Encouraging Popular Political Participation and Effective Election Monitoring Through Whatsapp Social Media Platforms

Ikegbunam, Peter .C[1], Obiakor, Casmir U.[2]

[1]Assistant lecturer, Paul University Awka
[2]Assistant lecturer, Chukwuemeke odumegwu Ojukwu University Iganriam campus

ABSTRACT: Nigeria and Nigerians have witnessed different kinds of electoral frauds since the return to democracy in 1999. Counting from the 1999 general election in Nigeria, the 2019 general election is the 6th general elections conducted in the country. Unfortunately, none of these elections have been considered to be free and fair as there are always public outcries from one end to another against the results of the elections as a result of lack of transparency in the process. Drawing from this background, this study, examines whether heavy use of WhatsApp platforms by different political parties in the election encouraged popular participation and effective monitoring of the electoral processes. The study which examined a total of 318 respondents sampled from select WhatsApp groups of the two leading political parties adopted the survey research method with the social media engagement and technological acceptance theories as its theoretical framework to ascertain whether the use of WhatsApp platforms by political parties encouraged popular participation among the electorate and determine if WhatsApp platforms were helpful to parties in monitoring the 2019 general election as well as its processes. Findings revealed that WhatsApp use encouraged popular participation and electoral process monitoring. The researchers recommended that the political parties and the electoral umpire should engage more in the use of social media platforms in passing information during, on and after election to encourage transparency in leadership.

KEYWORDS: Monitoring, Democracy, electoral Frauds, social media.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

As of 2018, WhatsApp is a significant component of the global communication and information dissemination application which is drastically replacing mainstream SMS, especially in developing countries of the world (Caetano, Magno, Cunha, Meira Jr., Marques-Neto and Almeida, 2018). Because of this height of penetration and popularity among the population of phone users, WhatsApp has turned out to be an important platform for political propaganda and election campaigns around the globe, having played significant roles in elections in Brazil, India (Vindu, 2018), Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico and Zimbabwe (Caetano, 2018). From personal observation, virtually, 80% of internet enabled phone users are WhatsApp subscribers. In this regard, these phones and their social media platforms encourage the sharing of information in all forms from one end to another irrespective of distance.

While investigating the way in which cell phones and social media platforms had penetrated political lives and activities of the people, a new national survey by the Pew Research Center cited in Smith (2014), confirmed that cell phones and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are playing an 'increasingly prominent' role in how voters get political information and follow election news. Given the high temperature of the 2019 general election and the level of social media awareness and consciousness, different WhatsApp groups were created by different political groups to hunt for voters, maintain voter/candidate relationship and monitor what INEC and other opponents are doing about the election.

Recent analysis on the use of cell phones in getting and sharing political news and activities shows that the proportion of Nigerians who use their cell phones in this capacity and campaign coverage has doubled compared with the last general election in the country (Nwangwu, Onah and Out, 2018; Melo, Messias, Resende, Garimella, Almeida, Benevenuto, 2019). In the 2019 general elections, it is common place to see or find voters of all ages joining different social media groups to gain and share information on the electoral process unlike what obtains in the previous elections in the country. Virtually all the primary elections conducted in the 2019 election across the participating political parties are well monitored and communicated in social media landscape (WhatsApp) (Melo, Messias, Resende, Garimella, Almeida, Benevenuto, 2019). Participation in this online campaign had a clear partisan direction because all the supporters of each participating political candidate express their overwhelming support using their persuasive techniques to win more voters online for their candidates. In Okoro and Adibe (2013), this is "social media war" spreading on

various WhatsApp groups where different political social media handlers adopted some kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter attacks in a bid to protect their candidates from oppositions on one side and garner supports for their candidates on the other. This feature distinguished the 2019 general election from its 2015 counterpart which was classified to be the most credible election in Nigeria (National Democratic Institute (NDI, 2018). This may be probably because of its ability to produce the opposition party as the winner, a situation which had not been observed in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999.

In a bid to be on a safer side, most political party had their WhatsApp groups at various levels aimed at monitoring every part of the electoral process in the country. The reason for this is that it was believed that effective election monitoring can reduce the risk of manipulating the process. This will reduce high rate of occurrence of possible election-related violence which usually occur frequently in previous elections as recorded in literature (Schimpp & McKernan 2001, Binder 2009, Global Commission 2012). This claim is most commonly based on the assumption that since electoral fraud may likely encourage election-related violence; monitoring electoral processes will drastically reduce fraud and the risk of the election being manipulated and equally reduce violence (Global Commission 2012).

