theme related to qualification of netizens to register for voters’ card, two posts (1.17%) on themes related to pattern of thumbprint, three posts (1.75%) on theme to campaign electoral malpractices, two posts (1.17%) on theme related to qualification of Netizens to vote and one post (0.58%) on theme related to reminding voters about date of election.

Peoples' Democratic Party had five posts (2.92%) on agenda of the presidential aspirant; Atiku Abubakar whose supporters were popularly known as *ATIKUlate*, two posts (1.17%) on enlightenment of people with disabilities, three posts(1.75%) on acknowledgement of supporters, five posts (2.92%) on theme related to disregard of hearsay or rumour, five post (2.92%) on theme related to ethnocentric, zero post on theme related to qualification of netizens to register for voters' card, three posts (1.75%) on themes related to pattern of thumbprint, 0 posts on theme to campaign electoral malpractices, one posts (0.58%) on theme related to qualification of Netizens to vote and three post (1.75%) on theme related to reminding voters about date of election.

It can be deduced from figure 2 that the three selected political parties adopted three themes on their Twitter pages which were: Agenda of the presidential aspirants, disregard of hearsay or rumour and ethnocentric. However, all the selected political parties displayed bulk of their theme on agenda of the presidential aspirants. Thus, the three selected political parties: All Progressive Congress, Labour Party and Peoples' Democratic Party centred their voters education to youths via dissemination of their Agenda in order to positively influence their voting habit in order to enable youths to understand the programmes they (political parties aspirants) aimed at delivering, if eventually voted into power.

It can therefore, be concluded that the three selected political parties are more concerned about how youths will prefer them over other aspirants which is why they focus more on disseminating the agenda they have, disregarding rumour leveled against them and post contents that would make youths believe that they should support a particular presidential aspirants. This finding is in tandem with the submission of Jacob et al. (2023) who submitted that the themes dominant on social media platforms for voters education were dominated by blame shifting, ethnocentric and religious undertone. This implies that agenda of political aspirants is critical in winning election as it informs the prospective voters on what to expect from them after winning an election.

Table 2 and 3: Perceived consequences of political parties voters' education on voting habit of Ilorin youth

In measuring the perceived consequences of political parties voters' education on voting habit of Ilorin youths, political party's influence and sales of votes were used. Hence, table 2 and 3 present the findings.

Table 2: Political party's social media voters' education influenced me to cast my vote during 2023.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	137	(61.1%)
Agreed	83	(37.1%)
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	4	(1.8%)
Total	224	(100%)

Source: Field Study, 2024

Table 2 indicated that 220 (98.2) respondents agreed that political party social media voters education influenced them to cast their vote while 4 (1.8%) disagreed. The findings showed that majority of the respondents were influenced to partake in the 2023 presidential election process. It can be deduced from table 2 that political parties social media voters' education influenced the voting habit of Ilorin youth positively.

Table 3: Political party's social media voters education hindered me from selling my vote?

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	199	(88.8%)
No	25	(11.2%)
Total	224	(100%)

Source: Field Study, 2024

Table 3 indicated that 199 (88.2%) respondents affirmed that political social media voters education stopped them from selling their votes in the 2023 presidential election while 25(11.8%) said otherwise. This showed that social media voters education is a

potent tool in educating youths about the rules and regulation of election. This finding corroborates the submission of Erubami (2020) that concluded that social media have positively influenced Nigeria's democracy by awakening public political consciousness. Thus, political parties' social media voters education has been able to correct the misconception of vote selling among youths in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Therefore, this study has contributed to the existing knowledge as it has improved on the work of the past scholars such as Folorunso & Folorunso (2020) who examined the use of social media for political participation by stating that the most preferred social media for political participation is Facebook, but the present study has contributed to knowledge by extending the scope of the study to individual voters. The study also validates uses and gratification theory as it emphasises that netizens use social media based on the benefits they derive therein.

Conclusion

The study examined the influence of social media voters' education on the Nigerian youths' voting habit in the 2023 Presidential election. The finding has shown that political parties social media voter's education facilitated the youth participation in the 2023 presidential election. Hence, social media is a powerful tool that can be used to educate and mobilise voters, especially the youths, to participate in the electoral process. This perhaps was responsible for the decrease in the number of invalid votes from 4.51% that was recorded by INEC in 2019 general election to 3.76% that was recorded in 2023 general election. Therefore, political parties social media voters education has a significant influence on the voting habit of youth as social media voters education provides a platform for dialogue and debate, increases political engagements, promotes informed decision-making and faster a more participatory and democratic society among the youths, INEC and political parties in Nigeria.

The study is, therefore, significant as it informs the political parties' needs to adopt themes related to pattern of thumbprint, sensitisation of people with disabilities as well as educating youths about the qualification they must possess in order to be able to vote not just about disseminating the agenda of the political party. Also, the study also awakes the political aspirants on the need to leverage more on social media for voters'

education prior to the commencement of electioneering campaign. Moreover, the study is significant as it will prompt the civil society such as Socio-Economic Right and Accountability Project (SERAP), Enough is Enough Nigeria (EIE Nigeria), Center for Democracy and Development (CCD) to use social media to educate the youths on their civic responsibilities.

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