

Twitter, Political Communication, and Voter Behaviour in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The emergence of social media has transformed political communication and electoral campaigns across democratic societies, providing political actors and citizens with new avenues for information dissemination, engagement, and participation. Specifically, the study investigated the role of Twitter in political communication, assessed its impact on voter decision-making and electoral participation, and explored public perceptions of media coverage during the election period. Guided by the Agenda-Setting Theory, the study adopted a qualitative research approach utilizing secondary data. The paper argues that Twitter emerged as a major source of political information for many voters, providing real-time updates, campaign messages, and political discussions. The study found that exposure to political content on Twitter significantly influenced voters' awareness of candidates, perceptions of political issues, and electoral choices. Participants also acknowledged the platform's capacity to enhance political engagement and participation, although concerns were raised regarding misinformation, political bias, and the credibility of some online content. Furthermore, the findings indicated that social media played a more prominent role in informing voters than some traditional media outlets during the election period. The study concludes that Twitter has become a critical instrument of political communication and electoral mobilization in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape. While the platform contributes to political awareness and citizen participation, there is a need for greater media literacy, ethical journalism, and effective regulation of misinformation to strengthen democratic processes.

Keywords: Twitter, Political Communication, Social Media, Electoral Participation, Voter Behaviour, Political Campaigns

I. Introduction

The term politics was introduced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who defined politics as a civilized form of community that serves the “common good”. It can also be translated from Greek as “an art of government”. Politics is a term that encompasses a wide range of relationships, pursuits, actions, inclinations, viewpoints, and communication channels pertaining to governing and governing bodies. People or groups are known to compete for dominance in politics. Politics is viewed as a process of maneuvering to assert competing interests. Since before independence, the media has played a significant role in its history. In their battle to drive the demons known as colonial overlords from their realm, the nationalists made use of the media (Asemah et al., 2022).

Communication can be conveyed from one person to another using media as a platform.

Politics' goal is to influence public development in a good way by establishing shared goals and strategies for accomplishing them (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022). Political scientists have given us different definitions of politics however, each definition helps us understand better. The notion of competition over interest or power is relevant to politics. Politics is about who gets what, when and how according to Harold Lasswell in 1936 (Okunade, 2025).

Political culture is a term used to describe the commonly held opinions, sentiments, and ideals regarding the workings of political systems that can act as a bridge between the people and their governments. Different political cultures exist in various nations and states, and these cultures help us understand how and why those governments are set up the way they are. Political campaign is known as a coordinated effort to sway the course of decision-making within a particular organization (Gadi Wolfsfeld et al., 2022).

In democracies, political campaigns frequently relate to electoral campaigns, which are used to elect legislators or decide on referendums. Political campaign is used to further any position or candidate running for office in a general election, whether it be at the municipal, state, or federal level (Sanusi et al., 2014). In today's political environment, the media play a crucial but underappreciated role. The government of Nigeria does not have control over the media because if it did, it would undoubtedly be able to avoid any responsibility for its acts and pose a threat to the very foundations of the free and democratic system that we use (Aondover et al., 2026).

Since before the independence of Nigeria, the media has played a significant role in the country's history. Political campaigns particularly rely heavily on the media. The media serve as channels for communication between individuals and groups of people as well as between geographical locations. Media is an aspect of marketing management. Media platforms include newspapers, televisions, radio, hand-bills, social media, etc. The media encourages public participation in politics (Obi et al., 2023; Aondover et al., 2025).

Nigerian journalism has been transformed by the internet. The public now has unparalleled access to government operations as a result of this. In politics all communications counts, twitter is fast becoming more vital than most social media platforms (Sanyaolu et al., 2017). Twitter plays an important role in determining electoral outcomes as it gives young politicians a platform.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Agenda Setting Theory, which was first reported in 1972 by McCombs and Shaw. They studied agenda setting in the presidential campaign of 1968 and hypothesized that the media sets the agenda for each political campaign. This theory has two major assumptions, but we will be focusing on one amongst others. This assumption states that the media gives topics importance: the more the media reports on a certain issue the more likely is the public to perceive that issue as being of greater importance than others (Steven, 2016; Obasi & Msughter, 2023).