Unlike the 2015 election, the February 23rd, 2019, general elections result had been widely protested by different political parties on the basis of electoral irregularities witnessed during the election. This protest was occasioned by the act of declaration of some of the election's result inconclusive by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with observed height of electoral irregularities in the use of both manual and electronic verification methods in different parts of the countries. High in the list of the criticism was the selective use of electronic verification in some parts and manual verifications in the other parts which gave some political parties edge over the other. The election was characterized by massive pre-election voting which were spread through the social media for the people to see for themselves (AIT video documentary, 2019).

However, it is pertinent to state here that the body in charge of the election in their usual way did not accept that the ballot papers found to have been thumb printed in various WhatsApp videos was their true ballot papers designed for the election until it was disclosed that the contractor for the logistics and ballot paper printing is an APC senatorial candidate (BBC Pidgin, 2019). On the event of the above, various political parties were using their WhatsApp platforms to inform their supporters elsewhere on the position of things ranging from the INEC training of ad-hoc staff to publications of names of the shortlisted ad-hoc staff for the election through to the distribution of the electoral materials from Abuja to various polling stations. The essence of all these efforts is to monitor the process through social media platform and ensure it is not manipulated at any stage (Walton 2012). Parties and various candidates deemed it fit and normal for the electorates to be well informed so as to be able to do what they ought to do in order not to run into the problem of being rigged out or manipulated in the process (Kelley 2012).

Drawing from the observed massive reliance by parties on the use of WhatsApp social media platform in the mobilization of voters/supporters and monitoring of the 2019 general election in Nigeria, one then may ask, were the WhatsApp social media groups effectively mobilized voters/supporters and monitored the entire electoral processes? In the light of this background, this study examined whether WhatsApp had helped in mobilizing voters, connecting the electorates and the candidates together and monitored the 2019 general election in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid expansion of social media and the public's enthusiastic reception of its use in political activities promise an imminent revitalization of democracy in developing nations. Social media platforms are interactive channels of communication that allows people to get together, develop communicative communities and share information in different forms in a virtual public sphere (Grönlund, Strandberg & Himmelroos, 2009). While observers have focused on the use of social media, little is known about actors' perceptions of social media as a platform for political communication/mobilization and election monitoring. Earlier before the advent of social media platforms, it is often admitted that political communication and election monitoring are both compromised because it is uni-directional, flowing from the parties, leading candidates and INEC to the voters (Karlsen 2009). The reason is that those politicians, higher interest bidders and INEC never allowed the masses to gain access to the series of events concerning every bit of the election ranging from pre, on and post-election stages uninterrupted. Previous research has therefore, failed to reveal whether the use of social media platforms had impacted on the electoral process in Nigeria thereby increasing political consciousness and at the same time reducing the rate of electoral violence, post-election crisis and encouraging reasonable acceptance of electoral results among contestants and political parties. It was in the power of the last sentence that this study set to examine WhatsApp platform's use by political parties for voters' mobilization and election monitoring during the 2019 general election using PDP/Atiku and APC/Buhari WhatsApp groups in Anambra state.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to bring to lime light the use of WhatsApp social media platform for voter mobilization and election monitoring by political parties and candidates using the 2019 general election as case in point. The measurable research objectives guiding this study are: - To

1. Ascertain whether the use of WhatsApp in monitoring the 2019 presidential election exposed irregularities in the election.
2. Determine whether the use of WhatsApp increased political consciousness of the electorate in the election.
3. Ascertain how effective the respondents rated WhatsApp use in mobilizing voters and monitoring the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study covered only PDP/Atiku and APC/Buhari WhatsApp group chats and the members therein. The groups were those that were formed and operate in Anambra state. Any other WhatsApp groups formed in other states of the federations were not covered in the study. The study covered only three months ranging from January to March 2019. The choice of these three months was based on the fact they were the period that characterize heavy electoral activities concerning the 2019 presidential election. The constraint of this study is the possible disregard of participation request by some of the group members who were also part of the population for the study. Moreover, some of the contacts found in the WhatsApp groups are no longer members as of the time of distributing the research questionnaire. In a bid to control this problem, the researchers resolved to make use of the available participants who admitted to be part of the study. In this study, three groups each were selected purposively from several WhatsApp groups formed by supporters to the two political parties and their candidates. The criteria for the selection are that any group to be selected must have about two or three members operating from the national, zonal, states and local governments level. This means that all social media information at the national level gradually found their ways into the various branches at all level through those representatives. On the side of PDP and Atiku, were Vitaldi Anambra, Atiku/Obi 2019 and Atikulated platforms. On the part of APC and Buhari, were GMB support group Anambra branch, Anambra Youths4Buhari, and APGA4GMB, 2019 platforms.

