

Influence of Mass Media and Social Media Political Campaigns on Electorate in South-South during the 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Barikui Nnaane, PhD

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria
bnaane@gmail.com

Abstract

The major objective of this research was to evaluate on comparative basis, the influence of both the conventional and social media in the South-South Region during the 2019 Presidential election campaigns. The research design was survey. Both cluster and simple random sampling techniques were used. Furthermore, the instrument for collecting data was the questionnaire. Out of the 384 copies distributed based on the adopted sample size determination table, 368 copies were found useful. The findings showed that while television was the most dominant conventional medium in terms of dependence by the respondents, WhatsApp was the most widely-used social media platform during the period. The researcher, therefore, recommended amongst others, that political parties/candidates should engage the services of professionals in the area of political advertising and political public relations in order to leverage on their competitive advantages.

Keywords: Influence, Mass Media, Social Media, Political Campaigns, Presidential Election, South-South

Introduction

The centrality of the mass media and of recent, the social media to politics and participatory democracy all over the world, has become focus of robust academic and intellectual engagements (Owen, 2014; Aleyomi, Ajakaiye, Otu & Oluwasegun, 2018; Patterson, 2019). Moreover, the tangential nature of these two categories of the media (conventional and social) to political communication, particularly campaigns, has made the battles for the hearts, minds and souls of the electorate to be a fierce one; in most cases, leaving it with, political polarisation, disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and politically-slanted information, among others (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). However, it is worthy to note that both the conventional media and the social media play complementary role during electioneering process, but the campaigns in particular.

Political parties and their candidates use these two categories of the media to galvanise and influence public opinion, mobilise the electorate, articulate their policies and programmes, de-market their opponents and also carry out propaganda, among others. According to Simons & Ghosh (2020), the social media in particular, are new public platforms for democracy and they are influential because they use algorithms to rank and order vast quantities of content and information, shape how the electorate access and consume news and information, communicate with each other, debate fundamental issues of public interests and make collective decisions. To understand how political parties and their candidates use underhand tactics by exploiting the potential of the mass media and the social media in political campaigns, a British political consulting firm by name “Cambridge Analytical Ltd” was used by politicians in the 2013 and 2017

presidential elections in Kenya; 2015 presidential election in Nigeria and the 2016 presidential election in the United States of America, among others. The major duty of this firm was to misappropriate digital assets, data mining, data brokerage and data analysis with strategic communication in electioneering process, particularly campaigns (Confessore, 2018). This shows that contemporary mass media and social media political campaigns are adopting more scientific and even unethical means to reach the right members of the voting public. The focus of this research, therefore, is to evaluate on comparative basis, how mass media and social media political campaigns influenced the electorate in the South-South Region of Nigeria during the 2019 presidential election.

Statement of the Problem

In times past, and with reference to the era before the emergence of the social media, the conventional media constituted the most used channels of mobilising, campaigning and engaging with the electorate, aside from political rallies. The mass media, especially television, were seen as powerful tools for wooing the electorate. However, with the emergence and ubiquity of digital technologies like the social media spawning the wake of the “platformisation of the Web,” the frontiers of the platforms of political campaigns have become more widened with political parties and their candidates engaging with the electorate directly, carrying out experiential marketing of personalities and manifestoes and also getting feedback in return. However, scholars such as Adams & Barrett (2019) argue that not only are the social media a threat to democracy, but that their algorithm and architecture make it possible for the users to be manipulated. Owen (2014) equally argues that the conventional media now use different social media platforms, thereby making their influence to be fuzzy. Arising from the foregoing, did the conventional and social media influence the electorate in the South-South region during the 2019 Presidential election campaign and if yes what was the extent of such influence in comparative terms; in addition, did the characteristics of each of these categories of the media contribute to the influence (if any) and what was the extent of such.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the extent of exposure to conventional and social media political campaigns by the electorate in South-South Region during the 2019 Presidential election in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain which of the categories of the media (conventional and social) had more influence on the electorate during the campaign.
3. Find out the specific conventional media outlet and social media platform that created the most influence on the electorate during the campaign.
4. Determine how the electorate perceive both the conventional and social media on comparative basis with respect to political campaigns.

