Mitigating the Effects of Social Media Technologies on Nigeria's Elections for Sustainable National Security

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Abstract: The rise of Social Media Technologies (SMTs) has transformed electoral processes globally, and Nigeria is no exception. These platforms have amplified political engagement and voter education but have also introduced the challenge of misinformation and public opinion manipulation. This paper presents strategies to address these issues in Nigeria's general elections. The proposed measures include fortifying regulatory frameworks and electoral laws, bolstering technological safeguards, and fostering collaboration with social media companies. These strategies are pivotal in regulating online political activities and ensuring adherence to national guidelines. Public education campaigns on media literacy can empower citizens to evaluate online content critically. Furthermore, institutional support for electoral bodies and civil society organizations, along with international cooperation, can strengthen the resilience of the electoral process. This research aligns with global efforts to combat the spread of fake news on SMTs, aiming to enhance national security and political stability in Nigeria. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can effectively manage the influence of social media on its elections, fostering a more transparent and democratic electoral environment.

Keywords: Election, Misinformation, Social Media, National Security.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one of the developing nations of the world. It has proven many criteria of vulnerability to social media abuse, as identified by the Kofi Annan Foundation (2022). However, the most problematic aspect is attributing the challenge to low trust in government institutions on one hand and deep ethnic, religious, and regional cleavages on the other alongside highly partisan media. Historically, Nigeria has had a heap of election-related violence, which at times is caused by misinformation and fake news, especially on the free platforms of social media technologies. This also puts the nation on tenterhooks after every tenure or successful administration. Notwithstanding, to date, Nigeria has enjoyed about five successful political transitions in more than two decades of political stability. Government and private broadcast organizations are doing relatively well enough in broadcasting genuine information on elections throughout the country. Still, on the contrary, some undercover SMTs create havoc in the country. However, Nigeria's democratic and political will is getting wise enough to be doomed by any form of implications through social media technologies.

This research centres on mitigating the effects of social media technologies on elections in Nigeria. Nigeria, the giant of Africa, remains a developing nation bothered by several national security issues, of which democratic misnomer is a part. Thus, maintaining political stability is possible in the country through conducting credible elections and avoiding misinformation through social media technologies. Therefore, without these, the government is said to have met all vulnerability criteria to social media abuse, as identified by the Kofi Annan Foundation (2022). Most of these problems are attributed to low trust in institutions, deep ethnic, religious, and regional cleavages, and highly partisan media. Nigeria also has a strong history relating to election-related violence, and this also puts the nation on tenterhooks after every tenure or successful administration. However, Nigeria has enjoyed about five successful political transitions in more than two decades of political stability. Therefore, the age of political stability of Nigeria's democracy is getting old enough to be doomed by any form of implications via the use of social media bodies.

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Issues of National security border all incidences that can threaten human existence or welfare (Ali, 2013). Accordingly, national security protects Nigerian citizens' lives, rights, dignity, and property (Ibagere, 2010). Therefore, national security is one of Nigeria's most precarious governance aspects today. However, attaining a sustainable level of national security is possible in Nigeria through politics, but only if democratic governance is ensured. However, this requires a very well-informed and participating population, which, on the other hand, is achievable through creative awareness, of which social media is a part. As indicated by Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2015), social media technologies are used to determine political and electoral issues and their importance to the members of Nigerian society.

In line with the above, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives thus (i) to identify the effects of Social Media Technologies on general elections in Nigeria, (ii) to explore the extent of the spread of fake political news on social media technologies, and (iii) to suggest to the government ways to contain and curtail the effects of social media technologies on the national election in the country.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Definition of Key Terms
2.1.1 Election
Wikipedia has described an election as a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public offices. According to Manin (1997), elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. An election is usually brought about when people collectively and voluntarily consent to an aspirant's choice through voting to make the vote to fill a position. The candidate with the highest vote gets elected through voting. Therefore, an election is the primary tool for bringing into office electable leaders; it is also a way of removing the elected leaders from office, as well as a means for preventing undeserving aspirants from gaining office, hence making it a democratic means (Flanigan & Zingale, 1998). Elections have brought peace and stability in many countries, but the opposite has happened in others. Elections can also be regarded as abstract mechanisms translating popular will into an institutionally defined role. In a more refined concept, elections are about the choice of individuals. Therefore, for the sake of this research, general elections can be considered a formal group decision-making process by which people choose individuals to fill offices in the legislative, executive, and sometimes the judicial arms of government at all levels, including local, state, regional, and federal governments. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations.

