

Social Media and Electoral Education of the Electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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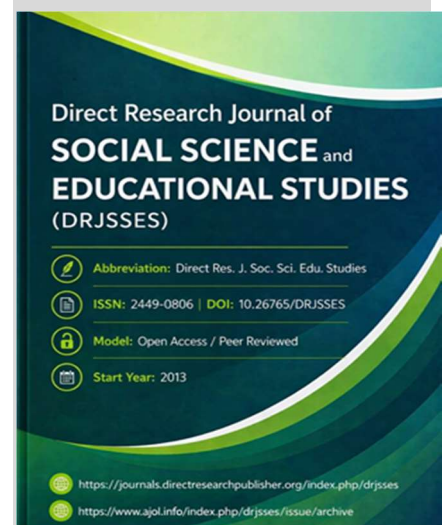
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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media has emerged as a major platform for electoral communication, voter education, and democratic participation by enabling rapid and interactive dissemination of election-related information. Despite its increasing use during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, empirical evidence on its contribution to electoral education at the local government level remains limited. This study examined the influence of social media on the electoral education of the electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. **Objectives:** The study assessed voters' exposure to social media election-related information, examined the role of social media in electoral education, identified the challenges associated with its use, determined the frequency of receiving electoral information through social media, and investigated its influence on voter turnout and political decision-making. **Methodology:** A survey research design was adopted. The study population comprised 70,923 registered voters in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Using Philip Meyer's sample size determination table, 384 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, while 380 valid questionnaires (98.9%) were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages. **Results:** The findings revealed that 71.5% of respondents were highly exposed to social media electoral education messages, with WhatsApp (25.0%) and Facebook (22.4%) being the most frequently used platforms. Social media influenced political decision-making among 73.7% of respondents, while 68.5% rated its influence on electoral awareness as influential or very influential. Network fluctuations (35.5%) and inadequate electricity supply (32.0%) were the major challenges, although 53.0% considered these constraints minimal. The results shows that 68.4% received election-related information often or very often through social media, 73.7% reported alternative information sources, and 80.2% perceived social media as having a high or very high influence on voter turnout. 53.0% indicated that social media positively influenced their political decisions. **Conclusion:** Social media is an effective instrument for electoral education, enhancing voter awareness, informed political decision-making, and democratic participation despite existing infrastructural challenges. **Significance:** The findings provide evidence for strengthening digital voter education strategies by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and civil society organizations, while contributing to scholarship on digital political communication and electoral behaviour in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social media; electoral education; voter education; political communication; voter turnout; democratic participation; Nigeria



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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of the defining features of twenty-first-century political communication, fundamentally transforming how political ideas, campaign messages, and public opinions are created, disseminated, and shared among citizens (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2021). Unlike traditional mass media, social networking platforms provide interactive communication channels that facilitate real-time information exchange, political discussions, civic engagement, and public participation in democratic processes. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have evolved from simple networking tools into influential instruments of political communication, electoral mobilization, public discourse, and democratic participation (Akai *et al.*, 2007; Akai & Uford, 2025). Consequently, social media has reshaped the relationship between political actors and citizens by providing unprecedented opportunities for political engagement while simultaneously presenting challenges associated with misinformation, political polarization, and electoral manipulation. In Africa generally, and Nigeria in particular, the adoption of social media for political communication has expanded considerably since the early 2000s, with the 2023 general election representing a significant milestone in the digitalization of electoral campaigns and civic engagement (Omenugha & Malizu, 2021).

