



Vol. 5 | Social and development concerns in Africa (c)

Vol. 5 Article 4/11 | July 2019

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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON VOTER BEHAVIOR DURING THE 2017 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN KITISURU WARD, NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: This paper investigated the influence of social media on voter behaviour during 2017 presidential elections in Kenya. The study was conducted in Kitisuru Ward of Westlands Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. This is as a sequel to the fact that many studies have been conducted globally including in Kenya on the use of social media during election campaigns. However, there is little evidence on studies undertaken on the influence of social media on voting behaviour of voters during the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya. The study was guided by three objectives: To identify social media platforms used by voters during 2017 general elections, to investigate on the uses of social media by voters during 2017 general elections and to determine whether social media usage influenced voters' decision making during 2017 presidential elections in Kenya. The study adopted Two-step communication theory as theoretical underpinning for the research. A descriptive survey design was used. The target population of the study was registered voters in Kitisuru Ward. The target population therefore was 1198. Yamane [1967] sampling formula was used to get sample size of 400 respondents. The researcher obtained 248 questionnaires representing 62% response. Data was collected using research assistants. Data was presented using Frequencies, Percentages and Tables and was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences [SPSS V.22]. Study findings revealed that 77% of respondents confirmed that social media influenced their decision making during 2017 presidential elections, while 23% said that they were not influenced by social media in choosing their preferred candidates during the same elections. The study also revealed that Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram were the main social media platforms used by voters in that order during 2017 elections. On perceptions, the study further revealed that 45% of respondents confirmed that they used social media to express their political ideology, 31.5% said social media increased knowledge of parties contesting in the election while 23.5% said social media was an effective platform through which they discussed politics. The study concluded that information on social media had great influence on voters as they decided on their preferred presidential candidate during 2017 elections. The study also concluded that, Twitter was the most popular social media platform followed by Facebook that was used by voters during 2017 election.

Key Words: Social media, Voting behaviour, 2017 general elections, Twitter, Facebook

1.1 Background to the study

Voting behaviour involves an analysis of individual psychological processes (perception, emotion, and motivation) and their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on election. Voting Behaviours is a field of study concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in an election and the reasons why they vote as they do (Dewa, 2009). Voting behaviour has many determinants such as demographic factors like age, education, gender, and occupation and socio- politico and economic factors such as, political ideology, party affiliation, candidates' qualification, and family affiliation, Charisma, religion, money factor, performance of the party in power, mass literacy, and media (Hazarika, 2015; Hossain, Aktar, & Islam, 2017). Available evidence suggests that access to information is a major determinant of voting behaviour.

Social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, have today become the go-to platforms where social media users turn to for real-time updates on any political, economic or social matter (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Susarla et al., 2012). Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create -share, exchange and comment contents among themselves in virtual communities and networks. Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Adesope & Ogan-Charles, 2016).

According to the 2019 Global Digital Media Report, the number of internet users worldwide stands at 4.388 billion, up 9.1% from the previous year, the number of social media users worldwide in 2019 is 3.484 billion, up 9% year-on-year, and number of smartphone users in 2019 is 5.112 billion, up 2% from 2018. These statistics show and prove that social media is a must platform for any organisation, business, and also political entity to ignore its use. There is ample evidence that social media is becoming an important component of politics, political campaigns, political information, and communication (Hootsuite, 2019).

There is evidence from around the world that social media has a role to play in the voting patterns and voting behaviour of the electorate. In Denmark, first-time voters are more exposed to direct communication from political actors than experienced voters while content from news media on social media plays an equal role in both groups' media diet. Results suggest that a digital media environment potentially socializes young voters into polarized information environments that nevertheless may increase their involvement in an upcoming election (Ohme, 2019). In Sweden, Munir (2018) reported that social media were effective in changing voting behavior of young voters in Scottish Referendum 2014 and social media helped in setting agendas to alter the decisions of voters as young voters gratified their needs and were quite active as they knew what to do with social media sites and how to use them effectively before, during and after the Scottish referendum. Young Scottish voters selectively chose their information source on social media and their selectivity depends upon their self-orientation.