According to Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang (1959) The media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about. By setting the agenda the media determines the election campaigns as well as the standards used to evaluate presidential candidates, this process is called priming. Agenda setting theory served as the study's theoretical foundation. The idea that the media has the potential to report important problems on its news agenda and relay them to the general public gave rise to the idea of agenda setting. Journalists typically handle news in a number of significant ways. In the beginning, they choose which news to cover and which news to avoid (Michael & Kayode, 2014).

The positioning of an item on the page, the headline, and the length of the article, for instance, all plainly indicate the newspaper's editorial preference. One of the most significant

components of the media, according to agenda-setting, is the transmission of certain saliences (Funkhouser, 1973) the agenda-setting theory's main focus is not just on the media's ability to choose what the public should not know, but also on making sure that they give the people something to think about. Twitter today makes information about any region of the globe widely accessible. All people outside of those having direct access to such information that is not deemed required or less necessary to be communicated. This theory is a direct response to the research questions, by observational learning, agenda setting theorists place that the public can decide on a candidate based on the importance placed on that candidate by the media (Guanah et al., 2026).

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Empirical Review

In the past years, there has been a growing interest among researchers and scholars in exploring the role of twitter in political campaigns. This has become pertinent because of the increasing amount of diversity issues in the country and the unending competition attached to every political campaign (Okunade et al., 2025).

A study by Aliyu, M. Kolawole, PhD, "Influence of the Twitter on Voters' Behaviour During the 2015 General Elections in Southwest Nigeria" notes that the success of an election lies not only on the electoral umpire, but that the basic role of the twitter in electoral process is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for conveying unbiased electoral information (Cairo Institute for Human Right Studies, 2011). According to the Electoral Commission of Zambia, ECZ, (2015), the media's role towards the success of elections are to serve as watchdogs, voters' education and peace building. Voter's education is the proper enlightenment given to the voters 'most especially before the election. It is observed that a well-articulated and effectively delivered voters' education could make a positive difference. Going by the findings of the study, the media played a prominent role to ensure a free and fair election by educating the voters. Therefore, directly or indirectly, twitter is the most widely recognized channel that gave political education to the electorates in southwestern Nigeria during the 2015 general election.

A work on, "Regulatory and political influence on Twitter Operation in Nigeria" by Usman Ibrahim Abubakar and Isyaku suggests that Nigerians are constantly exposed to information, ideas, news, and ideologies from different media sources in the course of their daily activities. Many media experts in Nigeria, Africa and indeed around the world agree that twitter has an influence on their audiences (Aondover et al., 2023; Joseph & Okunade, 2026). However, the direction, nature and extent of this influence remain a source of disagreement. Thompson noted that the media all over the world have established themselves as a third channel for political, social, and economic influence and in many aspects also as an independent power broker. This paper states that it is evident that the political class controls and influences the content and operation of broadcast media in the country. The majority of the private media stations in Nigeria are owned by politicians or their cronies. A closer look at the media ownership pattern revealed that the majority of the private media organizations are owned by politicians or affiliates of political parties. This indicates that the development of media in Nigeria was a product of politics and politicians.

A critical analysis on voters' turnout and the 2017 Gubernatorial Election in Anambra state by Amobi p. Chiamogu and Uchechukwu p. Chiamogu says that the electoral history of

Anambra state since the dawn of the fourth republic in 1999 is full of political intrigues and notoriety. From 1999-2013, the state created a new record in godfatherism. First was the Sir Emeka Ofor-Barr Chinwoke Mbadinuju saga (1999-2003), Chief Chris Uba- Dr. Chris Nwabueze Ngige comedy (2002-2006) and later, the farcical impeachment of Mr Peter Obi as the governor of Anambra state (CDD, 2017); the intrigues include the unprecedented abduction of a serving governor, Dr Chris Ngige, who was allegedly forced to resign; an election petition for governorship election which lasted for nearly three years in a four year tenure; the impeachment of a governor, which was later found to be without merit but took months to get to the governor being reinstated, the brazen attack and burning of government house, among others.

The seeming defeat of cabals and godfathers by the never existed Dr Chris Ngige and Mr Peter Obi led governments invariably marked the demise of shylock political godfathers in Anambra state politics. By 2007, Mr Obi cruised to landslide victory that occasioned a new dawn in Anambra gubernatorial politics which invariably introduced the Chief Willie Obiano administration in 2014. The 2017 gubernatorial election ordinarily represents a huge opportunity for state building and democratic consolidation that was predicated on several variables. The impact and how the Biafra separatist agenda subsist and a re-test of election boycott in Nigeria. The boycott declaration by the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) through the instrumentalities of MASOB posed an unimaginable threat to the conduct of the election. Again, the declaration of MASOB a terrorist organization by the Federal Government was very defining the Ndi-Igbo and electorates in Anambra state.