Electoral education constitutes one of the most important pillars of democratic governance because informed citizens are more likely to participate effectively in electoral processes and make rational voting decisions. Electoral education involves the systematic dissemination of knowledge regarding electoral laws, voting procedures, voter rights and responsibilities, political participation, electoral institutions, and democratic values. Traditionally, electoral education has relied on conventional communication channels such as newspapers, radio, television, town hall meetings, and civil society outreach programmes. However, increasing mobile phone penetration, expanding internet connectivity, and widespread adoption of social media have positioned digital platforms as important channels for reaching electorates, particularly among younger populations and communities where conventional civic education programmes have limited coverage (Ojo, 2019; Ekwueme, 2020; Akpan *et al.*, 2024). The interactive nature of social media allows electoral management bodies, political parties, civil society organizations, and citizens to exchange electoral information instantly, thereby promoting voter awareness, civic learning, and democratic participation.

Despite these advantages, the use of social media for electoral education presents considerable challenges. The same platforms that facilitate civic education also provide avenues for the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, fake news, hate speech, and politically

motivated propaganda capable of distorting public understanding of electoral processes and influencing voter behaviour (Adaja, 2020; Suntai & Targema, 2022). Consequently, while social media has increased access to electoral information, concerns remain regarding the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of information circulated during election periods, particularly in emerging democracies where digital literacy remains uneven.

Nigeria's democratic experience demonstrates the increasing integration of digital communication into electoral processes. The 2023 general elections particularly illustrated both the opportunities and limitations of technology-driven electoral administration. Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal to improve electoral transparency, the elections were nevertheless characterized by electoral violence, voter suppression, ethnic politics, technological challenges, misinformation, and relatively low voter turnout. These experiences suggest that technological innovations alone cannot guarantee electoral credibility without effective electoral education capable of equipping citizens with adequate political knowledge, promoting informed participation, and strengthening public confidence in democratic institutions (Ita & Ibanga, 2025).

Recent empirical evidence has increasingly demonstrated the significant role of social media in shaping political participation in Nigeria. Essoh *et al.* (2025) investigated the influence of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok on political participation among eligible voters in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District and found significant positive relationships between the use of each platform and political participation. The study concluded that social media functions not only as a communication medium but also as an important tool for political mobilization, civic education, public discourse, and real-time electoral engagement. Accordingly, the authors recommended greater collaboration among government institutions, political parties, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and civil society organizations to leverage social media for improving voter awareness and strengthening democratic participation.

Similarly, Bassey and Dokubo (2025) examined media framing of political campaigns during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State and reported that approximately 83% of respondents were highly exposed to political campaign messages through the media. Their findings further revealed that media framing significantly influenced citizens' voting behaviour, indicating that the presentation and framing of political information substantially shape electoral perceptions, political learning, and voting decisions. These findings further reinforce the importance of communication platforms in

promoting electoral awareness and influencing democratic participation. Beyond communication and information dissemination, scholars have also identified socio-economic and psychological determinants of electoral behaviour. Umanah (2026), in a qualitative investigation of *Idip Udia* (food politics) in Akwa Ibom State, established that unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy significantly sustain inducement politics and transactional voting behaviour. The study concluded that economically disadvantaged citizens often exchange electoral support for immediate material benefits, thereby undermining issue-based democratic participation. Consequently, the author recommended expanded civic education programmes, community sensitization campaigns, and socio-economic empowerment initiatives to strengthen informed electoral participation.

Complementing these socio-economic explanations, Umeatuegbu (2026) examined Nigerian electoral behaviour from a psychological perspective using the Stockholm Syndrome framework. The study argued that persistent exposure to political manipulation, insecurity, poverty, violence, and repeated unfulfilled political promises encourages adaptive psychological responses that weaken citizens' political agency and reinforce emotional attachment to political elites. The study therefore emphasized the importance of electoral education in empowering citizens to develop critical political consciousness capable of resisting political manipulation and making informed electoral decisions.

Although previous studies have significantly contributed to understanding social media, political participation, electoral behaviour, media framing, and voter psychology in Nigeria, important gaps remain in the literature. Most existing studies have concentrated on political participation, campaign communication, voting behaviour, electoral technology, or national and urban electoral dynamics, with relatively limited empirical attention devoted specifically to the contribution of social media to electoral education at the local government level. Likewise, few studies have examined how social media platforms facilitate voter education within semi-urban communities such as Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical evidence regarding the extent to which social media contributes to improving electoral knowledge, voter awareness, civic responsibility, and informed democratic participation within local contexts.