In India, Sharmaa and Parma report that social media emerged as the hottest promotion tool during elections by the political parties to influence, connect and express their vision, objective to help them increase their visibility, or to gain majority. Today people live on social media, where even political parties want to reach out to hit them where they live showing that the social media have significant influence on voting decision especially young voters. Biswas, Ingle, and Roy (2014)

report that social media played a significant impact on voting behavior of young voters in India and found that the conversation on forum influence the female more than the male which indirectly affect their decision to vote. In Tunisia, M'barek, Jeddi, and Achouri (2015) reports that social media has an important role in determining the electoral decision of the Tunisian voter. Social networks are an essential source for information and form an opinion with respect to parties and candidates. Specifically, the study showed that Facebook and YouTube were the most used social networks by Tunisian voters. Social media was more prevalent among well-educated young who often uses Facebook and Twitter to learn about the political programs and to assess candidates. In Kenya studies have been conducted on the use of social media during campaign periods. For instance, Nduvala and Mueni, 2013 and Wasswa, 2013 conducted research on the use of social media during 2013 general elections in Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social media platforms have become important tools for communication in the 21st century because they permeate every aspect of our social, economic, and political lives of people. Available evidence suggests that social media is being used in the political arena both by the political elites and the electorate especially during the political campaign seasons. There is evidence (Ndavula & Mueni, 2013; Ndavula, Mberia, & Mwangi, 2014; Wasswa, 2013) of the use of social media as a platform for political campaigning in Kenya. However, there is little evidence of studies undertaken on the influence of social media on the voting behaviour of the individual voters during 2017 general elections in Kenya. This is the research gap that this study attempted to fill by examining the influence of social media use on voters they decided on their choice of presidential candidates during the 2017 general elections.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To identify social media platforms used among voters during the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya.
- ii. To examine the uses of social media among voters during the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya
- iii. To determine whether social media use influenced voter decision making during the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya

1.4 Study site and importance of the Study

The study was conducted in Kitisuru Ward of Westlands Constituency, Nairobi County. The study may be of importance to policy makers on the sectors of electoral processes and information, communication and Technology. They may use findings of this study to formulate enhanced rules and regulations to regulate and standardize social media use during political campaigns. The study will be of importance to politicians and political candidates as it will give insight into the influence of social media on voter behaviour which can be used in upcoming political contests. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge on social media use in political campaigns and its influence on voter behaviour.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The first theory that was used in this study is the uses and gratification theory (U&G) which is credited to Herta Herzog (Okoro & Santas, 2017). The majority of available literature on uses and gratification theory application has been in the entertainment media. Sweetser and Kaid (2008)

opined that the theory has been more recently used to determine the gratifications of entertainment media. However, the theory also has a long history of investigating political information seeking motivations. For instance, Blumer and McQuail (1969) found that gratifications sought from watching political broadcasts clustered into three constructs; political reason such as reinforcement or vote guidance; surveillance for keeping up with the issues; and excitement such as seeing which political party would win. The advancement of the internet and its subsequent deployment for the dissemination of political information, researchers have applied the uses and gratifications perspective to online political information seeking. In their research, Kaye and Johnson (2002) examined gratification for seeking political information online and found that primary motivations to be guidance, information seeking and surveillance, entertainment and social utility.

According to Okoro and Santas (2017), the U&G theory is relevant to this study because users of social media feel that the medium will satisfy their curiosity and meet their information need, and thus make them active participants in the political communication process. Therefore, they are able to select specific messages on a variety of social media platforms to connect to political activities within and outside their geographical location. The uses and gratification theory has been used by past studies (Nouran, 2013; Okoro & Santas, 2017) that investigate the explored the relationship between social media and voter behaviour.

The second theory that the study is based on is the Two-Step Flow of Communication proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) to emphasize the importance of interpersonal communications. The two-step flow of communication begins with messages disseminated through the mass media. However, rather than being directly received by an audience of individuals who are attentive, the messages are received by a layer of opinion leaders who are interested and engaged in public affairs. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) conducted classical studies on voting behavior. Some of the principles established by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) served as foundation for the work done by other authors afterward which were termed as two-step flow of communication later on (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948).

