



Ethics of Social Media Influence in Voting Decision of Youths in the September 2024 Anambra Local Government Election

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Abstract

This study examines the role of social media in the *2024 Anambra State local elections*, highlighting its importance in engaging voters and influencing campaign dynamics. Social media enhances youth participation, campaigning, and support mobilization, but it also raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding misinformation and propaganda spread by digital generative multimedia tools (DGMTs). These tools can manipulate voter perceptions and undermine electoral integrity, presenting a dual challenge: fostering democratic engagement while risking ethical breaches. Guided by the Technology Determinism Theory (TDT), the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT), and Mediation Theory, a survey of 400 respondents among over 2.76 million voters used Likert-scale questionnaires and descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that social media positively impacts youth involvement and candidate choice, but also exacerbates misinformation, especially through DGMTs. This ethical dilemma is crucial for Nigeria's democracy, as social media's influence in the election raises concerns about disinformation, hate speech, and manipulation. The research offers an empirical baseline for understanding these dynamics in the context of *Anambra's local government elections*. Recommendations include prioritizing digital literacy campaigns and establishing self-regulatory ethical guidelines for political actors and youths to promote responsible platform use. The study fills a gap in understanding the specific ethical implications and influence patterns among Nigerian youths, emphasizing the need to safeguard electoral integrity amid the rapid proliferation of emerging digital tools.

Keywords: social media influence, voting decision, Local Government Election, Anambra State, DGMTT

INTRODUCTION

On 28th September 2024, Anambra State held its local government election for the positions of local government chairmen and councillors (Attah, 2024). While inaugurating the Anambra State Independent National Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) on 6th August 2024, the Anambra State Governor, Professor Charles Chukwuma Soludo, revealed that the Local Government election was for twenty-one (21) Chairmen and three hundred and twenty-six (326) political wards in the state (Chikindi, 2024). Prior to election day, the Chief Electoral Officer and Chairman of ANSIEC, Genevieve Osakwe, stated in a press briefing at the Commission's Headquarters in Awka, that the local government election was open to all registered political parties in Nigeria.

As is almost always the case around the world, election periods are usually marked by a lot of political and marketing communications activity (Nwammuo & Eneome, 2022). During these times, political parties and their candidates frequently fight for men's minds, which Bans and Ross (1968, p.115) called a "war," as Dunu (2018) said. As part of the institutional rituals for public support, political parties and their candidates usually run electioneering campaigns against each other. Political parties and/or candidates running for office frequently choose from a number of different ways to talk to people, depending on the situation or the resources they have (Eneome & Emechebe, 2023). They can also try to connect with certain topics where they have claims or records, trying to win based on their beliefs and values. They can also try to get a good image by associating with, dressing like, or being like someone else instead of by policy. These considerations elucidate the necessity of complete communication programs in political campaigns, alongside methods and tactics that are appropriate in marketing contexts (Eneome & Emechebe, 2023).

The connection between political communication techniques and election campaigns shows how important the media is in politics. McQuail (2010), as referenced in Sukkar (2020), asserts that the media serve as the conduit via which the state and influential interests communicate with the populace, in addition to providing venues for the perspectives of political parties (and their candidates) and various interest groups. Eady et al. (2019) support this by saying that the media can change people's minds about certain problems and that there is also proof that people can learn about issues and policy positions, especially those who don't know much or care about them. From this, one might conclude that media serve as effective conduits for mass mobilisation and civic or political participation during electoral campaigns. Additionally, the media serve as conduits via which voters and electorates are inundated with a multitude of communications regarding political candidates and electoral procedures. According to Campante et al. (2017), the media's role in election campaigns is similar to the process of defining an agenda and learning effects. This can change people's minds or, more likely, make them see things in a way that supports one side or the other. In light of this, it is now common knowledge that one of the most popular, although maybe not the most traditional, ways to talk about politics is through modern internet-based media, especially social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and

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YouTube. Atkin et al. (2022) say that social networking sites let people make and share user-generated material. Users can make a profile and publish anything they wish about themselves, like images, videos, and links to other websites. Social media have a unique socio-political role because they let people send and receive messages quickly. This can change how voters talk about issues and how they vote (Pew Research Centre, 2019). According to Boxell et al. (2018), social media has long been a way for politicians to reach their base. Recently, they have started to work harder to label posts as misleading and possibly wrong to stop the spread of false information that is already common on the platform.

So, as it is known that they always copy US and British election campaign techniques, the September 28th, 2024 local government election campaign has used social media a lot to reach out to voters and get their support. The number of votes cast at the polls shows how much political support the voters have for the politicians they like. The number of people who vote in an election depends on how well and quickly political candidates have reached out to the people who will vote. Consequently, it is essential to assess the ethical impact of social media on the voting choices of youngsters in the 2024 Anambra State Local Government election.

The Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) created the phrase "the medium is the message" in his book "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man" (Echner, 2016). He argued that the media itself shapes and controls the scale and form of human relationship and action. McLuhan (1964) elucidated that the content of each media is perpetually another medium; hence, speech is the content of writing, writing embodies the content of print, and print itself represents the content of the telegraph (Echner, 2016). So, people depend on the content, which is clear, to give them useful information. The medium alters the message in a way that has a big effect on how it is understood. Social media is an excellent example of what "the medium is the message" means in today's world. Messages on social media are quick and to the point. Social media provides unparalleled prospects for political engagement and mobilisation among young; but, its rapid evolution, especially with the emergence of advanced digital generative multimedia tools (DGMTs), presents considerable ethical dilemmas. The uncritical consumption and rapid dissemination of information, including propaganda and misinformation, generated and amplified through these tools, can profoundly manipulate voter perceptions and decision-making, thereby undermine the integrity of the electoral process and potentially lead to less informed or even biased choices among young voters. This research aims to examine the ethical ramifications of this dynamic within the framework of the Anambra 2024 Local Government election. It remains an empirical inquiry about how social media messages, especially those potentially enhanced by DGMTs, ethically mobilise support for candidates and their parties. This study aims to address a gap in information, particularly regarding the ethical dimension.

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The general objective of this study is to evaluate the ethics of social media influence on the voting decision of youths in the September 2024 Anambra Local Government election. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To ascertain how social media refines and adds premium to electioneering campaigns, considering ethical considerations in content creation and dissemination.
2. To examine the use of social media as ethically responsible and socially-impactful channels for enlistment of political support and mobilisation.
3. To explore the relationship between ethical social media use and voters' turnout during election day.

METHODS

This study used the survey research method, and the area it looked at was Anambra State. The target population for this study comprises 2,761,467 registered voters in Anambra State (Ajayi, 2022; INEC, 2022; Nzeagwu, 2022). This is the number of people who can vote in Anambra State as of August 2022. The study used Taro Yamane's formula to find a sample size of 400 voters, as shown: $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$.

The sample size was spread out evenly across the three senatorial districts in the state: Anambra North, Anambra Central, and Anambra South. But since $400 \div 3 = 133.33$, one senatorial zone will have one (1) respondent more than the other two. This is because fractions don't apply to people. This method was chosen because it was hard or impossible to get the number of registered voters in each local government area in the state, which would have helped with the pro-rata distribution of the sample size. A multi-stage sampling method was used to choose the sample size for this study. This is because neither the probability nor the non-probability methods can give the exact sample size needed for this study on their own. The researcher first divided the sample size into groups based on their need for accuracy and detail. These groups were students, civil servants, traders, and artisans. After that, the research found groups where each of these groups could be found (for example, the building materials market in Onitsha for traders; the Jerome Udorji Secretariat complex in Awka for civil servants; Madonna University in Okija for students; and so on). After finding these groups, the research chose one from each senatorial zone, which made the sample size more systematic. The questionnaire was the tool used to do the research for this study. Descriptive statistical tools were used to show the results of this survey. The data were displayed in straightforward frequency distribution tables and subsequently analysed.

We distributed a total of 400 Likert scale questionnaires by hand to civil servants in Awka (for Anambra Central), undergraduate students at Madonna University, Okija (for Anambra South), and traders and artisans at the Building Material Market, Fegge/Onitsha (for Anambra North). A total of 376 questionnaires, or 94%, were returned. 24 questionnaires, or 6%, were not returned. The 376 questionnaires that were returned were used to analyse the results that came after.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Biographic Data of Respondents

S/N Biographic Characteristics	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1. Sex	Male	203	54%
	Female	173	46%
	Total	376	100%
2. Age	18 yrs – 25 yrs	86	23%
	26 yrs – 30 yrs	100	27%
	31 yrs – 35 yrs	98	26%
	36 yrs – 40 yrs	92	24%
	Total	376	100%
3. Marital Status	Married	182	48%
	Single	183	49%
	Separated	8	2%
	Widow/widower	3	1%
	Total	376	100%
4. Occupation	Civil servants	128	34%
	Students	130	35%
	Artisan/Trader	118	31%
	Total	376	100%
5. Academic Qualification	SSCE	69	18%
	NCE	78	21%
	HND/First Degree	168	45%
	Second Degree	51	14%
	Ph.D	10	3%
	Total	376	100%

Data in the table above revealed that 67% of the respondents (250) strongly agreed to the statement while 31% of the respondents (118) merely agreed. This implies that electioneering campaigns are *sine qua non* for political office seekers. The subsequent table revealed the reasons behind this postulation.

Table 2: Electioneering campaigns afford political office seekers the opportunity to interact with voters/electorates

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	68	60
Students	70	60
Artisans/Traders	68	50
Total	216	170

Source: Field survey, 2025

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The primary reason behind electioneering campaign, as revealed by the data in Table 3 above, is to interact and engage with the electorates with a view to establishing grounds for a social contract with them. This means that there must be channels through which electioneering campaigns must be consummated.

