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Public Relations Representation of Political Pluralism via Facebook and its Implication on Democratic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the role of public relations in representing political pluralism on Facebook and its implications for democratic development in Nigeria. The research is anchored on the Social Information Processing Theory, which explains how users construct meaning and relationships through online interactions. Using a survey method, data were collected through structured questionnaires among active Facebook users across Plateau state states in Nigeria. Findings reveal that Facebook serves as a significant platform for amplifying diverse political voices, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing citizens' political awareness. However, the study also identifies challenges such as misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic bias, which can distort pluralistic representation and weaken democratic engagement. The results further indicate that effective public relations strategies such as transparency, audience engagement, and fact-based communication can improve the quality of political discourse online. The researcher concludes that while Facebook contributes to democratic development by fostering pluralism, its impact depends largely on ethical public relations practices and media literacy among users. It recommends stronger regulatory frameworks and strategic communication approaches to sustain democratic growth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Public Relations, Political Pluralism, Facebook; Democratic Development; Social Media, Political Communication. Media Literacy

Introduction

The accelerated advancement of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed public relations practice and political communication globally. In Nigeria, the onset and widespread use of social media platforms particularly Facebook have reshape and redefined how political actors, institutions, and citizens interact within the democratic space. Diamond (2019) assert that public relations, which traditionally focuses on managing relationships between organisations and their publics, now plays a



strategic role in shaping political narratives, influencing public opinion, and facilitating engagement in pluralistic societies.

Political pluralism which is describe as system in which power and decision making is distributed among different political group is widely seen as a cornerstone of democratic governance. In its primary origin, it is refers to the recognition and participation of different ideologies, political actors, parties, and interest groups within the political network, allowing power to be distributed rather than concentrated. Suleiman & Peter, (2025) put that in Nigeria's heterogeneous society, characterised by ethnic, religious, and socio-political diversity, the representation of political pluralism is essential for fostering inclusiveness, national cohesion, and democratic consolidation. This had led to the expansion and opportunities for pluralistic engagement through the Social media platforms by enabling decentralized communication and providing avenues for marginalized voices to participate in political discourse.

The increasing relevance of Facebook in Nigeria's political landscape is evident in recent electoral processes, particularly the 2023 general elections, Nnaane, (2024) affirmed that where digital platforms played a central role in political communication, political actors leveraged Facebook for campaign messaging, voter mobilisation, agenda-setting, and real-time engagement with citizens. This shift reflects a broader transformation from traditional media gatekeeping to a more participatory communication environment, where individuals and groups can directly create and disseminate political content.

Significant empirical studies from Onwe and Amaka (2024), Nnaane, (2024), Jimada, (2023) e.t.c shows that Facebook has become a dominant platform for political engagement in Nigeria, with a significant proportion of users actively interacting with political content and using the platform to shape their political opinions. This interactive nature enhances available political information, encourages citizen participation, and promotes democratic inclusivity. Furthermore, Arowolo and Ogande, (2025) postulates that social media platforms provide opportunities for public relations practitioners to implement strategies such as targeted messaging, audience engagement, and digital storytelling, thereby amplifying diverse political voices.

However, despite these advantages, the role of Facebook in representing political pluralism is not without challenges. One of the most critical concerns is the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, which can distort political discourse and undermine democratic processes. Chukwu, (2025) studies shows that social media platforms in Nigeria have contributed to the spread of misleading information, political propaganda, and polarized narratives, thereby weakening the quality of democratic engagement

Additionally, algorithm driven content distribution on Facebook often creates echo chambers, where users are exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs. This limits exposure to diverse perspectives and undermines the essence of political pluralism, which relies on open and balanced discourse. The commercialisation of digital communication further complicates this landscape, as financially advantaged political actors can dominate online visibility through sponsored content and targeted advertisements.

Moreover, the role of social media in democratic development in Nigeria presents a paradox. On one hand, it enhances political participation, particularly among youths, by providing accessible platforms for engagement, advocacy, and mobilisation. On the other hand, it contributes to political polarisation, hate speech, and digital manipulation, which can hinder democratic consolidation. This dual nature highlights the need for critical examination of how public relations practices influence political communication outcomes on Facebook.

Another important factor is digital literacy, which affects how users interpret and engage with political content online. While Facebook facilitates access to diverse information, many users lack the necessary



skills to critically evaluate the credibility of such content. This makes them susceptible to manipulation and reduces the effectiveness of pluralistic representation in fostering informed democratic participation.