These studies proposed that messages transfer from media to opinion leaders who modify what they read or hear. They pass their perceived messages to associates or followers who look forward to them as influential (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). Gaudet (1948) identified useful voting patterns that directly influenced individual voters. The theory applies to this research as users of social media build their political opinions by forming discussion groups and following the opinion of a particular group leader acting as opinion leader of their community. Similarly, in social media, voters form groups and follow opinion leaders in the political process and has been used by other studies (Munir, 2018) to explore the effect of social media on voter behaviour.

1.6 Literature review

In Denmark, Ohme (2019) explore the media exposure of digital native first-time voters and test for its mobilizing potential for their campaign participation. We compare first-time voters' and experienced voters' exposure to political information on social network sites, non-social online media and offline media. The study adopted a unique research design that involves a smart phone-based diary study assessing voters' media exposure every other day of the Danish parliamentary election campaign in 2015. The findings revealed that social media platforms play a superior role in the media diet of digital native voters and can foster campaign participation. The study

concluded that a digital media environment potentially socializes young voters into polarized information environments that nevertheless may increase their involvement in an upcoming election.

In Scotland, Munir (2018) analyzed the role of social media in shaping voting behavior of youth in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014. Findings from a survey of inhabitants of Scotland and England indicate that the social media is composed of limited self-selected members (especially Facebook). Young voters seek information from like-minded political experts on social media. The politically aware young voters are more efficient and active than their less politically aware counterparts with respect to gaining political information. Social media were effective in changing voting behavior of young voters in Scottish Referendum 2014. In India, Sharmaa and Parma (2016) examined the impact of social media on voter's behavior-a descriptive study of Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. The study aimed to find out the effect of comments/tweets/follows on social media on voter's behavior and to understand the demographic characteristics of voters and their influence by social media during voting. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study was conducted among 110 respondents selected for the survey using questionnaires. The results of the study show that the social media have significant influence on voting decision especially young voters. The study also support that the remarks/tweets/comments by political leaders significantly influence their decision to vote for that party.

M'barek et al. (2015) study the impact of online social media on voting behavior of the Tunisian voters in the 2014 elections. The study collected direct self-declarations (face to face survey) about the voting behavior of voters, its determinants and the main factors that influence it through the data from a survey of a sample of 564 Tunisian voters. The sample was selected according to convenience methods. Descriptive statistical analysis and chi-square were used for analysis to answer questions of the study. The results indicated that social networks are an essential source for information and form an opinion with respect to parties and candidates. Specifically, our study showed that Facebook and YouTube were the most used social networks by Tunisian voters.

In Nigeria, Okoro and Santas (2017) conducted a survey aimed at examining the utilization of social media for political communication during the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. The rationale behind the study was to determine whether voters' choice of presidential candidates was influenced by their social media use among 249 respondents. The results of the descriptive statistics show that majority of the respondents' choice of presidential candidates during the 2011 presidential election was influenced by the use of social media. The respondents affirmed that their voting pattern during the 2011 presidential elections was influenced by social media usage.

In Egypt, Farrag and Shamma (2014) conducted a study on factors influencing voting intentions for Egyptian parliament elections 2011. The study measured to what extent different factors including Islamic religious beliefs influenced Egyptian's voting behavior intentions in the last parliament elections, given the moderating effect of the media and its role in shaping the existence of the Islamic political brand in Egypt. Qualitative research was initially conducted to modify the Newman and Sheth model to fit the Egyptian culture. A final total of 401 Muslim citizens' that participated in the last parliament elections were then surveyed via face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. The results found that media played a very significant role in shaping the Islamic political brand in the minds of Egyptian voters and there was an extensive use of social media by all political parties.

In Mauritius, Kasenally and Awatar (2017) explored the possibility of doing politics differently through the use of new technology and social media. The study conducted a content analysis of the Facebook pages and YouTube channels of a selected set of mainstream and small political parties covered one month of campaign prior to the day of the general election, 10 December 2014. Facebook and YouTube were selected as the two social media platforms due to their popularity among Mauritian users. The content analysis conducted during 2014 general election indicated that most of them used a conventional and non-engaging method of communication, the old wine in new bottle approach. The study concluded that social media did not have any effect on voter behaviour.