Review of Related Literature

Contemporary presidential election campaigns worldwide depend majorly on the mass media as well as the social media to reach out and influence the voting public. Political parties and their candidates usually exploit the potential and three-dimensional attributes of conventional television; for instance, to mobilise and sell their manifestoes to the public. Patterson (2019) argues that while the mass media may not necessarily sway the

electorate to vote in a pre-determined manner, savvy presidential candidates and their political parties usually exploit the impact of the mass media to get across to the electorate. In a seeming support for the above, Aghamelu (2014) notes the unassailable fact that the mass media play an important role in election campaigns through their power of mass information.

In a study by Liberini, Redoano, Russo, Cuevas & Cuevas (2018) concerning the influence of the social media on politics, they argued that the social media enable politicians to personalise and target voters who may play a decisive role in the outcome of elections. Their study revealed that online political campaigns targeted at users' gender, geographic location and political ideology had a significant effect in persuading undecided voters. Bossetta (2018) avers that political communication on the social media is mediated by the digital architecture of a specific platform; that is, the technical protocols that enable, constrain and shape users in the virtual space. Using four social media platforms as the foci of his research which was premised on the 2016 presidential election in the United States of America, Bossetta (p. 1) argues that the diffusion of political communication on the social media does not follow the same pattern, rather it is a "platform's network structure," "functionality," "algorithmic filtering" and "datafication model" that influence political campaign on the social media.

In another study by Bossetta, Segesten & Trenz (2017) on how the electorate can enact varying styles and degrees of political engagement on the social media, they distinguished between three primary types of content styles (factual, partisan, and moral) and four degrees of engagement (making, commenting, diffusing and listening). They argued further that differences in Twitter and Facebook's digital architectures encourage certain styles and degrees of engagement over others. Vergeer & Hermans (2013) in their study which focused on the use of Twitter during the 2010 general election in the Netherlands explained why some candidates were more likely to adopt Twitter, have larger networks and show more reciprocation than other candidates. The study further revealed that their central hypothesis which stated that candidates from less established and smaller parties will use Twitter more extensively, was not validated; and that being an early adopter of the social media was more effective than being a late adopter, especially prior to elections.

Furthermore, Halpern, Valenzuela & Katz (2017) studied how the different social media platforms can influence political participation through collective and internal efficacy, using the Latin American country of Chile as the study area. Using data from a two-wave panel survey, they found that frequent usage of Facebook and Twitter for sharing political information was conducive to higher levels of participation through different efficacy measures. They equally discovered that Facebook had a significant effect on collective efficacy, while Twitter had a significant effect on internal efficacy. Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee & Kwak (2017) studied incidental exposure, selective exposure and political information-sharing with a focus on how to integrate online exposure patterns and expression on the social media. Using a two-wave panel survey, their study demonstrated that incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal partisans drives stronger partisans to actively seek out political contents that resonate with them the more, which subsequently encourages political information-sharing on the social media. Their results also highlighted the imperative of considering both types of political information exposure when modelling citizens' political behaviour online.