In view of these dynamics, the intersection of public relations, Facebook, and political pluralism presents both opportunities and challenges for democratic development in Nigeria. Understanding how public relations strategies shape political communication on Facebook is essential for assessing their impact on inclusivity, transparency, and citizen engagement. This study, therefore, investigates the role of public relations in representing political pluralism via Facebook and its implications for democratic development in Nigeria.

The growing adoption of Facebook as a tool for political communication in Nigeria has significantly altered the representation of political pluralism and democratic engagement. While the platform provides opportunities for diverse political actors to express their views and interact with the public, concerns persist regarding the quality, balance, and credibility of such representations. Despite its potential to enhance democratic development, the effectiveness of public relations practices on Facebook remains debatable.

There is little or no literature that addresses the problem of widespread dissemination of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria's digital political environment. Recent studies focus on social media platforms as a catalyst to misleading political propaganda, and emotionally driven narratives that influence public perception and electoral behavior. Such practices undermine the ethical foundations of public relations, which emphasise truth, transparency, and accountability. Other critical issues are the algorithmic nature of Facebook, which tends to reinforce selective exposure and create echo chambers. This limits users' access to diverse political viewpoints and weakens the representation of political pluralism. Instead of promoting inclusive dialogue, the platform may deepen political polarisation and reduce meaningful democratic engagement. Furthermore, unequal access to financial and technological resources among political actors creates an imbalance in online visibility. Well-funded individuals and parties dominate the digital space through sponsored content and strategic messaging, thereby marginalizing less influential groups. This challenges the fairness and inclusiveness required for effective pluralistic representation.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention on social media and political communication in Nigeria, there is limited focus on the specific role of public relations in shaping political pluralism on Facebook. Therefore, this study sought to address this gap by critically examining how public relations practices influence political pluralism and democratic development in Nigeria's digital communication environment through the following objectives:

1. To examine the public relations strategies employed by political actors in representing political pluralism on Facebook in Nigeria.
2. To assess the extent to which Facebook facilitates inclusive political participation and the representation of diverse political viewpoints in Nigeria's democratic space.
3. To evaluate the impact of public relations-driven political communication on Facebook on citizens' political awareness, engagement, and democratic development in Nigeria.
4. To identify the challenges associated with the use of Facebook in promoting political pluralism and determine how these challenges affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Information Processing Theory. The provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals create meaning, form impressions, and build relationships through computer-mediated communication such as Facebook. The theory, propounded by Joseph Walther in



1992 explained how people develop relationships online despite the absence of face to face non-verbal cues.

In relation to political communication in Nigeria, the theory explains how Facebook users process political messages disseminated by public relations practitioners, political actors, and institutions. Through repeated exposure to posts, comments, and shared content, users gradually construct perceptions about political parties, ideologies, and candidates. This process significantly influences political awareness, attitudes, and participation.

Furthermore, the theory highlights the role of strategic communication in shaping online interactions. Public relations practitioners utilise carefully crafted messages, visuals, and engagement tactics to influence audience perception and promote specific political narratives. However, the same process can also facilitate the spread of misinformation and biased content.

Method

This study adopted a survey research design to investigate the role of public relations in representing political pluralism on Facebook and its impact on democratic development in Nigeria. The survey method is considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a large population, enabling the researcher to generalize findings and identify patterns in political communication and audience perception.

The population of the study consists of active Facebook users in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau states, Nigeria who is exposed to political content on the platform. These include youths, professionals, and other politically aware individuals who regularly engage with political information online. The online Australian Calculator was used to drawn a sample size of 384 respondents out of the totaled population (311,392) of populace in the research local government area using a simple random sampling to ensure that every eligible respondent has an equal chance of being selected though purposive was equally used to choose active Facebook users who are knowledgeable about political scopes.

Data for the study are collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the research objectives. The questionnaire is divided into sections covering demographic information, exposure to political content on Facebook, perception of political pluralism, and the effectiveness of public relations strategies. Responses are measured using a 5-point Likert scale allowing for quantitative analysis of respondents' opinions and attitudes.