In Kenya, Buchere (2014) conducted a study on the impact of social media on Kenya's presidential election outcome of the 2013 presidential elections in Starehe Constituency in Nairobi. The target population was 138,630 registered voters in the constituency. The researcher used mixed method approach (both quantitative and qualitative methods) to collect data. The findings revealed that to some extent the electorate relied on social media in making their election decisions. The study further established that for the electorate the main reason or benefit for being on the social media was to get information while for the politician it's the presence of a ready audience to share information with.

1.7 Research methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive studies conceptually begin with a population base and the descriptive cross-sectional studies simply characterize the prevalence of a phenomenon in a specified population (Rahi, 2018). The study used this design because it aimed at collecting data at one point in time from a specific sample. The study used non-probability sampling approach to select the site of the as, Kitisuru Ward of Westlands Constituency Nairobi County. This constituency was selected using purposive/judgmental sampling due to the high internet and social media penetration in the location. The target population is thus 1,198 registered voters. In order to determine the sample size of the study, the study adopted the Yamane (1967) sampling formula to determine the sample size of 400 respondents.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Where;

n = sample size

N = study population

e = tolerance at the preferred level of confidence

p = 0.05 at 95% confidence level.

$$\begin{aligned} n &= 1,198 / 1 + 1,198 (0.05)^2 \\ &= 1,198 / 2.995 \\ &= 400 \end{aligned}$$

1.8 Data analysis and presentation

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The data analysis was done using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). The analysis focused on descriptive statistics such as frequencies,

percentages, means, standard deviations, and Chi-Square. Percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation were done to summarize the data whilst chi-square was used to test whether there existed a relationship between social media and voting behaviour of the respondents. The data is presented in sections that include the demographic characteristics of the respondents, social media use among respondents, social media use during the 2017 general elections, and the relationship between social media and voting behaviour and pattern of the respondents. Out of the 400 questionnaires administered, the study was able to reach 62 % of the sample which corresponds to 248 respondents which was the actual sample size for the study.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic features of the respondents that were reached in this study. The findings show that female gender accounted for 53.3 % of the sample and men represented 46.7 %, 14.5 % were in the 18-24 age group, 23.4 % were aged 25-34 years, 27.8 % were 35-44 years, 18.1 % were 45-54 years, 11.7 % were 55-64 years, and 4.5 % were 65 and above years. The majority of the respondents were citizens as shown in the 59.3 %, 22.6 % were business people, 28.2 % were employees, and 8.5% were students.

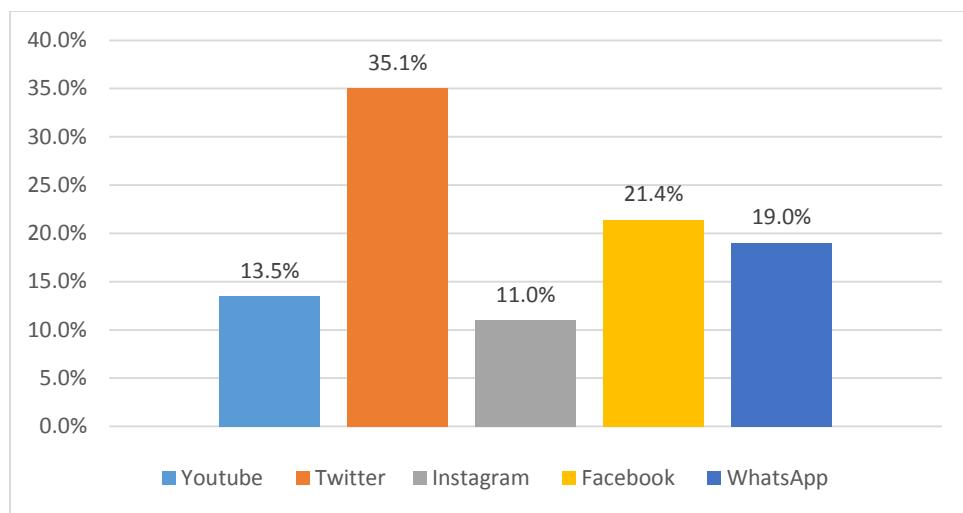
Table 1: Respondents' demographic characteristics