In a study by Okoro & Tsegysu (2017) which focused on the utilisation of the social media for political communication during the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria, their results showed that the choice of presidential candidates by a majority of the respondents was influenced by the use of the social media; that the two selected presidential candidates were popular because of their use of the social media; and that the respondents agreed that their voting pattern was influenced by the social media. Other scholars who have also interrogated the role of the mass media and the social media in political campaigns are as follows: Holbert (2005), Chinedu-Okeke & Obi (2016), Coleman (2017), Apuke & Tunca (2018) and Adams & Barrett (2019), among others. However, from the literature reviewed so far, there is no study that compares the influence of both mass media and social media political campaigns during elections. This is the gap this study fills.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on two theoretical constructs: the Elaboration likelihood model/theory and the adaptive structuration theory. The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion was developed by Richard E. Petty & John Cacciopo in 1986. This model explains the different ways of processing stimuli, why they are used and their outcomes on attitude change. The elaboration likelihood model proposes two major routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. Under the “central route,” persuasion will likely result from a person’s careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of an advocacy. On the other hand, under the “peripheral route,” persuasion results from a person’s association with positive or negative cues in the stimulus or making a simple inference about the merits of the advocated position. These cues will involve factors such as the credibility or attractiveness of the sources of the message, or the production quality of the message. The likelihood of elaboration will be determined by an individual’s motivation and ability to evaluate the argument being presented (Petty & Cacciopo, 1986). It follows, therefore, that the influence of mass media and social media political campaign messages on the electorate will depend on any of the “routes” or a combination of the two “routes” used in processing the messages by the electorate. This model believes that the mass media and social media have conditional powers.

The adaptive structuration theory on the other hand, is based on Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (1984) which simply focused on technology as it is. However, the adaptive structuration theory looks at technology, especially digital technologies from the social dimension. It argues that individuals, groups and organisations exploit the dynamic nature and social aspect of digital technologies to leverage their activities and influence outcomes (Poole & DeSanctis, 1990, 1994). In relation to this research, it means that the political parties and their candidates exploit the social media to reach out and engage with the electorate in order to have predetermined outcomes, which is winning an election.

Methodology

The research design for this study was survey. According to Brown, Cozby, Kee & Worden (2018), survey research design is quite appropriate in eliciting people’s views on an issue because it employs careful sampling techniques to obtain an accurate description of an entire population. The population from the area of study which comprise the

registered voters in each of the states in the South-South Region is represented in the table below:

Table 1: Population of Registered Voters

S/N	State	Capital	Population
1	Akwa Ibom	Uyo	2, 119, 727
2	Bayelsa	Yenagoa	9, 23, 182
3	Cross River	Calabar	1, 527, 289
4	Delta	Asaba	2, 845, 274
5	Edo	Benin	2, 210, 534
6	Rivers	Port-Harcourt	3, 215, 273
	Total		12, 841,279

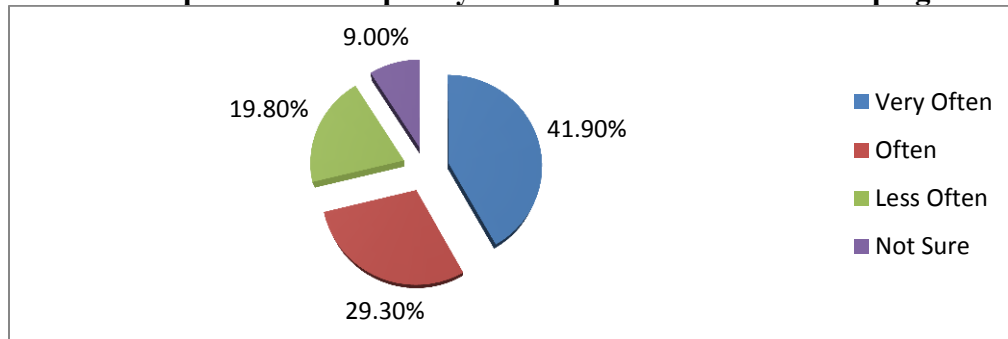
Source: World Population Report (2019)

The determination of the sample size followed Krejcie & Morgan sample size determination table cited by Davoudi & Allahyari (2013) which states that at 95% level of confidence and 5.0% margin of error (usually for the social sciences), when the population is 3 million and above, then the sample size should be 384. The sampling techniques were cluster sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Cluster sampling was used to divide each of the state capitals into clusters, while simple random sampling random was used to get the respondents based on the clusters. The instrument of data collection was questionnaire, while the method of analysis was frequency table, charts and Likert scale.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this study, 384 copies of questionnaire were distributed, while 368 copies, representing 95.8% response rate were returned. The percentage of response is quite impressive because according to Ohaja (2003), when the response rate of a research using the questionnaire is 70% and above, then the findings of the research are valid.