2.1.2 Mobilization
Mobilization could be seen as the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups introduce to people their political ideologies to motivate them to participate in active policies of their party to aid their parties win elections, to pass bills, and or to influence policies (Strandberg, 2006). Political organizations may contact people and provide opportunities for their political actions. On many occasions, mobilization is a prerequisite before any participation can occur. Political mobilization is how citizens organize people to pressure the political representatives. Thus, it could be any movement that results in a change of policy; for example, when a newspaper writes about malfunctioning within a government, many people read it, and it gets picked up by the politicians who will start working with it, and in the end, can change the government's policy. It could be actions such as signing a petition to change public policy on contemporary issues.

Katerina (2010) identifies forms of mobilization as follows: Mobilization takes place through social networking, including campaigning on the streets, TV campaigns, direct mail, text messages, social media messaging, and or phone calls. Thus, the involvement of social media networks implies that a particular person is available and can be reached at any time upon request. Other forms of mobilization can also occur through direct contact between aspirants and citizens over networks of friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Therefore, to sum it up, social media networks, in this regard, can be considered a facilitator of political mobilization regardless of the genuineness of the content of their messages.

2.1.3 Communication
According to Merriam-Webster.com (2022), communication is exchanging information between individuals through a standard system of symbols, signs, or behaviour. In other words, communication can be identified as imparting information by speaking, writing, or using another medium. Therefore, communication is sending or receiving information such as radio, television, telephone lines, or computers. However, communication can be described as transferring information through spoken or verbal (face-to-face, telephone, radio, or other media) and written communication (letters, e-mails, books, magazines, and the Internet). For the sake of this study, social media has fallen into both groups because Social Media is a form of electronic communication that facilitates interaction between individuals. It is best described as a computer-based technology that facilitates sharing ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Thus, social media is an internet-based communication that gives users quick electronic sharing and or exchange of content such as personal information, documents, videos, audio, and photos under the World Wide Web platform through mobile applications and or computer software applications, some of which include

Blog, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Podcast, 2go, flicker, WhatsApp, etc.

2.1.4 Social Media

The term "Social Media" has been defined in different ways. For instance, Kaplan (2010) defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". It includes web-based and mobile-based technologies that turn communication into interactive discussion among individuals, organizations, and communities. Social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools that can be used for storing and disseminating information.

The 21st century has created advanced technological knowledge with the help of Web 2.0, powering social media platforms. Today's world is filled with advanced technological knowledge and skills that have redefined human communication and interaction in modern society. Social media can be regarded as a 21st-century technological invention and innovation. With its attributes, social media brings knowledge, skills, and events closer to the people and has revolutionized access to information. Social media can be defined as internet-based services that allow a person to connect with the general public, understand what others are doing and thinking, and connect with others (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014). Furthermore, social media is an online application built on the Web 2.0 platform to create and share individual content. Web 2.0 can be seen as a platform through which individuals create content and allow the continuous sharing of information modifications by others (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). In this study, social media is regarded as a Web 2.0 platform that connects people to share information, knowledge, and much more.

2.1.5 National Security

According to Wikipedia (2022), another term for National Security is National Defence. Both terms have been deliberated upon as the security and defence of a sovereign state, including its citizens, economy, and institutions, which is regarded as a duty of government. However, national security was initially conceived as protection against military and non-military dimensions against any form of attack from terrorism, minimization of crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security, and cyber-security. According to the Macmillan Dictionary (2010), National security is the protection or the safety of a country's secrets and its citizens. According to these definitions, national security can be regarded as a prerequisite for progress and orderliness in any society because protecting lives and property is paramount to human existence. On the contrary, the absence of national security can be seen as a national risk, including the actions of other nation-states, actions by violent non-state actors, narcotic cartels, and other national and multinational corporations, as well as civilians and the effects of natural disasters. However, for this paper, national security means the protection of a nation's citizens to ensure political, economic, and social order to allow unity and prosperity at local, national, and international levels.

From the preceding, it can be argued that one of the fundamental backbones of good and democratic governance is free and fair elections. Elections allow citizens to exercise their civic and constitutional rights to elect or appoint their representatives and confer legitimacy on those responsible for leading them in a democratic society. The electorates could empower the representatives with the executive or legislative authorities. Qualified citizens in a democratic society possess legal rights to vote for politicians and the political party of their choice through free, fair, and credible elections based on the policies they logically express.

