

Social Media and Democratic Governance in Akwa Ibom State (2020-2023)

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Abstract

The study focused on Social Media and Democratic Governance in Akwa Ibom State (2015-2023). Democratic governance has been identified as a need owing to its necessity in human development. In the 21st Century, social media has become a mainstay in enhancing democracy as it serves as a platform for expressing public opinion, civic political participation, and ensuring the protection of human rights. However, the same social media has become threatening to democracy as it is used to misrepresent realities and in political blackmail. Hence, the study is generally aimed at examining the role of social media in democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State from 2015-2023. The specific objectives of the study include ascertaining whether social media has significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State from 2015-2023 and determining the extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State from 2015-2023. The Media Dependency Theory was adopted for the study. The research methodology adopted for the study was both qualitative and quantitative, while the research design was the descriptive survey. The sources of data were both primary and secondary. The primary data source was the questionnaire. The secondary sources of data included textbooks, journal publications, social media posts, internet sources, etc. Questionnaires were distributed to 400 sample sizes gotten from the Taro Yamane formula (N) in the 3 Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State. Data were analyzed using the simple linear regression analysis through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). It was discovered in the study that Social media has significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State from 2015-2023. It was also discovered that the extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State from 2015-2023 is high. It was recommended that a special human rights protection board should be established by the Akwa Ibom State Government and vested with the responsibility of receiving and investigating human rights violations reported via online platforms.

Keywords: Social media, democratic governance, Akwa Ibom State, human rights protection, civic political engagements

Introduction

The media (print and electronic) in Nigeria, especially the privately-owned ones have always been strong instruments of sensitization and mobilization of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship (Ajayi, 2007). However, their reach was limited by such factors as government intimidation/harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control. With the widening of the communication media space through improved technology, information dissemination and sensitization of people now have a widespread immediacy and more diligent follow up of events. This is because of easy accessibility and availability of information, irrespective of social status. With very cheap mobile phones, people can access some social media platforms for information, education and entertainment, at reasonable costs. Fundamentally the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed thereby making them indispensable for good governance, the deepening of democracy, societal growth and development generally.

The emergence of the new social media is a major phenomenon that has transformed the interaction, communication and sharing of information between people throughout the world in the 21st century. It is important to point out that social media is not a new concept. It has been evolving since the dawn of human interaction (Aja et al, 2019). Meanwhile, during the 21st century, there was the emergence of new forms of social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, internet service among others. The emergence of these new forms of social media revolutionized many aspects of human communication. Thus, today social media have become a part of the everyday lives of people all over the world. For instance, data released by the parent company, Meta, shows that as at the third quarter of 2023, Facebook had 3.05 billion users globally. This indicates a 1.82 billion marginal increase from 1.23 billion users in 2013 (Oberlo, 2013) and this has been increasing rapidly. This development makes social media fantastic tools for communicating with a large audience.

The arrival of these new media platforms have to change the way people communicate with each other or one another around the world. For example, mobile phone penetration rates, in particular, have resulted in a plethora of ideas for new media platforms aimed at bridging the information divide between the well-connected and the disconnected (Unwin, 2012). In addition, Internet-based communication has started to gain importance in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Both mobile phones and the internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication. “The much reported rapid spread of mobile connectivity and services, as well as the different forms of public and shared internet access have allowed a growing number of people who may not have access to a computer or a fixed connection to take part in “the global conversation” (André-Michel, 2010:4).

The use of new social media in politics has continued to grow in Nigeria since the 21st century. The role of social media networks such as mobile phones’ SMS, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube in deepening the democratization of Nigeria in recent times cannot be overemphasized. For example, 2011 alone witnessed a massive use of mobile phones’ SMS, Facebook, and Twitter in the general elections in Nigeria (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). The social media networks like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are amongst the most used social media platforms in Nigeria (Sasu, 2023). Due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature, they have become veritable instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization. Hence, social media has become an avenue for the democratic governance which is characterized by responsive and responsible accountability system, preventing conflicts, promoting stability, managing crises, facilitating economic and social progress, maintaining the rule of law, human