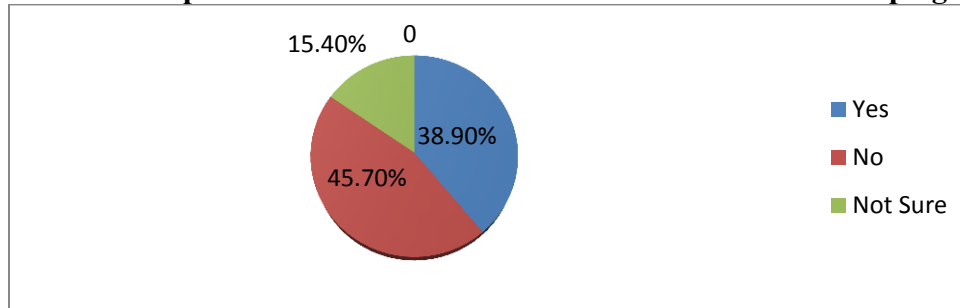
Chart 1: Respondents’ Frequency of Exposure to Political Campaign Messages



From chart 1 above, a majority of the respondents were following the political campaigns seriously because presidential elections all over the world usually generate more interests than other elections. It is instructive to note that “very often” meant following political campaign messages every day, “often” meant following political campaign messages

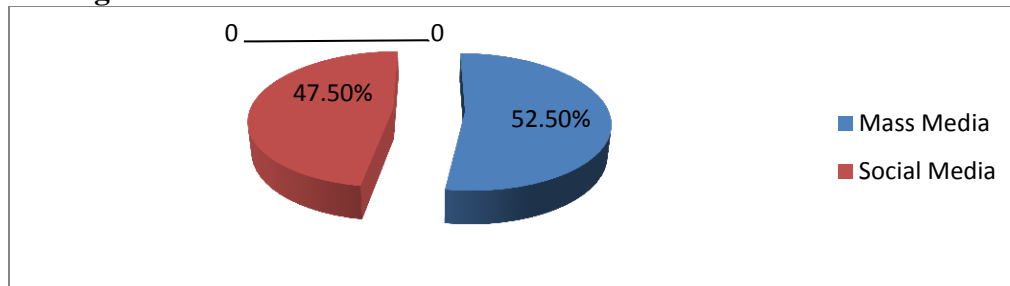
within 2-3 days, “less often” meant following political campaign messages within 4-7 days of the week, while “not sure” meant inability to remember at all.

Chart 2: Respondents’ Views on Persuasiveness of Political Campaign Messages



From chart 2 above, a majority of the respondents were not persuaded by the political campaign messages probably because in Nigeria, opinion leadership, ethno-religious factors and trust deficit of the political class other than media campaigns contribute more to the choices the electorate make.

Chart 3: Respondents’ Views on Exposure to Media Category’s Political Campaign Messages



From chart 3 above, the mass media still play leading role in political campaigns, in spite of the popularity and ubiquity of the social media. This implies that the social media complement the capacity and impact of the mass media. It also indicates that the mass media are believed to have more reach, especially to political opinion leaders, than the social media.

Chart 4: Respondents’ Views on Influence Potential of the Mass Media and the Social Media