This study therefore addresses this knowledge gap by examining the influence of social media on the electoral education of the electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the role of Facebook and WhatsApp during the 2023 general election. Specifically, the study investigates how these social media platforms contributed to voter awareness, dissemination of electoral information, civic education, and democratic participation among eligible voters. By providing empirical evidence

from a local government context, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital political communication and electoral education while offering practical insights for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), policymakers, political parties, civil society organizations, and other democratic stakeholders seeking to strengthen electoral integrity through effective digital civic education.

Problem Statement

The everyday use of social media by politicians and the manner in which the user-citizen interacts with the social network pages of political actors has received comparatively little scholarly attention, even though political communicators design their messages with the expectation that such interaction will favourably influence public perception and behaviour. There is therefore a pressing need for better political information, education and enlightenment through the adequate and efficient use of social media platforms by the electorate, since campaign messages founded on truth and complete information enable voters to make wise decisions that bring credible leadership into governance. In Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, the electorate's engagement with electoral matters occurs against a backdrop of misinformation risk and uneven digital access, yet little localised evidence exists on how far social media has actually shaped their electoral knowledge, attitudes and turnout. This study therefore interrogates how social media influenced electoral education among voters in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area during the 2023 election, considering both its potential for enhancing engagement and its risk of spreading misinformation.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess the extent of exposure of the electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area to social media on election matters in 2023;
2. Examine the role of social media in electoral education in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area;
3. Identify the challenges of using social media for electoral education in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area;
4. Find out how often the electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area receive information on election matters from social media;
5. Investigate the relationship between social media usage and voter turnout in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media may be defined as internet-based platforms

that allow users to create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2020). Within the Nigerian context, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X and Instagram have become central to political communication, with electoral bodies, civil society organisations and politicians using them to disseminate information on voter registration, candidate profiles and voting procedures (Ogbonna, 2021; Ekwueme, 2020; Uford *et al.*, 2022). Civil society organisations, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and groups such as the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, have increasingly relied on social media to promote electoral awareness and monitor electoral integrity (Nwosu, 2020; INEC, 2022).

Electoral education itself is considered essential for promoting democratic values, ensuring voter turnout and fostering political awareness. Political literacy and civic education are critical components in developing an informed electorate that understands the importance of voting, which in turn fosters greater political participation and accountability in governance (Norris, 2022). In the Nigerian context, a significant portion of the electorate remains uninformed about key aspects of the electoral process, including voting technology, electoral regulations and candidate platforms, a gap that has often resulted in voter apathy, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Akinbobola, 2023; Asuquo *et al.*, 2024).

Social media's contribution to electoral education in Nigeria cannot be overstated. It has become a vital tool through which citizens' access information about voting procedures, candidate profiles and electoral timelines, while also providing a space for discussion and clarification on electoral issues (Adebayo, 2021). At the same time, this contribution is not without difficulty: the proliferation of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms has raised genuine concerns about the integrity of electoral processes and citizens' trust in electoral institutions (Akpan, 2016; Okoro & Nwafor, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Agenda-Setting Theory. The Uses and Gratifications Theory holds that audiences are not passive recipients of media content but actively select specific media sources to satisfy particular needs, such as information-seeking, social interaction and civic engagement (Kushin & Kitchener, 2022). Applied to this study, the theory explains why voters in Ikot Ekpene turned to Facebook and WhatsApp for electoral information: these platforms offered instant access, real-time updates and interactive features that satisfied their need for political knowledge. The Agenda-Setting Theory, on the other hand, posits that the media may not necessarily tell people what to think but strongly

influences what they think about, by emphasizing particular issues over others (Norris, 2021). In the context of this study, the theory helps explain how social media campaigns around voter registration, candidate platforms and anti-vote-buying messages shaped what became salient in the minds of the Ikot Ekpene electorate, thereby influencing their level of engagement with the electoral process.

Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence on the effect of social media on electoral participation in Nigeria is largely positive, though not without caveats. Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023) found that social media played a significant role in mobilising voters during the 2023 Nigerian elections, shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the electorate. Similarly, Wonuola and Ajjola (2025) reported that social media voter-education posts motivated youths' active participation in the 2023 presidential election, with a majority of respondents affirming that such content discouraged vote-selling. Conversely, Okoro and Nwafor (2020) and Suntai and Targema (2022) have warned that the same platforms have been deployed to spread fake news and campaigns of calumny, occasionally deepening political and religious polarization.

On the challenges of social media use for electoral purposes, Olaoye and Akande (2025) identified internet inaccessibility, poor network coverage, misinformation and distrust of online content as key barriers confronting Nigerian voters. Ubong *et al.* (2024) similarly showed that, despite these constraints, social media platforms were effectively deployed for voter education in the 2023 election. Beyond Nigeria, studies of the United States electorate found that social media use was associated with higher political self-efficacy and involvement among young voters, with a notable share obtaining political information directly from social media platforms (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2021; Owen *et al.*, 2022).

Within the broader field of Nigerian media and communication scholarship, related work by Umoren and colleagues has examined how digital platforms shape public perception, information behaviour and organizational communication outcomes, themes closely connected to the present study's concern with social media and electoral awareness. Umoren *et al.* (2025) investigated the spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories on social media and citizens' response to vaccination campaigns, demonstrating how the same platforms that disseminate public health information can also propagate misinformation that undermines official messaging, a dynamic that mirrors the misinformation challenges identified in electoral communication. Ntuk and Umoren (2024) explored residents' perception of government image management and reputation in Akwa Ibom State, underscoring how mediated communication, including social platforms, continues to shape citizens' trust in

public institutions, a concern central to electoral legitimacy. Umoren and Akpan (2024), in their examination of media digitization in Nigeria, further highlighted the infrastructural and digital-literacy constraints, such as limited internet access and inadequate technological capacity that shape the extent to which digital and social platforms can be optimally utilized for civic communication, findings consistent with the access-related challenges reported by the electorate in Ikot Ekpene.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design, considered appropriate for investigating opinions, attitudes and behaviours of a population (Shittu & Taiwo, 2023). The population comprised the 70,923 registered voters in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area as at the 2023 general election. Using Philip Meyer's table for determining sample size from a given population, as cited in Vivian (2009), a sample of 384 respondents was drawn. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from the two clans that constitute the local government area, namely Amanyam and Ikot Ekpene Urban, ensuring that only eligible voters with exposure to social media and electoral education were included. A structured questionnaire, divided into a demographic section and a substantive section addressing the research questions, was the primary instrument for data collection. Out of 384 copies administered, 380 were retrieved and found usable, representing a 98.9 percent response rate. The validity of the instrument was established through expert review, while reliability was confirmed through a test-retest pilot exercise. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically simple percentages and frequency distributions, presented in tables organized around the study's five objectives.

RESULTS

Findings are presented in tables organized by research objective. A total of 380 valid responses (100%) formed the basis of analysis for each objective.

Objective 1: Extent of Exposure of the Electorate to Social Media on Election Matters

Table 1 shows that 270 respondents (71.5%) were exposed to social media electoral education messages to a great extent, 75 (19.3%) to some extent, while 35 (9.2%) reported no exposure at all. On platform use, WhatsApp (25.0%) and Facebook (22.4%) were the most patronised channels, followed by Instagram (15.7%), with BBM, Nimbuzz and X accounting for smaller shares. This indicates that the electorate in Ikot Ekpene was largely,

and primarily through WhatsApp and Facebook, exposed to social media for electoral purposes.