2.2 The Concept of Media in Politics

The media plays a crucial role in today's political environment. More significant than the majority of people really realize. Not only does it cover important roles pertaining to politics it often sets an agenda for the audience. The very foundations of the free and democratic system we use would be in danger if the government had control over the media. It could then avoid all responsibility for any actions (Ademosu et al., 2025). However, as a reliable and unbiased source of information, the media has recently fallen short of its promise. Instead, the media now favor one side or the other of the political spectrum, which skews how the information they give is understood.

Politicians and the general populace of Nigeria value media because it frames democratic processes including news reporting, communicating urgent topics, and encouraging citizen participation in political affairs (Okunade, 2025). The disadvantage of the media is that it shapes public opinion and influences how the general public may respond. This influences people's political behavior and could have an impact on voting. It might be argued that the media is a good tool for helping with governmental difficulties, but it also affects how the general public views these concerns (Aondover et al., 2025).

The usage of new media in Nigeria demonstrates that while it has improved political interaction and knowledge, it has also been used to smear, intimidate, and discredit political rivals, leading to conflicts (Aondover & Ademosu, 2025; Aondover & Obasi, 2025). Through their excessive dependence on and re-publication of new media messages without effective gatekeeping, Nigeria's print and electronic media have also emphasized these political tensions.

Twitter plays a particularly important function during electioneering since it informs the public about election-related issues. In doing so, it effectively affects societal members' perceptions and attitudes about political figures and organizations. The study evaluated

numerous published research studies on the function of the media in establishing news agenda in order to acquire insight into various functions that the media perform during electioneering.

2.3 Political Communication

Political communication is a branch of communication and political science that examines how information is disseminated and how it affects politics, decision-makers, the media, and the public (Aondover et al., 2025). It addresses the creation, transmission, movement and outcomes of information in a political environment, both through twitter and interpersonally. This includes, among other things, researching the media, analyzing speeches made by politicians, individuals attempting to sway public opinion, and formal and informal dialogues amongst citizens (Mohammed & Aondover, 2025).

The media serves as a conduit between the public and the government. Political communication is the relationship between citizens and politics, as well as the channels via which these two groups communicate with one another. Twitter is alleged to influence societal communication and public discourse in recent years. twitter is being used more and more in political context (Maradun & Aondover, 2025). More recently, social networking sites like Facebook and microblogging services like twitter are thought to have the potential to boost political participation. While political institutions (such as politicians, political parties, political foundations, etc.) have started using twitter for the purpose of engaging in direct dialogue with citizens and promoting more political discussions, twitter is still the best platform for users to spread information in general as well as political opinions publicly through their networks (Aondover, 2024).

Using social media, activists are creating new protests and movements that are increasingly successful at changing the political agendas of major parties. Members of congress in the US today frequently use YouTube to post political advertising and Twitter to dispute with partisan rivals or communicate with voters. twitter has allowed grassroots movements in many nations to impact actual policy in ways that even direct action has not been able to. Social media's influence on politics is not unique to the united States or even to western democracies (Aondover et al., 2025).

III. Conclusion

The growing integration of Twitter into Nigeria's political landscape has significantly transformed the nature of political communication, electoral campaigns, and voter engagement. This study has demonstrated that Twitter serves as an important platform for the dissemination of political information, enabling candidates, political parties, media organizations, and citizens to interact in ways that were previously impossible through traditional media channels alone. Through its capacity for real-time communication, broad audience reach, and interactive engagement, Twitter has become a vital tool for shaping political discourse and influencing voter perceptions during electoral processes.

The study concludes that Twitter has become an indispensable component of contemporary political communication and voter mobilization in Nigeria. Its influence on political awareness, public opinion formation, and electoral behaviour underscores the increasing importance of digital media in democratic processes. To maximize its benefits while minimizing its risks, stakeholders including government institutions, electoral bodies, media organizations, civil society groups, and citizens must promote media literacy, encourage ethical online communication, and strengthen mechanisms for combating misinformation. By doing so,

Twitter and other social media platforms can contribute more effectively to democratic consolidation, political accountability, and informed citizen participation in Nigeria.

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