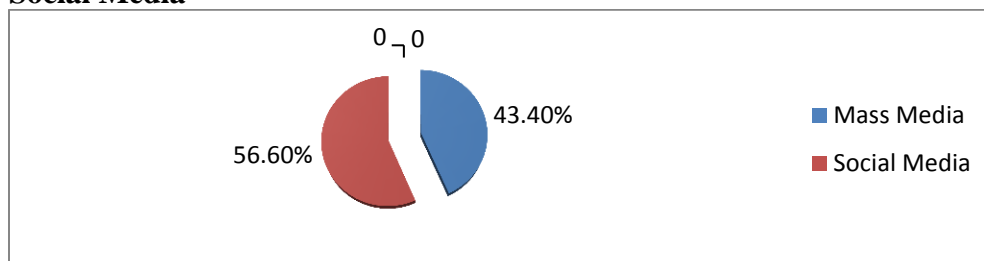
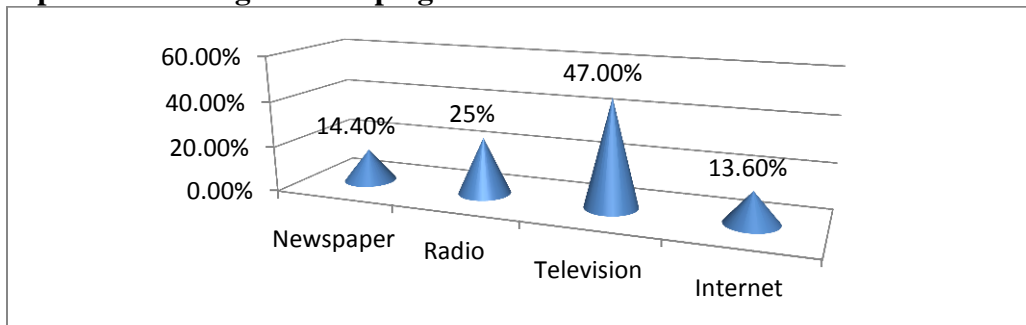


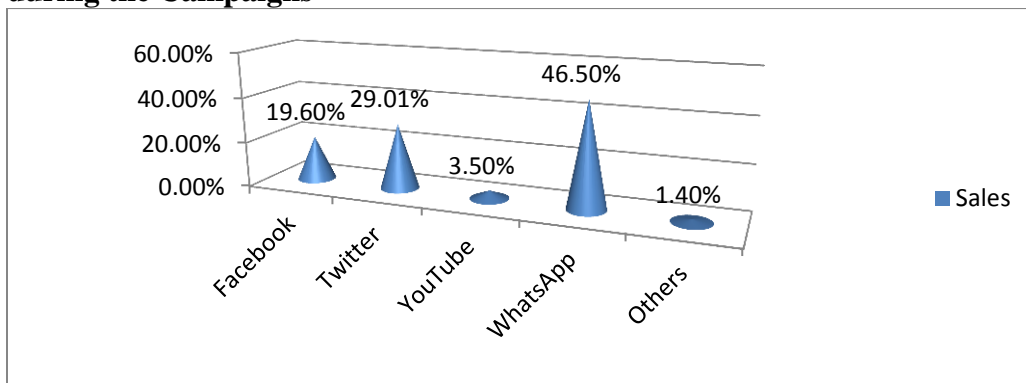
Chart 4 above was based on the 143 respondents (38.9%) who said they were persuaded by the political campaign messages. However, when their views were sought further about which of the categories of the media’s political campaign messages persuaded the most, a majority said the “social media.” This underscores the fact that the characteristics of the social media such as networking, connection, collaboration, linkage, liking, engaging and sharing, among others, appeal more to the respondents. In addition, the potential of the social media to democratise mass communication among the people, makes a majority of the people to have more say in the electioneering process than through the mass media.

Chart 5: Respondents’ Views on the Specific Mass Media Channels they were more exposed to during the Campaigns



From chart 5 above, television remains the most sought-after mass media channel of political campaigns because of its three-dimensional attributes of sight, sound and motion. In all presidential elections in Nigeria, especially that of 2019, all the state, geopolitical zone and grand finale campaigns were shown on the major television stations in the country. Because seeing is believing, television can be used to manipulate people’s emotions by showing the crowd at the various political rallies.