2.2 Empirical Review
2.2.1 The Role of Social Media in Elections

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp play a critical role in elections by facilitating political communication and engagement. According to Ojebuyi and Salawu (2020), social media provides a space for political parties and candidates to interact directly with voters, disseminate information, and mobilize support. However, this open environment also allows the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can undermine electoral integrity (Ugwuanyi et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Challenges Posed by Social Media

Social media is a breeding ground for false information. In the 2019 Nigerian general elections, numerous false narratives were propagated, affecting voter perception and behaviour (BBC, 2019). Efforts to combat this include fact-checking initiatives and digital literacy campaigns (Akinfemisoye, 2020).

Similarly, cyber-attacks targeting electoral infrastructure and political entities' social media accounts pose a significant risk. Oyero et al., (2021) highlight the vulnerability of Nigeria's digital election systems to hacking and other cyber threats. Likewise, social media is often used for political manipulation through bots and trolls, which spread propaganda and fake news (Adekunle, 2021). This manipulation can skew public opinion and disrupt the democratic process.

2.2.3 Regulatory and Policy Interventions

Effective regulatory frameworks are essential to mitigate the negative impact of social media on elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has initiated some measures to regulate online political

activities. However, these efforts must be more robust and comprehensive (INEC, 2019).

2.2.4 Technological Solutions

Partnerships with fact-checking organizations like Africa Check have been crucial in debunking false information (Africa Check, 2021). Studies suggest that real-time fact-checking can significantly reduce the spread of misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Also, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools can detect and mitigate the spread of fake news. These technologies analyse patterns and flag suspicious content for further scrutiny (Buntain & Golbeck, 2017). Enhancements of cyber security measures are vital to protect electoral systems from attacks. Implementing advanced security protocols and regular audits can safeguard digital infrastructure (Williams, 2020).

2.2.5 Public Education and Media Literacy

Increasing media literacy among the electorate is critical in combating misinformation. Educational campaigns that teach citizens how to evaluate online information critically can mitigate the impact of fake news (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). The Nigerian government and civil society organizations have initiated several media literacy programs, but their reach and effectiveness need further enhancement (Nwosu, 2020).

2.2.6 Institutional and Stakeholder Collaboration and Cooperation

Collaboration between government agencies, electoral bodies, social media companies, and civil society organizations is essential. The INEC's engagement with platforms like Facebook and Twitter to curb the spread of misinformation is a positive step, but more proactive measures are required (Facebook, 2019). Consequently, global partnerships can provide Nigeria with access to best practices and resources for combating the adverse effects of social media on elections. Collaboration with international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union can enhance Nigeria's capacity to manage these challenges (UN, 2020).

The political significance of any candidate in a democratic setting is measured through the quality of expression of the citizens that is not devoid of free, fair, and credible elections (Alemika, 2011). In such a society, every vote must count. Since 1960, Nigeria joined the comity of independent states; the conduct of elections has been generally marred and characterized by violence and other electoral flaws based on several factors, which social media is now a party. Looking at the preceding, this study is also consistent with previously related studies on the effect of social media on national elections in Nigeria, such as Chukwuere & Onyebukwa (2018) and Dahiru & Mohammed (2021).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study uses a cross-sectional survey design and observations to determine the effects of social media technologies on Nigeria's elections for sustainable national security in our country. The study uses a sample of 50 social media technology users spread across the internet through simple random sampling, comprising both sexes with an age range of thirty years and above. Primary and secondary data for the study were obtained from unstructured interview questions, and participant observations were recorded using a smartphone with selected relevant stakeholders. The secondary data will be sourced from journals, relevant academic textbooks, newspapers, and internet materials.

Thus, by examining the relationships between regulatory effectiveness, media literacy, misinformation, cyber security, and public trust as a theoretical framework that provides a conceptual basis for understanding and addressing the impact of social media technologies on general elections in Nigeria, our policymakers and electoral stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of social media on electoral integrity and public confidence.

4.0 Prospects of social media technologies on general elections in Nigeria

Social media technologies have significant potential to impact general elections in Nigeria. Here are some key prospects:

1. Increased Voter Engagement: Social media platforms provide a space for political discourse, allowing voters to engage directly with candidates, parties, and issues. This can increase voter awareness, participation, and informed decision-making.
2. Amplified Political Messaging: Political parties and candidates can use social media to disseminate their messages to a broader audience quickly and cost-effectively. This enables them to reach segments of the population that traditional media might not reach effectively.
3. Youth Mobilization: Nigeria has a young population, and many are active on social media. Political campaigns can leverage social platforms to engage with this demographic and mobilize them to participate in the electoral process.
4. Transparency and Accountability: Social media can be a tool for monitoring electoral processes, enabling citizens to report irregularities and share information in real-time. This can enhance transparency and accountability within the electoral system.
5. Issue-Based Campaigning: Social media allows for discussing specific policy issues, enabling candidates to focus on substantive matters rather than just personalities or rhetoric. This

can lead to more informed debates and decision-making by voters.