| <i>Demographic characteristics</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 116 | 46.7 |
| Female | 132 | 53.3 |
| Total | 248 | 100.0 |
| <i>Age group</i> | | |
| 18-24 years | 36 | 14.5 |
| 25-34 years | 58 | 23.4 |
| 35-44 years | 69 | 27.8 |
| 45-54 years | 45 | 18.1 |
| 55-64 years | 29 | 11.7 |
| 65 and above | 11 | 4.5 |
| Total | 248 | 100.0 |
| <i>Designation</i> | | |
| Student | 21 | 8.5 |
| Employee | 70 | 28.2 |
| Business person | 56 | 22.6 |
| Citizen | 101 | 59.3 |
| Total | 248 | 100.0 |

Source: Field data, 2019

Social media tools/platforms

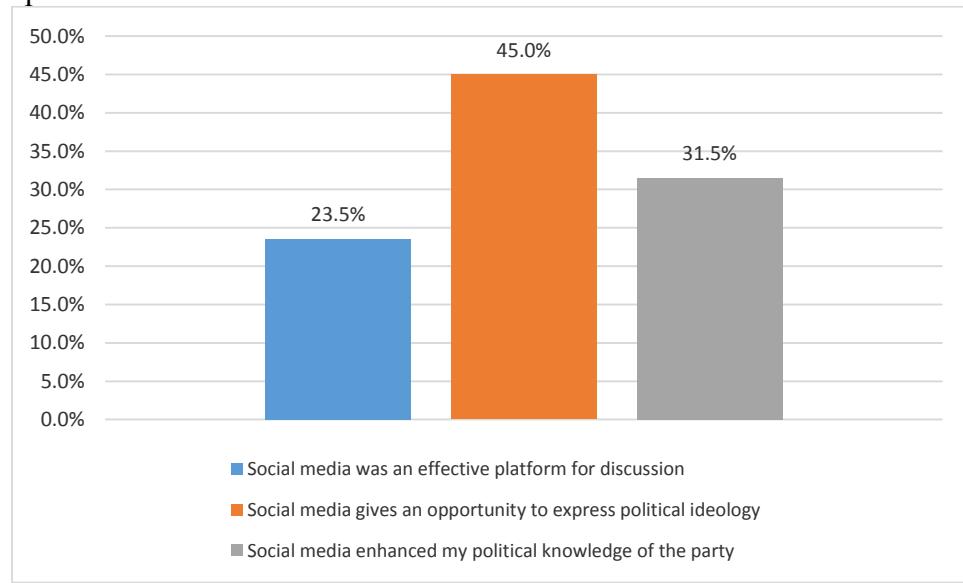
Figure 1 shows the outcome of social media platforms being used among the respondents to follow political campaigns. The results revealed that Twitter was the most common social media platform as cited by 35.1 %, this was followed by 21.4 % used Facebook, 19.0 % used WhatsApp, 13.5 % used YouTube, and 11.0 % used Instagram.

**Figure 1: Social media used among Respondents**

Source: Field data, 2019

Social media use during the 2017 general elections

The study aimed to find out the perceptions of respondents on the influence of social media in the voting pattern. As shown in Figure 2, 45.0 % opined that social media provided a chance for respondents to express their political ideology, 31.5 % believed that social media increased their knowledge of the parties running in the general elections, and 23.5 % believed social media was an effective platform for discussion.

**Figure 2: Social media use in the 2017 general election**

Source: Field data, 2019

Social media and voting behaviour and pattern of the respondents

In reference to social media and voting behaviour, the findings indicate that 52.0 % believed that social media changed voting behaviour during the 2017 general elections, 28.0 % agreed that social

media campaigns did influence the results of the elections, and 20.0 % believed that social media was an effective platform for the 2017 general elections as shown in figure 3.