Significance of the Study

This study is an insight into the influence of WhatsApp platform use in voter mobilization and election monitoring in Nigeria. Having seen that a good number of challenges are facing the country's electoral process, WhatsApp use reawakening political conscious minds and election monitoring can be a veritable tool for reducing electoral fraud and at the same time make the election results acceptable to all once the results are produced in a transparent way. The study also adds to literature that considers the sustenance of the nascent democracy in Nigeria. It will equally expose Nigerians to the role of WhatsApp social media in enhancing good governance by expunging candidates of bad characters who rely on electoral frauds to clinch to position of authorities. To INEC as the electoral umpire in Nigeria, this study will provide them with the need to also use this same platform in communicating the people on the realities on ground during election to encourage acceptance of results. To the judiciary, the study will help them in administration of justice during post-election litigations given the platform's ability to provide audio-visual evidences in court as exhibits in order to strengthen the country's political future.

Technological Acceptance Theory

According to Chen, Li and Li (2011), this theory originated from the fields of information systems. It is one of the most influential research theories in the studies of the determinants of information systems and information technology acceptance in predicting intentions to use by individuals. The theory explained the reasons why society or individuals accept a particular technological innovation and development from three different perspectives: namely (a) perceived ease of use, (b) perceived usefulness, and (c) attitude towards the technology (Suleman, Nusraningrum, & Ali, 2019). Advancing on the above perspectives, Chuttur (2009) affirmed that "the attitude of a user towards a system is the major determinant to whether the user will actually accept or reject the system". Here lies the basic objective of this study which is to examine WhatsApp platform use for voter mobilization and monitoring the 2019 presidential election.

In another development, it will be pertinent to acknowledge the fact that the attitude of the user is prone to being influenced by two other beliefs. These beliefs according to Ha, Yoon, and Choi (2007); López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, & Bouwman, (2008); Bouwman, López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, Van Hattum, (2012), are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The import of this postulation to the current study is that the acceptance of WhatsApp use for voter mobilization and monitoring election processes is dependent on the individual beliefs and perception of usefulness of WhatsApp platform and their perceived ease of use which encouraged them to accept or reject the platform.

This study was basically on the perceived ability of the platform to satisfy the desired purpose for its adoption in voters' mobilization and election monitoring process by political parties and their candidate(s). If from the look of what had happened in the 2019 presidential elections that the parties did not get the gratifications sought in the use of WhatsApp for voters' mobilization and

election monitoring process, it will not be adopted for the same purpose in the next election. The reason for this is that there is no perceived usefulness of WhatsApp social media platform for voters' mobilization and election monitoring as expected by political parties. This theory was considered relevant to the study in respect to its ability to draw attention to the perceived ease of usefulness of the WhatsApp social media platform in voters' mobilization and election monitoring processes in the country.

Social Media Engagement theory
This theory came into existence through Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) model of co-creation in the service sector. It centers on the ability of the social media users to create the contents that their followers consume and react to. According to Di Gangi & Wasko (2016), the model adapts the social media power to create cost-conscious news information that permeates the society through links and shared connectivity. The basic proposition of this theory is that through social media, users modify, share, and re-use contents, irrespective of the creators' original meaning or purpose (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). Drawing from the above scholarly view, the more the users in different WhatsApp platforms create, update and re-use contents, they open up different electoral frauds taking place against their political parties while at the same time countering any report that were published against their party and candidate(s).

Election Monitoring
Election monitoring is the observation of an election by one or more independent parties to assess its quality and usually focuses on judging whether the election meets international standards or not. The observation may focus on electoral administration, the participation of political parties, candidates and interest groups. Elections can be monitored by international observers (such as the European Commission or the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), local observers, and as well all the parties in the contest so as to get first-hand information in the election where possible (Goldzweig, Lupion and Meyer-Resende, 2019). The essence of the participation of political actors and parties in election monitoring is to ensure that they were not compromised and as well get facts that can be used for post-election litigations (Bartlett, Krasodomski-Jones, Daniel, Fisher, and Jesperson, (2015). Election observers are mostly seen by the citizens of a country where they operate as impartial and that such observation is generally seen to boost transparency and enhance the accountability of election officers (Binder 2009; Bargiacchi *et al.* 2011).