rights, civic participation and peaceful transfers of power through electoral processes. Each of these underpins a peaceful and stable society (UNIP, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the huge potentials of the new social media for consolidating democracy, they equally have their challenges. The new social media platforms has severally been misused in disseminating unfiltered/ unverified information and rumours which are inimical to strengthening democracy. The increasing use of social media and other online tools has indeed led to greater privacy challenges. This is to say that with the great potentials of the internet and other digital social media platforms, is included the challenges of monitoring and regulation. Obviously, the new social media require some sort of regulation if our society and indeed Akwa Ibom State is not to degenerate into a state of anarchy (Ekwe, et al., cited in Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). For instance, a viral video of immoral conduct or lurid sex photos can instantly infect a political campaign or career. Anonymity of sources makes it difficult for strict regulation, monitoring and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a vulnerable instrument for perpetuating fraudulent acts and it also promotes piracy. This can destroy images of political leaders, aspirants, as well as the image of the state, hence, resulting to political apathy in those involved (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

While the above is affective on political leaders, citizens also suffer the ills of social media in relation to the practice of democracy. For instance, it is common among political office holders in third world countries like Nigeria to hunt down, embarrass, arrest and detain citizens who publicly criticize their attitudes towards governance in a particular entity, a practice which is unconstitutional and undemocratic. This has also been the case in Akwa Ibom State where individuals who have used social media in legitimately criticizing behaviours, attitudes, and regimes of public office holders have been harassed severally. For instance, in 2020, a social media critique of the Akwa Ibom State Government, Zion Umoh, was arrested and detained on charges of threats to life and conspiracy, although there was proof that he conspired with someone (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

It is upon this backdrop that the researcher is informed to investigate into the role of social media in democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State from 2020-2023

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the role of social media in democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State from 2020-2023.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. ascertain how the social media have promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State from 2020-2023 and,
- ii. determine the extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State from 2020-2023.

Research Questions

The following questions would direct the researcher in the course of the study:

- i. How has the social media been adopted to protect human rights in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. to what extent has the social media been utilized for civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

1. H1: Social media has significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State.
Ho: Social media has not significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State.
2. H1: The extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State is high
Ho: The extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State is not high.

Literature Review

Concept of Social Media

The concept of social media is wide and varied, so much so that the meaning of the word social media depends on the context. What one person understands as social media may slightly differ from what another holds (Granados, 2016). According to Pearson (2009), because people mean different things when they refer to social media, it has become hard to tie the word to any specific concept. Reasons for this inconsistency may be due to the rapid changes in both the technology that bears social networking systems and the nature of the content that is traded on social media.

To some, social media can be associated with shared media user-produced content such as the ones found on Facebook or Linked. Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman (2015) attribute social media to a participatory activity between individuals and their network of friends on the web. One thing that stands out in the attribution of meaning to the concept of social media is the role that the word 'social' plays. Trottier & Fuchs (2014) contend that what makes the web a social tool depends on some theoretical questions. These questions include: what does it mean to be social? Are human beings always social or only if they interact with others? Answers to these questions, according to them, also depend on the concept of sociality that is adopted and the identification of different aspects of sociality including apprehension of ideas, transmission of ideas and collaboration.

According to Junco et al., (2010), social media are a collection of internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing. They are the websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008); and web-based applications which provide functionality for sharing, relationships, groups, conversations and profiles (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media has been referred to as "social media sites" (Diga & Kelleher, 2009), or a set of information technologies which facilitate interactions and networking (Kapoor et al., 2017; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013).

Social media also refers to online communities that are conversational, fluid, and participatory. These kinds of communities allow the members to publish, control, rank, critique, produce, and interact with online content. Social media is a phrase for virtual worlds, social news, book marketing sites, virtual worlds, forums, and opinion sites (Tutent, 2008). In a rather general form, Trottier & Fuchs (2014) note that all computing systems (like calculators, computers and counting machines), all web applications (like web browsers, search engines, 'social media' and networking platforms), and all forms of media (like CDs, cables, satellites, newspapers, radios and television etc.) are social because human knowledge can be transmitted through them and this engenders social interaction among people, although, not all of them allow for a direct sharing of information between human beings. A conclusion deducible from this argument is that the web is and becomes social only when it involves

interactions between humans, not just between media platforms or computing devices and a human character.