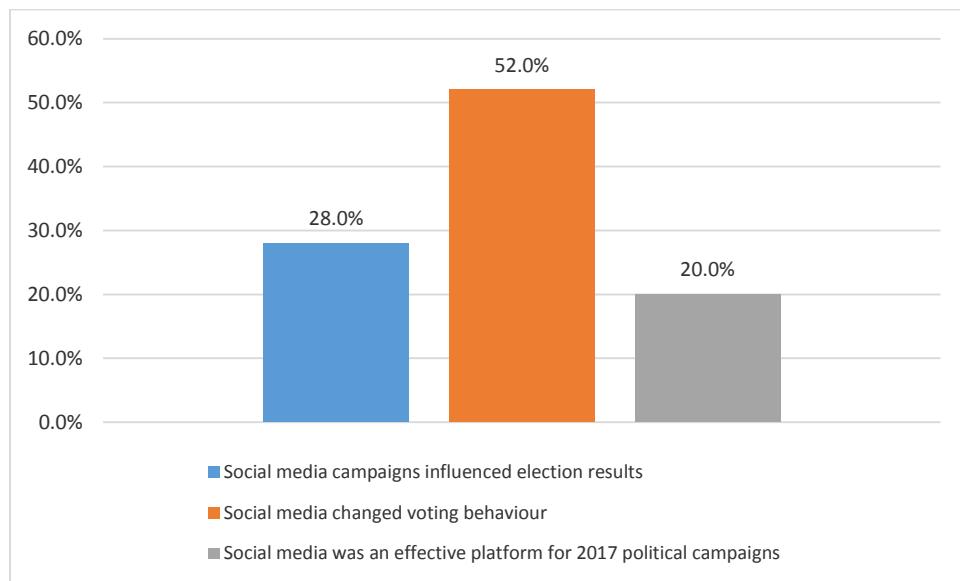


Figure 3: Influence of social media on voting pattern

Source: Field data, 2019

Effect of social media on individual voting behaviour

The respondents were asked to indicate whether the use of social media during the 2017 general elections influenced their voting behaviour or choice of presidential candidate.

Table 3:

| Social media influenced my decision to vote for either presidential candidates | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 191 | 77.0 |
| No | 57 | 23.0 |
| Total | 248 | 100 |

Source: Field data, 2019

Table 3 shows the Chi Square results which indicate the value of chi- square calculated $X^2 = 99.711$ with the degree of freedom (df), = 2, and is significant 0.000 at 5 % level of significant. This means that voter's choice of political candidates in the 2011 presidential election was influenced by political communication on social media.

Table 4: Chi Square Results

| Did social media influence your decision to voter for either presidential candidates? | |
|--|--------|
| Chi square | 99.711 |
| Df | 2 |
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 |

Source: Field data, 2019

1.9 Discussion

The findings indicated that Twitter was the most popular social media platform that respondents used during the 2017 general elections. This finding agrees with past studies that have found that politicians use Twitter as a means to communicate with the electorate. Larsson and Moe (2011) study on Twitter use during the 2011 Swedish election found that Twitter served as a channel for disseminating political information and not for political dialog with the electorates. The presidential candidates in the 2017 general elections all had personal twitter accounts which they used to communicate with the electorate. The findings show that social media was mostly used to express political ideology among the respondents. Buchere (2014) study revealed that Facebook and Twitter offered a new outlet to mobilize groups to action and unlike most media, the receiver cares about the sender enough to seek out additional information. The use of Twitter and Facebook allows the electorate to share the political options over trending topics on either social media.

Most of the respondents perceived that the use of social media did indeed change voting behaviour of the electorate. In reference to influence of social media on individual voting behaviour also showed that majority of the respondents agreed that it influenced their choice of presidential candidates in the 2017 general election. The Chi Square results confirmed this finding and thus it's this study's finding that social media influenced voting behaviour of respondents in the 2017 general elections. This finding corroborates other findings that have found a similar relationship between social media and voting behaviour in general elections. Sharmaa and Parma (2016) study in India revealed that remarks/tweets/comments by political leaders significantly influence their decision to vote for that party. In Kenya, Buchere (2014) findings revealed that to some extent the electorate relied on social media in making their election decisions. In Nigeria, Okoro and Santas (2017) found that voting pattern during the 2011 presidential elections was influenced by social media usage. The finding disagrees with Kasenally and Awatar (2017) in Mauritius which found that social media did not have any effect on voter behaviour.

1.10 Conclusion

Social media in this study was limited to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The study concludes that social media had an impact on voting behaviour of respondents in the 2017 general elections. The findings indicate that Twitter was the most common social media platform used during the 2017 general elections followed by Facebook.

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