Election monitoring has several advantages regarding the credibility of the process. It can build confidence in the minds of the people, prevent conflicts and violence, and legitimize elections (Anglin 1998) cited in Walton, (2012). Given the important of election monitoring in developing countries, international election observers are now present at more than four out of every five elections in the developing countries of the world including Nigeria (Hyde 2010). Most studies on election-related violence have identified a range of causes and advocate a range of interventions to address these causes (Schimpp & McKernan 2001; Sisk 2008; Haider 2011, Global Commission 2012). Causes of election-related violence as found in (Schimpp & McKernan 2001; Sisk 2008) include structural conditions, electoral system choice, the competence of electoral administration and the nature and functioning of the security sector. This scholarly position points more to the security networks and the electoral umpire in a particular country and their disposition to play by the rules.

Against these fraud encouraging challenges, all political parties have set their eye squarely on the ball by establishing social media groups as their situation room from where they monitor all that happens in and around INEC office. These WhatsApp groups however contain participants from all wards and polling units who report raw data of situation on ground. As a result, the literature generally suggests that electoral support interventions should address the whole electoral cycle and allow for specifically designed response measures to prevent, mitigate and/or resolve election-related violence (Haider 2011). Among the measures advocated for include reviewing the legal framework, building the capacity of election administration bodies, improving planning and budgeting, civic and voter education, strengthening electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, violence monitoring, non-violence training and improving evaluation (Schimpp & McKernan 2001; Haider 2011, Global Commission 2012).

Most studies acknowledge that fundamental transformation of the electoral systems can take time. In their view, Global Commission (2012) state that in many contexts long-term electoral security requires addressing rule of law issues and infusing the institutions of democracy with the ethos of democracy. The argument here is that effective election monitoring can provide a better understanding of what happened and as well reduce election violence and encourage legitimacy. This was supported by Atwood, (2011) cited in Walton, (2012) who argues that the primary goal of monitoring election is to assess elections and, perhaps, deter particularly egregious abuses noting that for some polls this might reduce the risks of violence.

Measuring the impact of election observation is complicated by the fact that these interventions are often poorly implemented and therefore ineffective. The Global Commission (2012) argues that international donors and democratic governments have not used election observation to its fullest effect. In particular, they have not fully taken advantage of pre-election observation reports to do more to prevent egregiously flawed elections and the political use of violence during elections. Nor have donors and democratic

governments done enough to use observer reports after elections to strengthen political processes of electoral integrity and democratic change throughout the electoral cycle in advance of the next election. This is really the major problem facing the Nigerian electoral system. Finally, donors and governments have not done enough to build up domestic electoral observation capacity (Global Commission 2012). This is why all political parties strategize and position themselves well starting from the pre-election activities, on the election activities to the post-election activities. The major target here is to gather enough fact for tribunal if the international observers had failed to do the needful.

Hyde and Kelley (2011) argue that observer missions often arrive late or are understaffed and that as a result, attention tends to be directed solely on the election day when most of the unlawful and irregularities must have been executed. Some governments around the world have learnt to shift their fraudulent activities and improper behavior to the pre-and post-election days since the observation handbook does not cover those days (Beaulieu & Hyde 2009). This was supported by Darnolf's (2011) claims that observation handbook failed to place priorities on non-election day activities in most countries of the world. Kelley (2010) argues that election observers may also be biased in certain circumstances. The author finds that there are multiple observer missions in most cases where external monitors observe elections, and that in roughly a third of the cases, monitoring missions disagreed with one another about their overall assessments (Kelley (2010, p. 162). This is the basic fact that renders international observation more or less useless.

However, these criticisms are disputed in the literature and have been challenged specifically by Stremlau and Carroll (2011) where they argue that serious election observation increasingly begins many months before voting and counting, and often continues after the elections to monitor the resolution of election disputes. They also state that observers are keenly aware of the dangers of renewed conflict or instability after elections and must weigh those concerns while conducting their missions. Still, credible observation organizations know that their most important asset is their record of impartiality (Stremlau & Carroll 2011). The Global Commission's (2012, p. 55) report also argues that "as early as 2005, the most experienced observer missions were much longer than they were in the early 1990s. This means that the strength of this mission is expected to increase by the day.

A recent study by Hyde and Marinov (2012) shows that post-election protests are more likely to last longer and gather more supporters following negative reports from international and party observers based on available data from their situation rooms. This implies that election monitoring make protest more likely in the short term, but increase incentives to hold democratic elections in the long term. One could infer from these findings that election monitoring may increase the risk of violence in the short term, while decreasing it in the long term. This assumption is confirmed by a recent study by Daxecker (2012) who examined post-election conflict events for African elections between 1997 and 2009. This study found that the presence of election fraud and international observers increases the likelihood of post-election violence. The study confirms the hypothesis that when elections are manipulated to deny citizens an opportunity for peaceful contestation and international and party monitors publicize such manipulation, violent interactions between incumbents, opposition parties, and citizens can ensue (Daxecker 2012).