6. International Visibility: Social media provides a platform for international observers, journalists, and organizations to monitor and report on Nigerian elections, increasing transparency and global awareness of the electoral process.

Social media technologies have significant prospects for general elections in Nigeria. They offer platforms for political engagement, information dissemination, and voter mobilization. However, challenges like the spread of fake news, misinformation, hate speech, and manipulation of public opinion also exist. Therefore, while social media offers immense potential for enhancing democracy in Nigeria, it also requires careful management and safeguarding regulations to mitigate these risks and ensure they contribute positively to the electoral process.

5.0 Key Challenges

The influence of social media on general elections in Nigeria is profound, offering both opportunities for enhanced political engagement and significant challenges such as the spread of misinformation and manipulation of public opinion. Effective mitigation strategies are essential to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, but in so doing, some key challenges were identified by this paper, which include:

1. Regulatory and Legal: Outdated laws and enforcement difficulties, compounded by political influences, hinder effective regulation of social media.
2. Technological: Detecting misinformation, managing vast volumes of content, and addressing cyber security threats require advanced technological solutions.
3. Public Awareness and Media Literacy: Low media literacy and the logistical challenges of widespread educational outreach impede efforts to educate the electorate on identifying misinformation.
4. Institutional and Coordination: Fragmented efforts, resource limitations, and bureaucratic inefficiencies challenge implementing comprehensive mitigation strategies.
5. Collaboration with Social Media Platforms: Aligning global social media companies' policies and response times with national regulatory requirements is challenging.
6. Socio-Political and Cultural: High political polarization, low trust in institutions, and diverse cultural dynamics complicate mitigation efforts.
7. Economic Constraints: Funding limitations and the digital divide affect the scope and effectiveness of regulatory and educational initiatives.

8. Ethical and Legal Considerations: Balancing regulation with freedom of speech and privacy rights is a complex ethical and legal issue.

6.0 Mitigation Strategies

Addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by social media technologies in Nigeria's general elections requires a holistic approach. This includes robust regulatory frameworks, advanced technological interventions, comprehensive public education, adequate institutional support, and international collaboration. By integrating the stated strategies below, Nigeria can enhance the integrity and fairness of its electoral processes in the digital age.

1. Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks: Updating and enforcing laws to regulate social media activities, emphasizing independence, hate speech, misinformation, and electoral fraud.
2. Technological Solutions: Utilizing AI and machine learning to detect misinformation, enhancing cyber security measures, and partnering with fact-checking organizations.
3. Public Education and Media Literacy: Implementing media literacy programs to educate the public on critical evaluation of online content and reducing susceptibility to misinformation.
4. Institutional Support and Coordination: Ensuring robust resource allocation and coordination among various governmental and non-governmental bodies.
5. Collaboration with Social Media Platforms: Working closely with companies to ensure timely action against harmful content and improve transparency and accountability.
6. International Cooperation: Engaging in global partnerships to leverage best practices and resources for managing social media impacts on elections.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The pervasive influence of social media on Nigeria's general elections presents substantial opportunities and significant challenges. While social media platforms enhance political engagement and democratize information dissemination, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation, cyber-attacks, and political manipulation, thereby threatening the integrity of the electoral process.

Mitigating these adverse effects requires a multi-pronged approach. Strengthening and updating regulatory frameworks is essential to ensure that laws keep pace with technological advancements and that enforcement is consistent and impartial. Leveraging advanced technological solutions, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, can help detect and counteract misinformation more effectively. Enhancing

cyber security measures is crucial to protect the electoral infrastructure from digital threats.

Equally important is the need to boost public media literacy. Educating the electorate on evaluating online content critically can significantly reduce the impact of misinformation. This involves comprehensive outreach and education programs, particularly in rural and underserved areas, to ensure that all citizens can navigate the digital information landscape.

Institutional support and coordination are also vital. Effective collaboration among government agencies, electoral bodies, social media companies, and civil society organizations can foster a unified and robust response to social media's challenges. Additionally, international cooperation can provide valuable insights and resources, enabling Nigeria to adopt best practices worldwide.

Addressing these challenges is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process. Continuous research, adaptation, and innovation are required to stay ahead of evolving threats and to ensure that mitigation strategies remain effective.

In conclusion, by adopting a comprehensive, collaborative, and adaptive approach, Nigeria can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of social media technologies on its general elections. This will help foster a more transparent, fair, and democratic electoral process, ensuring that the people's voice is accurately and fairly represented in the digital age.

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