Objective 2: Role of Social Media in Electoral Education

Table 2 shows that 280 respondents (73.7%) said social media influenced their decision-making toward electoral activities, while 100 (26.3%) said it created awareness and encouraged participation. A combined 68.5 percent rated social media as very influential or influential in shaping their awareness and participation, while 39 percent said electoral messages mobilised them greatly and 53 percent said the mobilisation was minimal. This suggests that social media plays a substantial, though uneven, role in electoral education in the area.

Objective 3: Challenges of Using Social Media for Electoral Education

Table 3 indicates that network fluctuation (35.5%) and inadequate electrical power supply (32.0%) were the most commonly cited challenges, followed by lack of reliable devices (19.3%) and the cost of purchasing data (13.2%). On overall severity, 39 percent of respondents described the challenges as great, while a larger proportion, 53 percent, described them as minimal, and 8 percent reported no challenge at all. This suggests that, although infrastructural barriers exist, they have not been severe enough to outweigh the benefits the electorate derive from social media for electoral education.

Objective 4: Frequency of Receiving Electoral Information from Social Media

Table 4 shows that a combined 68.4 percent of respondents received electoral education messages through social media often or very often, while 21.1 percent said rarely and 10.5 percent said not at all. Notably, 73.7 percent indicated they could also access electoral education messages through sources other than social media, suggesting that social media complements, rather than replaces, other channels of electoral information in the area.

Objective 5: Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Voter Turnout

Table 5 shows that 195 respondents (51.3%) rated the effect of social media usage on their voter turnout as very high and 110 (28.9%) as high, against 70 (18.2%) and 5 (1.3%) who rated it low and very low respectively. This means a combined 80.2 percent of respondents associated social media usage with a high to very high effect on voter turnout. On the direction of influence on political decision-making, 53 percent reported a positive influence compared with 47 percent who reported a

Table 1: Extent of Exposure to Social Media Electoral Education Messages and Platforms used.

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extent of exposure	To a great extent	270	71.5
	To some extent	75	19.3
	Not at all	35	9.2
Platform used	WhatsApp	95	25.0
	Facebook	85	22.4
	Instagram	60	15.7
	BBM	50	13.2
	Nimbuzz	50	13.2
	X	40	10.5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2: Role of Social Media in Shaping Electorate Decision-Making, Awareness and Political Mobilization.

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Role of social media	Influences decision-making	280	73.7
	Creates awareness/participation	100	26.3
	Very influential	115	30.3
Influence on awareness/participation	Influential	145	38.2
	Less influential	80	21.0
	Not influencing	40	10.5
	Greatly	150	39.0
Extent of political mobilisation	Minimal	200	53.0
	Not at all	30	8.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3: Challenges Encountered in Using Social Media for Electoral Education.

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Specific challenge	Network fluctuation	135	35.5
	Electrical power supply	120	32.0
	Reliable device	75	19.3
	Data purchasing	50	13.2
Overall severity of challenges	Greatly	150	39.0
	Minimal	200	53.0
	Not at all	30	8.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4: Frequency of Receiving Electoral Education Messages and Availability of Alternative Sources.

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequency of use	Very often	145	38.1
	Often	115	30.3
	Rarely	80	21.1
	Not at all	40	10.5
Alternative source available	Yes	280	73.7
	No	100	26.3

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5: Social Media usage, Effect on Voter Turnout and Influence on Political Decisions.