From all indications, international observers reduce the potential for election-day violence, but creates incentives for political actors to engage in violent manipulation in parts of the electoral process receiving less international attention. This is the major reason why parties through WhatsApp social media platforms set their eye on the electoral process video, record and share unlawful activities suspected to be against their interest in the process. In another development, international election monitors most times get scared that reporting their findings from election assessments may encourage violence (Kelley 2012). This view is very common in contexts where pre-election violence has been widespread such as the 2019 general election in Nigeria where clips of videos showing where some political actors were thumb-printing ballot papers days before the election. The Global Commission (2012) report states that international actors rarely adopt punitive measures against countries whose elections fall below international standards partly due to fear of stoking instability. This very situation left the parties with nothing other than to devise a means of effective election monitoring which in this case is the use of WhatsApp situation room.

WhatsApp and election monitoring: A Brief SWOT analysis
In the present-day world community, WhatsApp is one of the most popular communication applications in many developing countries such as Brazil, India, Mexico and Nigeria where many people use it as an interface to the web (Melo, Messias, Resende, Garimella, Almeida, Benevenuto, 2019). WhatsApp is also being massively used for election campaigns and mobilization of supporters for a candidate in an election. For instance, it was used in America in 2016 by both Trump and Clinton; it was also used in 2018 Brazilian general election process to elect a new president, deputies, and governors. Resende *et al.* (2019) studied the use of WhatsApp during election campaign but found that WhatsApp was one of the sources of misinformation and has high potential to spread misleading information. Actually, this is the basic argument of the critics of WhatsApp use in election monitoring who capitalized on the tendency of the medium to encourage the spread of misleading information as its major flaw (Josemar, Gabriel, Evandro, Wagner, Humberto, Virgilio, 2018). Significantly, although that WhatsApp has been tagged a potential source of misinformation, it cannot be taken for granted that it encourages free flow of information. This view was captured more succinctly

in Nic, (2019) who argues that the platform was used to mislead voters in increasingly sophisticated ways but also shows that WhatsApp strengthened democracy in other areas. This implies that the use of the platform is not entirely disadvantageous to democracy.

However, it could be recalled that through WhatsApp, every internet enable phone is a reporter that can either stir people into action or drop a message that can keep the people awake to impending dangers. On the other hand, because WhatsApp has a strong penetration, particularly in political campaigns, political parties and politicians utilize it in several ways either separately or combined: to spread legitimate information about party activities and issues; to create a seemingly 'direct link' between politicians and voters; to shape political dialogues; to organize and mobilize people around a common issue; to spread misinformation or defamatory information; as a part of professional political marketing strategies (Open Media Network, 2019). From the scholarly postulations above, it could be seen that WhatsApp played a big role in the Nigerian election and not all of it was bad (Nic, 2019).

According to experts on digital marketing cited in Josemar, Gabriel, Evandro, Wagner, Humberto, Virgilio, (2018) information delivered through WhatsApp has higher influence than other platforms because it has more penetration and appears to come from known but not all reliable sources. WhatsApp is unlike having Facebook where people have 5,000 friends many of whom they don't know in person. WhatsApp messages come as personal single messages from specific contacts or enter into a group of friends in a group WhatsApp room with the phone numbers of all participants showing on their respective icon. Another advantage of the medium is its ability to share audio, video and images from any end to another. This adds to the height of acceptance of its contents and utilization among the people for different purposes. The import of this analysis is that WhatsApp medium can serve the purpose of election monitoring by instigating the urgent need of any political party to take a precautionary action before it is too late through its ability to transmit voices, images and sounds to their receivers whose action to save the situation on ground is needed. If fake news can come up through WhatsApp, it will serve as a wakeup call should anything like that happens or is about to happen. Again, pre-reporting of an impending evil can deter the perpetrator from accomplishing the idea.

CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE
While maintaining social interaction among party faithful, WhatsApp platform provides a critical and helpful avenue for finding, creating and disseminating relevant information that the mainstream media may not be disposed to reveal. Relating this view to the current study, while engaging in social media use for monitoring 2019 presidential and national assembly election, parties were able to provide their faithful with relevant information that can help them stay well in the contest.