Table 2: Social Media have widened the scope of the available channels of communication for electioneering campaigns

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	90	38
Students	88	42
Artisans/Traders	80	20
Total	258	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

In the table above, the results indicate that social media have provided multiple options for channels of political communication during electioneering campaigns. The implication is that the multi-media approach provided by social media will deepen democratic participation.

Table 3 There has been an increased use of Social media for electioneering campaign in recent times

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	42	38
Students	56	48
Artisans/Traders	50	30
Total	148	116

Source: Field survey, 2025

The implication of the data in the table above is that political office seekers have a better understanding of the yearnings and aspirations of the electorates, since social media offered them the opportunity to interact with the electors on a one-on-one basis.

Table 4 Candidates of political parties for the September 28th 2024 local government election in Anambra state utilised social media platforms for their electioneering campaign

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	86	42
Students	72	58
Artisans/Traders	50	50
Total	208	150

Source: Field survey, 2025

In the table above, the data revealed that 55% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement while 39% merely agreed. The implication of the data in the table is that the respondents keenly observed the electioneering campaign of the 2024 local government election.

Table 5 Social media are veritable channels for enlistment of political support and mobilisation

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	46	34
Students	52	48
Artisans/Traders	43	46
Total	146	128

Source: Field survey, 2025

In the table above, the data revealed that 39% of the respondents (146) strongly agreed with the statement, while 34% (128) merely agreed. A total of 54 respondents (14%) and 48 respondents (13%) strongly disagreed and disagreed, respectively. The data in Table 7 above implies that political office seekers, as a matter of necessity, utilise social media to reach out to the electorates.

Table 6 Social Media platforms provide candidates for elective posts veritable opportunities for active and productive engagement with voters for large voters' turn-out

Categories of Respondents	Options	Total
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed
Civil Servants	40	48
Students	52	38
Artisans/Traders	40	40
Total	132	126

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data in Table 8 above showed how the people who answered the questions felt about social media and how active voters were during election campaigns. The above data suggests that social media serve as an effective platform for political communication, facilitating a substantial voter turnout.

Our initial finding indicated a substantial correlation between the utilisation of social media by political aspirants and the procurement of political support and mobilisation. According to our table, 146 people (39%) strongly agreed with this statement, and 128 people (34%) just agreed. This discovery aligns with the Technology Determinism Theory, the Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT), and the Mediation Theory. The premise of these theories that the medium constitutes the message effectively aligns with the utilisation of social media by political aspirants to garner political support and mobilisation, particularly when considering the ethical dimensions introduced by advanced digital tools as described by DGMTT. The proactive use of DGMTs, such as AI-generated content or highly targeted messaging, can enhance the persuasiveness and reach of campaigns, thereby increasing mobilisation, but also raises questions about transparency and authenticity.

Our second finding showed that social media improves and adds value to political campaigns when candidates running for office use it to interact with voters in meaningful and productive ways. This finding goes along with what Yauqub and Vaidya (2017) found in a study titled: "Analysis of

Political Discourse in Twitter in the Context of the 2016 US Presidential Election". The study showed that Twitter was a good place for candidates and voters to talk to each other and share new ideas and thoughts. Additionally, our second finding corresponds with the results of Huu, Dat, and Tran (2021) in their study examining the community of Trump supporters on Twitter during the 2020 US presidential election. The study found that Twitter has been and will continue to be a place for people to get involved in politics, talk about politics, and share their political views. Additionally, our second finding supports the results of the study conducted by Kadijat et al. (2020), titled "Twitter Discourse on the Pre-Presidential Election Campaign in Nigeria." The study revealed that utilising Twitter for political campaigning resulted in a high level of engagement. These engagements, when conducted ethically, can foster informed participation and democratic discourse. However, the potential for DGMTs to create highly persuasive but potentially misleading content underscores the need for ethical guidelines in these interactions.

The third finding, regarding the provision of opportunities for active and productive engagement for large voter turnout, further reinforces the significant role of social media. The immediacy and interactivity offered by these platforms allow for real-time dialogue and feedback, which can be crucial for mobilising voters. However, the ethical implications of how this engagement is achieved, especially concerning the potential for manipulation or the spread of disinformation, are paramount. The ability to craft emotionally resonant messages, potentially enhanced by DGMTs, requires a strong ethical framework to ensure that increased engagement translates into genuinely informed voting decisions rather than reactions to fabricated narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights social media as a powerful platform for electioneering campaigns, offering a comparative advantage through interactive, conversational communication that fosters immediate feedback and enhances voter turnout. Candidates leveraging social media can achieve more effective campaigns in today's digital age with sophisticated audiences. However, this efficacy is tempered by significant ethical challenges, especially due to the rise of Digital Generative Multimedia Tools (DGMTs), which amplify misinformation and propaganda risks. While social media encourages political participation, the unchecked spread of false information threatens informed decision-making among young voters, underscoring the ethical duty of political actors and electoral authorities to promote transparency, accuracy, and fairness. Future research should explore practical frameworks for regulating DGMT impacts and developing ethical guidelines tailored for emerging digital electoral communication tools.

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