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Effect on voter turnout	Very high	195	51.3
	High	110	28.9
	Low	70	18.2
	Very low	5	1.3
Influence on political decision	Positive	200	53.0
	Negative	180	47.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

negative influence, indicating a generally favourable, though contested, relationship between social media usage and electoral participation.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the majority of respondents (71.5%) were exposed to electoral education messages disseminated through social media to a great extent, with WhatsApp (25.0%) and Facebook (22.4%) emerging as the dominant platforms. This finding is consistent with Isah and Yacim (2026), who found that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) increasingly relied on Facebook and X as major digital channels for voter education during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. However, while Isah and Yacim primarily evaluated INEC's institutional adoption of digital platforms, the present study extends the literature by demonstrating that these platforms were not only deployed by electoral authorities but were also widely accessed and utilized by voters at the local government level. Similarly, the finding corroborates Inobemhe (2026), who reported that social media has become a major platform for voter mobilization and political participation in Nigeria. The predominance of WhatsApp over other platforms in the present study, however, contrasts with Okunnu (2026), who argued that the 2023 electoral communication landscape was characterized by a more diversified use of multiple social media platforms, suggesting that platform preference may vary according to geographical location, demographic characteristics and communication culture. The finding also supports Essoh *et al.* (2025), who established significant positive relationships between Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram and TikTok usage and political participation in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. Together, these findings indicate that while several platforms contribute to electoral communication, WhatsApp and Facebook remain the most accessible channels for electoral education among residents of Ikot Ekpene.

The findings in Table 2 reveal that social media substantially influenced respondents' political decision-making (73.7%), enhanced electoral awareness, and contributed to political mobilization. These findings strongly corroborate Wonuola and Ajijola (2025), who found that voter education messages disseminated through social media significantly motivated youth participation during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and discouraged vote-selling among many respondents. Likewise, the findings support Ubong *et al.* (2024) who concluded that social media platforms served as effective tools for voter education throughout the 2023 Nigerian elections by increasing citizens' access to electoral information. The present findings further agree with Abednego and Musa (2026), whose longitudinal assessment of election campaigns between 2014 and 2023 demonstrated that social media has fundamentally

transformed campaign communication and increased political engagement among Nigerian electorates. Similarly, Bassey and Dokubo (2025) found that media framing significantly influenced citizens' voting behaviour during the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State. While their study focused primarily on campaign framing across conventional and digital media, the present study specifically demonstrates that social media contributes directly to political decision-making through electoral education. Furthermore, the findings reinforce Essoh *et al.* (2025), who concluded that social media promotes civic education, political discourse and democratic participation beyond campaign communication alone. However, despite these positive outcomes, political mobilization in the present study was predominantly rated as minimal (53.0%), suggesting that exposure to electoral information does not automatically translate into high levels of political activism. This observation lends support to Ita and Ibanga (2025), who argued that technological innovations and digital communication alone cannot guarantee meaningful democratic participation because broader institutional and electoral challenges continue to influence voter behaviour.

Regarding the challenges associated with social media-based electoral education (Table 3), respondents identified network fluctuations (35.5%), unreliable electricity supply (32.0%), lack of reliable digital devices (19.3%), and the cost of purchasing internet data (13.2%) as the major constraints. These findings are consistent with Isah and Yacim (2026), who acknowledged that although digital voter education significantly expanded electoral outreach, infrastructural deficiencies continued to constrain equitable access to online electoral information. Likewise, the findings support the observations of Ubong *et al.* (2024), who identified digital inequality, internet accessibility and infrastructural limitations as major barriers affecting the effectiveness of social media voter education during the 2023 elections. Nevertheless, the present study differs from these earlier studies by showing that although infrastructural challenges remain evident, most respondents (53.0%) experienced only minimal difficulties. This finding suggests that increasing smartphone ownership, expanding mobile internet penetration and greater familiarity with digital platforms may be reducing some of the traditional barriers associated with online electoral education. However, these findings should be interpreted alongside Abdulazeez *et al.* (2026), who found that exposure to online political messages does not necessarily translate into trust because social media algorithms often expose users to misleading political information. Consequently, improving digital infrastructure alone may not sufficiently enhance electoral education without complementary interventions aimed at strengthening information credibility and digital literacy. The findings in Table 4 indicate that respondents frequently received electoral education messages through social media, with more than two-thirds reporting