In Nigeria, and just like most other parts of the world, social media is playing vital role in the mobilization of people to participate actively in political events (Nic, 2019). For instance, turnout of events such as the occupy Nigeria movement that challenged the government over the hike in prices of petroleum products, and the recently conducted 2017 gubernatorial elections in some states point to the important role social media real-time reporting of the events can play in ensuring that the process turns out to be credible. The implication of all these, show that the electorate have abandoned traditional news channels and adopted social media to express themselves real-time as the news break, thus making it difficult for those bent on manipulating the electoral process or spinning events to favor particular parties or candidates.

Olabamiji (2014) explored the use of media in political communication in Nigeria's 4th Republic and revealed that though the media have enhanced political awareness and interaction, there are cases where it has been used to intimidate opponent and trigger conflicts. However, it is imperative to state that the popularity shared in social media does not necessarily translate into electoral victory in an election (Gomez, 2014).

Empirical literature
Vonderschmitt, Kaitlin, (2012) concluded that advance in technology which led to the evolution of the social media has created a more opportunity for citizens to participate in politics and as well learn more about each candidate and have easier access to the candidates themselves using their social media handles. This study confirmed the use of the social media in mobilization of support for electioneering purposes and its power to link the electorate to the candidates directly. The study did not look at the power of the social media in monitoring electoral processes which is the hallmark of the current study. Having confirmed the power of social media in linking the electorates and the candidates, it is necessary to also investigate if the social media can be an effective way of monitoring election as a means of protecting and promoting democracy in developing countries of the world.

In another study, Ayo, Oluranti, Duruji, and Omoregbe (2014) investigated the impact of political information diffusion among the Nigerian electorates and the extent of electorate's interactions in the course of the elections using social media platforms particularly Nairaland in 2014 Osun state gubernatorial election. Using qualitative approach in data gathering and analysis, findings revealed that the social media can effectively support free, fair and transparent elections in Nigeria. the researchers concluded that the use of various social media channels in not only transmitting real-time information but also in removing censorship by gatekeepers went a long way to prove to the Osun state electorate the transparency of the election result in the midst of the highly competitive tension-

soaked election. In the researcher's findings, the use of social media was able to provide the desired effect of making the people see what they wouldn't have seen if the mainstream media were left to do the job alone. It went a long way to support the claim that the social media is intrusive and penetrating with a high level of message acceptability because of its ability to transfer both audio-visual contents. This study differs from the current one in focusing on Nairaland and interactions by the electorates. It did not look at Nairaland as an agent of election monitoring for credibility and fairness.

In a related study, Bartlett, Krasodomski-Jones, Daniel, Fisher, and Jesperson, (2015) investigated the potential of social media for election monitoring and communication using the 2015 Nigerian elections as a case study. The study is set to develop an understanding of the effectiveness of social media use for communication and monitoring during the 2015 general election in Nigeria. The study which lasted from 18th March to 22nd examined 13.6 million tweets posted by 1.38 million unique users associated with the Nigerian Presidential and State elections held in 2015. Findings revealed that that Twitter was ten times more active over the election period than at 'normal' times. The study also found that with a significant volume of rumours being spread on Twitter, there were relatively few cases of ethnic or racial slurs being used. This implies that social media have the ability to spread information concerning elections in both real and fake dimensions. This study is related to the current one but differs in the method of data collection which in the case of the previous one depends on the posts from twitter.

In another study, Bagić, and Podobnik (2018) investigates how and why participants create contents at political social networking websites. The study adopted the content analysis method in investigating posts and comments published on Facebook during the 2015 general election campaign in Croatia. The study shows the consequences of the sudden transition from reliance on traditional to reliance social media sources for political campaigns. It also revealed the strength of social media in activating and shaping public opinion during the general election campaign. Building on empirical dataset from Croatia, the researchers found that different political parties implement different election campaign strategies on social media to influence citizens who, consequently, respond differently to each of them. The results indicate that political messages with positive emotions evocate positive response from citizens and verse versa. This study was basically on the use of social media in mobilizing the electorate in order to gain their support during election. This means that the current study is broader than the previous one having the intention to look at the influence of social media in monitoring elections in Nigeria.

In a review of the use of social media 2012 and 2016 presidential election, Garrett (2019) adopted a three-wave panel survey in examining representative sample of Americans during the elections in USA. The target of the study is to assess whether use of social media for political information promoted endorsement of falsehoods about major party candidates or important campaign issues. Fixed effects regression helps ensure that observed effects are not due to individual differences. The results demonstrate that social media can alter citizens' willingness to endorse falsehoods during an election, but the effects are often small. This study justifies the need for the social media use in monitoring and mobilizing electorate during election. The study is related to the current one given that the two are centered on the use of social media but differ in focus and area of study.