Chart 6: Respondents’ Views on the Specific Social Media Channels they used most during the Campaigns



From chart 6 above, WhatsApp, acquired by Facebook has overtaken Twitter and Facebook as platforms of political campaigns. In Nigeria, it has emerged as the most

widely-used social media messaging platform. It has a very low cost in terms of tariff and also, quite flexible in usage, combining texts, graphics, audio and video files. Its major drawback, however, is that it is used more for fake news, disinformation and misinformation, especially during political campaigns.

Table 2: Respondents’ Comparative Perception of the Use of the Mass Media and the Social Media With Respect to Political Campaigns

S/N	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation
		F	F	F	F	F		
1	Mass media political campaign messages are more verifiable than those of the social media.	188	111	69	-	-	4.3	1.97
2	Mass media political campaign messages have more credibility than those of the social media.	190	107	71	-	-	3.5	1.15
3	Mass media political messages are less personal than those of the social media.	195	138	35	-	-	4.4	1.98
4	Mass Media political campaign messages are less engaging than those of the social media.	140	162	66	-	-	4.2	1.96
5	Mass media political campaign messages have less fake news, disinformation and misinformation than those of the social media.	152	163	53	-	-	4.3	1.97

KEY: SA= Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. Decision Rule: If Mean \leq 1.49 = Undecided; 1.5-2.49= Strongly Disagree; 2.5-3.49= Disagree; 3.5-4.49=Agree; 4.5-5=Strongly Agree

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the research indicated that a majority of the respondents (154:41.9%) followed political campaigns during the 2019 presidential election “very often.” In addition, a good number of the respondents (108: 29.3%) also stated that they followed “often.” As stated earlier, presidential elections all over the world usually generate more interests than all other elections in a country. Taking a look at both figures and percentages above, it showed that over 70% of the respondents had very keen interests in political campaigns during the 2019 presidential election. Furthermore, 143 of the respondents (38.9%) stated that they were persuaded by the political campaign messages to vote for their preferred candidates; 168 (45.7%) said they were not; while 57 (15.4%) said they were not sure. This tends to justify the elaboration likelihood model by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) who argued that persuasion depends on the individual’s use of either the

“central route” or the “peripheral route” or both in processing information. Also, a majority of the respondents (193:52.5%) noted that they were exposed more to messages from the mass media, while 175 (47.5%) chose the social media.

Out of the 143 respondents (38.9%) who stated that they were persuaded by the political campaign messages to vote for their preferred candidates, 62 (43.4%) said mass media political campaign messages persuaded them the more; while 81 (56.6%) mentioned the social media. Concerning the specific mass media channel used more, a majority of the respondents (47%) mentioned television, justifying Holbert (2005) who argued in his study that TV plays a dominant role, amongst all the conventional media in partisan politics and governmental affairs. For the specific social media platform used most during the campaigns, a majority of the respondents (46.5%) mentioned WhatsApp. This is not surprising because the messaging app is used by 2 billion people worldwide. In Nigeria for instance, WhatsApp is the most used social media platform/messaging app, accounting for 85% of the 122 million internet users in the country (Alagbaso, 2020). On the comparative perception of both the mass media and social media in terms of political campaigns, the respondents agreed that mass media political campaign messages were more credible than those of the social media, but that, however, social media campaigns were more personal and engaging than those of the mass media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A majority of the respondents were keenly interested in the 2019 presidential election campaigns, both the mass media and the social media played complementary and tangential roles during the campaign period and both categories of the media had their strengths and weaknesses during the campaign period. TV and WhatsApp were depended upon more by the respondents than other platforms and that concerning the comparative perception of both the mass media and social media in terms of political campaigns, the respondents agreed that mass media political campaign messages were more credible than those of the social media, but that, however, social media campaigns were more personal and engaging than those of the mass media. Based on the findings and conclusion, the following are the recommendations of this research:

1. Political parties/candidates should engage the services of professionals in the area of political advertising and political public relations in order to leverage on their competitive advantage.
2. Political parties/candidates should always be on the watch out for any form of de-marketing and/or fake news about their political brands.
3. The electorate should be more discerning and savvier in media-literacy so as to decipher empty political promises from genuine ones.