The collected data are analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such mean scores to summarize responses. These tools help in identifying trends and patterns in how Facebook influences political pluralism and democratic engagement. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent from respondents, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining confidentiality of all information provided. This survey-based methodology provides a reliable framework for examining the influence of Facebook on political pluralism and democratic development in Nigeria. Data were further collected purposively by selecting active Facebook users within duration of 6 weeks with the help of colleagues and were analyse through table and mean score

Findings

Research Question 1: What are the public relations strategies employed by political actors in representing political pluralism on Facebook in Nigeria?

Table 1: To examine the public relations strategies employed by political actors in representing political pluralism on Facebook in Nigeria.



Options	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
Political actors on Facebook present diverse political opinions and perspectives in their communication	155	140	45	30	14	4.02	Accepted
Political actors use interactive strategies on Facebook to engage multiple political groups	150	135	50	30	19	3.92	Accepted
Public relations messages by political actors on Facebook fairly represent different political parties and interests in Nigeria	145	130	55	35	19	3.90	Accepted
Political actors use Facebook to highlight and acknowledge the existence of multiple political parties and viewpoint in Nigeria	146	95	48	56	39	3.65	Accepted
Public relation messages shared by political actors on Facebook encourage tolerance and acceptance by opposing political opinions	87	74	48	99	76	2.99	Accepted
Grand mean score						3.69	

The objective examined the public relations strategies employed by political actors in representing political pluralism on Facebook. The results showed a grand mean of 3.69 indicating general agreement that political actors adopt inclusive and interactive communication strategies. This implies that while Facebook encourages multi-voiced communication, political actors use strategic narratives to favor their interests. Thus, political pluralism on Facebook exists, but it is often shaped by persuasion, competition, and selective messaging rather than full equality of representation

Research question 2: To what extent do Facebook facilitates inclusive political participation and the representation of diverse political viewpoints in Nigeria's democratic space?

Table 2: To assess the extent to which Facebook facilitates inclusive political participation and the representation of diverse political viewpoints in Nigeria's democratic space

Options	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
Facebook provides equal opportunities for citizens to participate in political discursions regardless of their background	160	140	45	25	14	4.05	Accepted
Facebook allows for the expression of diverse political opinions in Nigeria's democratic space	150	135	50	30	19	3.95	Accepted
Facebook give marginalized or less represented groups a voice in political discourse in Nigeria	145	135	55	30	19	3.92	Accepted
Facebook enables users to freely express diverse political opinions in Nigeria democratic space	105	96	48	76	59	3.21	Accepted
Political discussion on Facebook reflect a wide range of political parties and viewpoint	184	73	27	69	31	3.80	Accepted
Grand mean score						3.78	

The above objective assessed the extent to which Facebook facilitates inclusive political participation and representation of diverse political viewpoints. The findings showed a grand mean of 3.78, indicating great agreement among respondents. The highest-rated aspect was inclusive participation (Mean = 4.05), showing that Facebook is perceived as an open platform where citizens can freely engage in political discourse regardless of background. Additionally, respondents agreed that Facebook allows expression of diverse political opinions and gives marginalized groups a voice. This finding supports the view that Facebook serves as a digital public sphere that enhances political inclusivity in Nigeria. However, despite



this inclusiveness, structural issues such as algorithmic bias, political polarisation, and online harassment may still limit equal participation and visibility of all voices.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of public relations driven political communication on Facebook on citizens' political awareness, engagement, and democratic development in Nigeria?

Table 3: To evaluate the impact of public relations driven political communication on Facebook for citizens' political awareness, engagement, and democratic development in Nigeria

Options	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
Public relations driven political messages on Facebook have improved my understanding of political issues in Nigeria	161	139	45	25	14	4.05	Accepted
I actively engage with political content on Facebook and get influenced by public relations messages	150	130	50	30	24	3.91	Accepted
Public relations driven political communication on Facebook contributes to the growth of democracy in Nigeria	145	135	55	30	19	3.92	Accepted
Public relations messages shared by political actors on Facebook increase citizen awareness of political issues in Nigeria	86	75	48	96	79	2.99	Accepted
Exposure to political messages on Facebook influence citizen interest in elections and political participation	130	173	31	32	18	3.95	Accepted
Grand mean score						3.76	

The objective assessed the impact of PR-driven political communication on Facebook in enhancing political awareness, engagement, and democratic development. The findings revealed high mean scores for all three indicators with a grand mean of 3.76 indicating that respondents generally agree that Facebook significantly improves citizens' access to political information, increases participation in political discussions, and contributes to perceptions of democratic growth. The implication is that Facebook has become a vital communication channel that bridges the gap between political actors and citizens, enabling faster dissemination of political messages and encouraging interactive engagement. However, while engagement is high, it is largely digital and may not always translate into offline political participation such as voting or civic activism. This suggests that Facebook-driven engagement is more expressive than transformative in some cases.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges associated with the use of Facebook in promoting political pluralism that affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria?