Drawing from the objectives and the findings of the above reviewed studies, there exist a gap in literature because none of the studies had examined the use of social media platforms in monitoring elections in any country talk more of its effectiveness in serving in that capacity. In this regard, it is the believe of the researchers in this study that investigating the use of social media in monitoring election as a means of protecting and promoting democracy is paramount in the political communication and accountability in government.

METHOD OF STUDY

This study adopted the survey research method and sampled the participants using the purposive sampling techniques. The study covered members of selected WhatsApp groups belonging to both Atiku and Buhari formed and used for the sake of voter mobilization and election monitoring in 2019. The study examined members of Vitaldi Anambra, Atiku/Obi 2019 and Atikulated platforms on the side of the PDP and GMB support group Anambra branch, Anambra Youths4Buhari, and APGA4GMB 2019 platforms were selected to cover the APC political party. The essence of selecting only these two political parties was that they were the only political parties that have grassroots' presence in Anambra state with the might to establish and sustain their supports to the grass root. Each of these groups is full to capacity during the period under study containing a total of 257 participants making a total of 1542 participants in all. From this population, the researchers sampled a total of 318 respondents using Rakesh 2013 sample determination formular. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire which was disseminated through the participants E-mail address for responses. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers and tested for reliability using the Test-retest method which produced a correlation coefficient value of .75 showing that the instrument is reliable.

DATA PRESENTATION

Below is the data obtained from the field survey on the 318 members of the select WhatsApp groups of the two leading political parties in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

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Table 1: Does the use of WhatsApp in monitoring the 2019 presidential election helpful in exposing irregularities?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	213	67
No	67	21
Can't say	38	12
Total	318	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2019

The table above revealed that the WhatsApp medium has been empirically confirmed very helpful in monitoring elections in Nigeria. This implies that future elections will experience more WhatsApp groups for the same purpose.

Table 2: Rating the effectiveness of WhatsApp platform use in mobilizing supports for political parties and their candidates in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Very effectively in mobilizing supports and monitoring election	99	31
Effectively in mobilizing supports and monitoring election	89	28
Rather effectively in mobilizing supports and monitoring election	80	25
Not effectively in mobilizing supports and monitoring election	28	9
Very Less effectively in mobilizing supports and monitoring election	23	7
Total	318	100

Source: researchers' online survey, 2019

The data from the above table demonstrated that WhatsApp platform is a viable medium for the mobilizing supports for both parties and candidates in an election. From the information, the participant in the study considered WhatsApp use as an effective medium for securing supports. This implies that WhatsApp provides the desired effect of making the electorate knew their candidates and what they stand for in an election.

Table 3: 5-point Likert scale table

Variables	SA	A	UN	DA	SD	Total	X	Rmks
WhatsApp use in monitoring the 2019 presidential election was helpful to political parties	100 500	87 348	78 234	20 40	33 33	1,155	3.6	Accepted
WhatsApp helps the citizens to reach out to their representatives	80 400	56 224	64 192	56 112	62 62	990	3.1	Accepted
WhatsApp platform encourage political mobilization of the electorate	96 480	102 408	46 138	53 106	21 21	1,153	3.6	Accepted
WhatsApp also helps in spreading fake and misinformation about the election and its activities	90 450	70 280	86 258	52 104	20 20	1,112	3.4	Accepted
The fact the WhatsApp encourage fake and misinformation rules it out as a good mobilization and monitoring platform in the election	35 175	67 268	78 234	49 98	89 89	864	2.7	Rejected
WhatsApp use by political parties increased political consciousness of the electorate in the election	100 500	88 352	44 132	61 122	25 25	1,131	3.5	Accepted

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2019

From the 5-point Likert table, the researchers have examined the respondent's responses using the strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree in measuring the research objectives. In the table, one of the six hypothetical statements designed by the researchers to ascertain whether WhatsApp use had encouraged voter consciousness, mobilization and monitoring of the 2019 presidential election was rejected. This implies that WhatsApp medium is capable of instilling political consciousness in the citizens, mobilizing them to support candidates and as well encouraged proper monitoring of the election. The table also revealed that WhatsApp can encourage the spread of fake and misinformation on the electoral process but that reason was not considered destructive to the medium that it can be ruled out as a vibrant one in both mobilization and monitoring.