receiving such information often or very often. Furthermore, 73.7% indicated that they had alternative sources of electoral information. These findings corroborate Isah and Yacim (2026), who demonstrated that INEC increasingly complemented conventional voter education strategies with social media campaigns during recent Nigerian elections. Similarly, the findings agree with Ubong *et al.* (2024), who reported that social media functioned as an effective supplementary platform rather than a complete replacement for traditional voter education channels. The availability of alternative information sources observed in the present study further supports Okunnu's (2026) argument that Nigeria's electoral communication landscape has become increasingly hybrid, integrating social media with television, radio, newspapers and interpersonal communication. Consequently, the present findings suggest that effective electoral education depends on complementary communication channels rather than exclusive reliance on digital platforms. Finally, the findings in Table 5 reveal that respondents perceived social media as having a very high (51.3%) or high (28.9%) influence on voter turnout, while a slight majority (53.0%) believed that social media positively influenced their political decisions. These findings strongly support Inobemhe (2026), who concluded that social media has become an important instrument for increasing voter mobilization and democratic participation in Nigeria. Likewise, they corroborate Essoh *et al.* (2025), who established statistically significant positive relationships between the use of major social media platforms and political participation. Similarly, Akinbobola (2023) found that active engagement with social media significantly enhances civic participation by facilitating political discussions and increasing citizens' involvement in democratic processes. However, the finding that nearly half of the respondents (47.0%) perceived social media as having a negative influence on political decisions introduces an important nuance that is less emphasized in earlier studies. This observation aligns with Abdulazeez *et al.* (2026), who found that trust in online political messages remains inconsistent because algorithm-driven content exposure often amplifies misinformation, selective exposure and political bias. It also complements Umeatuegbu's (2026) psychological explanation that voters operating within environments characterized by poverty, political manipulation and repeated electoral disappointment may remain susceptible to emotionally driven or misleading online political content despite increased access to electoral information. Similarly, the findings resonate with Umanah (2026), who argued that socio-economic vulnerabilities continue to shape electoral behaviour despite increasing political awareness, indicating that access to electoral information alone cannot completely eliminate inducement politics or transactional voting. The present study contributes to the growing literature by demonstrating that although social media has become an indispensable platform for electoral education, political

awareness and democratic participation in Nigeria, its effectiveness remains conditioned by infrastructural limitations, information credibility, socio-economic realities and citizens' trust in digital political communication. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on national trends, campaign communication or political participation, the present study provides localized empirical evidence from Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, thereby offering a more context-specific understanding of how social media shapes electoral education at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

This study has shown that social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, played a substantial role in the electoral education of the electorate in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area during the 2023 general election. The electorate were largely exposed to electoral messages disseminated via these platforms, and this exposure translated into stronger political decision-making, awareness, mobilization and voter turnout. While infrastructural challenges such as network instability, the cost of data and inadequate power supply persist, they do not appear to have substantially diminished the overall educational value derived from social media use in the area. As a single local-government-area case study, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to the whole of Nigeria; future research should extend this line of inquiry to other local government areas and across subsequent election cycles to validate and extend the conclusions drawn here.

Recommendations

In line with the findings on each objective, the following recommendations are made:

1. Electoral stakeholders, including INEC and civil society organizations, should prioritize these two platforms when designing and disseminating electoral education content in similar semi-urban communities.
2. Targeted and issue-specific social media campaigns should be developed around voter registration, candidate information and civic responsibilities to sustain and deepen this influence.
3. Relevant government agencies and telecommunication providers should be engaged to improve network infrastructure and electricity supply in Ikot Ekpene, while electoral stakeholders explore low-data and offline-friendly formats for electoral content.
4. Electoral education strategies should adopt a multi-channel approach that reinforces social media messaging with complementary outreach through radio, town-hall meetings and community structures.
5. Continuous monitoring of social media's electoral impact, coupled with media literacy training to help voters distinguish credible from misleading content, should be institutionalized ahead of future elections.

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