Table 4: To identify the challenges associated with the use of Facebook in promoting political pluralism that affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria

Options	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
The spread of misinformation on Facebook hinders the promotion of political pluralism in Nigeria	180	120	40	28	16	4.08	Accepted
Political communication on Facebook is often biased and does not equally represent all political viewpoints	150	130	50	34	20	3.92	Accepted
Harassment and intolerance on Facebook discourage diverse political participation in Nigeria	170	110	45	35	24	3.95	Accepted
Limited digital literacy among users affect the effective use of Facebook for promoting political pluralism in Nigeria	173	86	48	50	27	3.85	Accepted
Algorithm driven content on Facebook reduces exposure to opposing political opinions	162	79	51	64	28	3.80	Accepted
Grand mean score						3.77	

The last objective focused on challenges affecting the use of Facebook in promoting political pluralism and democratic consolidation. The results revealed a grand mean of 3.77, indicating strong agreement that significant challenges exist. Key challenges identified include misinformation (Mean = 4.08), bias in political communication (Mean 3.92), and online harassment (Mean 3.95). These findings suggest that although Facebook enhances participation and awareness, it also facilitates the spread of false information, partisan messaging, and hostile interactions. These challenges undermine the quality of political discourse and may weaken democratic consolidation by distorting public opinion and discouraging constructive engagement, particularly among politically vulnerable or marginalized groups.

Discussion

This study examined public relations driven political communication on Facebook and its influence on political awareness, political engagement, democratic development, political pluralism, and inclusive participation in Nigeria. It also assessed the challenges affecting the effectiveness of Facebook as a democratic communication tool. Overall, the findings reveal that Facebook plays a strong but complex role in Nigeria's democratic communication landscape.

The results show that public relations driven political communication significantly enhances citizens' political awareness. Respondents indicated that Facebook provides timely and accessible political information, which improves understanding of political issues and government activities. This supports the idea that social media has become an important alternative source of political information beyond traditional media channels.

The study also found that Facebook encourages political engagement among citizens. Many respondents actively interact with political content through likes, comments, and shares, demonstrating that the platform has transformed political communication into a more participatory process. However, this engagement is largely digital and may not always translate into offline political actions such as voting or civic involvement.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that Facebook contributes to democratic development by promoting participation, dialogue, and interaction between political actors and citizens. It also facilitates political pluralism by exposing users to diverse political opinions and enabling multiple voices in political



discourse. Similarly, Facebook was found to support inclusive participation by giving citizens, including marginalised groups, opportunities to express their political views.

However, the study also highlights significant challenges that limit these democratic benefits. Misinformation, biased political messaging, and online harassment were identified as major obstacles. These issues distort public understanding, reduce trust in political communication, and discourage constructive engagement. As a result, while Facebook expands access and participation, it also creates risks that can undermine democratic quality.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The researcher concludes that public relations-driven political communication on Facebook has a significant positive impact on political awareness, political engagement, and democratic development in Nigeria. The platform serves as an effective tool for disseminating political information, encouraging citizen participation, and promoting interaction between political actors and the public. It also enhances the representation of political pluralism by allowing exposure to diverse political viewpoints and increasing citizens' access to political discourse. However, despite these benefits, the study also reveals notable challenges that hinder its full democratic potential. These include the widespread dissemination of misinformation, biased political messaging, and instances of online harassment and intolerance, all of which negatively affect the quality of political communication and democratic consolidation.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that political actors adopt more ethical, transparent, and balanced public relations strategies when using Facebook for political communication. Government agencies and relevant stakeholders should strengthen policies aimed at curbing misinformation and regulating harmful online content while still protecting freedom of expression. In addition, digital literacy programs should be intensified to equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate political information online. Strengthening these measures will ensure that Facebook becomes a more reliable and inclusive platform for enhancing democratic participation and political pluralism in Nigeria.

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