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DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

On the first research question designed to ascertain whether the use of WhatsApp in monitoring the 2019 presidential election exposed irregularities in the election, the response from the participants revealed that majority opinion admitted that WhatsApp exposed irregularities in the election. By exposing irregularities, the medium had been found to encourage transparency in the Nigerian electoral process and democratic sustenance. This finding agrees with Ayo, *et al* (2014) who found that social media can effectively encourage free, fair and transparent elections in Nigeria. This finding also confirms that of Bartlett *et al*, (2015) which revealed that the power of WhatsApp in sharing audio visual information makes it very vibrant in monitoring the activities of desperate politicians. In so doing, the platform becomes important in the protection of the country's democracy (Hitchen, Hassan, Jonathan and Nic, 2019). In another development, this finding had confirmed that the WhatsApp platforms are very helpful to both the political parties and the entire Nigerians given that it has made the people to see beyond the mainstream media can expose to them about the election. This justifies the perceived usefulness of the platform in electioneering purposes in Nigeria. Given the confirmed usefulness, this finding lends more credence to the positions of the technological acceptance theory which according its proponents Chuttur (2009); Chen, Li and Li, 2011; Suleman, *et al,* 2019) holds that the reasons why society or individuals accept a particular technological innovation and development because of its perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitude towards the technology.

Considering the second research question investigating if the use of WhatsApp increased political consciousness of the electorate in the election, empirical data from field study confirmed that the use of WhatsApp had contributed to wider spread of political party's ideologies and candidates and at the same exposed the performance of political office holders who seek reelection. The ability of WhatsApp medium to reawaken the political consciousness of the citizens in the 2019 presidential election was largely due to its cheap cost, ability to dispatch messages of unlimited word counts, its immediacy and the capacity to disseminate audio-visual contents with many friends simultaneously (Bouhnik and Deshen, 2014; Belli, 2018).

The rate at which citizens of Nigeria access smart phones makes WhatsApp more popular among the citizens and in that same manner, the most vibrant means of spreading political information through getting frequently exposed to political messages and rhetoric (Belli, 2018; Digital 2019). On the other hand, the above finding disagrees with the previous findings among previous social media scholars (Resende *et al.* 2019; Josemar, *et al,* 2018) where it had been established that WhatsApp is a major source of misinformation and fake news dissemination during electioneering campaigns in developing countries of the world. The disagreement was in tandem with Hitchen, *et al* (2019) where it was noted that although studies (BBC News, 2018) have shown that WhatsApp is a source of fake news spread, it is still a vibrant tool for accountability, monitoring and improving the transparency of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Finally, this finding corroborates the position of the social media engagement theory which according to Di Gangi & Wasko (2016) maintains that by modification, creating and recreating, sharing, using and re-using contents in social media offers the people a viable opportunity to gain consciousness especially on the issues being frequently shared. This implies that the constant creation ns sharing of political messages on social media have encouraged the observed political consciousness that characterized the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

On the third research question set to ascertain the respondents' rating of effectiveness of WhatsApp use in mobilizing voters and monitoring the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria, it was found that the medium was rated to be eminently effective in both mobilization and monitoring the election (see table 3 for more). Significantly, this finding was in tandem with the provision of the social media engagement theory which looks at the platform from the point of view of what it can achieve for the people when put into use in the electioneering process. According the proponents of the theory, by using different WhatsApp platforms in creating, updating and sharing contents, political parties and their agents open up different electoral frauds taking place in their various locations against their political parties while at the same time countering reports that can ruin the chances of their success in the process.

However, some scholars (Yau, 2019; Garrett; 2019) have accused WhatsApp use of heating the polity through spreading fake and unverified contents. On the contrary, this study agrees with (John, 2019) who argue that that what some scholars called fake news dissemination are pre-active measures that contributes immensely in the proper monitoring of the election because it alerts the would-be victims and create an atmosphere of fear in the mind of the intended perpetrator. WhatsApp therefore, permeates the population, reveal what previous public offices had done and put them into check. It could be observed that the WhatsApp do not only serve as a platform for voter mobilization and election monitoring but all post-election activities that span throughout the stay of the elected officials in office.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the study concluded that WhatsApp platform created solid enabling environment for the mobilization of voters for political parties and monitoring of the elections. The research found that WhatsApp use in mobilizing and monitoring of the 2019 presidential election was rated to be effective among the respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the empirical data gathered from the field study, the researchers recommended as that:
1. Political parties should as a matter of necessity create and maintain their WhatsApp platforms earlier enough to monitor their candidates and candidates of the opposition parties in order to gain insight into what they do in their respective positions before the next election.
2. That INEC should as well make their situation room transparent through creating their own WhatsApp groups that will contain all parties' agents.
3. That citizens should aver themselves the opportunity to be on WhatsApp as that makes them know the happenings around them politically.

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