References

- Adams, K. & Barrett, B. (2019). The rise of platforms: Challenges, tensions and critical questions for platform governance. Retrieved from <https://www.ssrc.org>.
- Aghamelu, F. C. (2014). The role of the mass media in the Nigerian electoral process. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4 (3), 154-172.

- Alagboso, C. (2020). Nigeria: WhatsApp for social good: How Nigerians used the platform to show care during covid-19 lockdown. Retrieved from <https://www.allafrica.com>.
- Aleyomi, M. B., Ajakaiye, O. O. P. Otu, A. O. & Oluwasegun, M. P. (2018). Mass media and political campaigns during the Nigerian 2015 presidential elections. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 10 (2), 174-185.
- Allcot, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31 (2), 211-236.
- Apuke, O.D. & Tunca, E.A. (2018). Understanding the implications of social media usage in electoral processes and campaigns in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*, 16 (31), 1-8.
- Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat in the 2016 US election. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95 (2), 471-496.
- Bossetta, M. Segesten, A. & Trenz, H.J (2017). Engaging with European politics through Twitter and Facebook: Participation beyond the national. In M. Barisione. & A. Michailidou (Eds.). *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era* (pp. 53-75). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, K. W., Cozby, P. C., Kee, D. W. & Worden, P. E. (2018). *Research methods in human development (2nd ed.)*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Chinedu-Okeke, C. F. & Obi, F. (2016). Social media as a political platform in Nigeria: A focus on electorate in South-Eastern, Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 21 (11), 6-22.
- Confessore, N. (2018). Cambridge analytica and Facebook: The scandal and the fallout so far. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com>
- Davoudi, S. M. M. & Allahyari, M. (2013). Effect of job organisation on job performance among operating staff in manufacturing companies. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 3 (2), 78-88.
- DeSanctis, G. & Poole, M. S. (1994). Capturing the complexity in advanced technology use: Adaptive structuration theory. *Organisation Science*, 5(2), 121-147.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. CA: University of California Press.
- Halpern, D., Valenzuela, S. & Katz, J.E. (2017). We face, I tweet: How different social media influence political participation through collective and internal efficacy. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22, 320-336.
- Holbert, R. L. (2005). Television news viewing, governmental scope and postmaterialist spending: Assessing mediation by partisanship. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 49 (4), 416-434.
- Liberini, F., Redoano, M., Russo, A., Cuevas, A. & Cuevas, S. (2018). Politics in the Facebook era: Evidence from the 2016 US presidential elections. University of Warwick Working Paper Series No. 389.
- Ohaja, E. U. (2003). *Mass communication research and project report writing*. Surulere: John Letterman, Ltd.
- Okoro, N. & Santas, T. (2017). An Appraisal of the utilisation of social media for political communication in the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. *African Research Review*, 11(1), 115-135.

- Owen, D. (2014). The new media's role in politics. Retrieved from <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com>.
- Patterson, T. E. (2019). *The mass media and elections: How Americans choose their presidents*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Petty, R. E. & Cacciopo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Poole, M. S. & DeSanctis, G. (1990). Understanding the use of group decision-support systems: The theory of adaptive structuration. In J. Fulks & C. Steinfeld (Eds.), *Organisations and Communication Technology* (pp. 173-193). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Simons, J. & Ghosh, D. (2020). Utilities for democracy: Why and how the algorithmic infrastructure of Facebook and Google must be regulated. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu>.
- Vergeer, M. & Hermans, L. (2013). Campaigning on Twitter: Microblogging and online social networking as campaign tools in the 2010 general elections in the Netherlands. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 8 (1), 399-419.
- Weeks, B. E., Lane, D. S., Kim, D. H., Lee, S. S. & Kwak, N. (2017). Incidental exposure, selective exposure and political information sharing: Integrating online exposure patterns and expression on social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22, 363-379.