Concept of Democratic Governance

The term “governance” refers to the process of decision-making and how decisions are implemented (or not). Hence, according to McGrew (2004), democratic governance generally refers to the regulation, constraints and safeguard of the political system. Such a democratic political system in practice is also dependent on a matching value system which encompasses tolerance of competing aspirations, cooperation and compromise. According to Ballington (2012), democratic governance is when institutions, politics and law function according to democratic processes and norms. These can appear democratic, but unless these structures are applied and implemented through a responsive and democratic system, citizens might lose trust in these institutions. To establish trust from citizens, these democratic institutions must perform with the highest level of transparency, integrity, and accountability. Successful and well-functioning democratic governance manifests through intra-institutional strengthening, public participation, and transparency (Igboeche & Atakpa, 2016).

Theoretical Framework: The Media Dependency Theory

The first to present the theory of media dependence was Ball-Rokeach & De Fleur (1976). The theoretical tradition in the field of communication grew from a strong model of media influence to a minimal model of influence in the early 1970s. Ball-Rokeach suggested a theory of media dependence, which attributes media influences rather than their respective characteristics to the relationship between individuals, media and culture (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019).

In simple terms, the media dependency theory states that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1976) described dependency as the correlating relationship between media content, the nature of society, and the behaviour of audiences. It examines both macro and micro factors influencing motives, information-seeking strategies, media and functional alternative use, and dependency on certain media (Rubin & Windahl, 1982).

As DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach (1989) suggested, active selectors’ use of the media to achieve their goals will result in being dependent on the media. Littlejohn (2002) also explained that people will become more dependent on media that meet a number of their needs than on media that provide only a few ones. If a person finds a medium that provides several functions that are central to his/her desires, he/she will be more inclined to continue to use that particular medium in the future (Rossi, 2002).

The intensity of media dependency depends on how much people perceive that the media they choose is meeting their goals. These goals were categorized by DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach (1989) into three dimensions including social and self-understanding (e.g., learning about oneself, knowing about the world); interaction and action orientation (e.g., deciding what to buy, getting hints on how to handle news or difficult situation, etc.); social and solitary play (e.g., relaxing when alone, going to a movie with family or friends). DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach (1989) also suggested that more than one kind of goal can be activated (and satisfied) by the same medium.

However, according to Baran & Davis (2016), the theory is invalid on diverse grounds including the fact that variability in micro-level and macro-level measurement makes between-study comparability problematic, difficulty in empirically verifying the tenets of the theory, the meaning and power of dependency is sometimes unclear, and the lack of power in explaining long-term effects.

The theory is relevant to the study owing to the place of media in meeting human needs which cut across the political, economic, social, religious, and even the cultural sphere. Hence, social media has become a platform where people seek assistance for their needs or in achieving their goals. Democratic governance is one of the major needs of individuals in a political system because it affects the ruled directly in other spheres of existence. Such needs in a democratic system include the protection of lives and properties, to participate equally in both active and passive political activities, to express oneself regarding certain issues of public concern, the need for accountability, responsiveness and transparency of the government, especially in terms of development affairs, etc. Hence, social media especially in the 21st Century becomes a veritable tool where individuals (especially those with similar needs) express concerns about these needs, or where they achieve these needs.

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Democratic governance is expressed in diverse forms including the protection of human rights, civic political engagements/participation through electoral campaigns, protests, voting, expression of public opinion, etc., which could result in socio-economic development, free and fair elections, public accountability and transparency (UNIP, 2023). These forms of democratic governance have been expressed in Akwa Ibom State aided by the proliferation of social media users and the intensity of their uses in the state especially from 2020 to 2023. A few of these areas in Akwa Ibom State are explicated below.

Social Media and Human Rights Protection/Administration of Justice in Akwa Ibom State

The intensity of the use of social media has awakened the consciousness of the government of Akwa Ibom State towards the protection of human rights, especially in mitigating the rates of illegal and unwarranted arrests of citizens. In significant cases in the state, social media have been used particularly by the youths to call out government officials, agencies, and institutions over abuse of human rights. Hence, social media in this scenario becomes a tool against autocratic regimes and tendencies in the state. For instance, in 2022, a certain Mr Blessing Esitikot whose arrest was ordered by the Ukanafun Local Government Chairman on grounds of defamation of character and cultism was released owing to calls by diverse social media users in the state with the hashtag #freeBlessingBethelEsitikotNow#. Social media users tagged his arrest as irresponsibility on the part of the Chairman, because of Esitikot's critical stance on his (the Chairman's) administration (Akpan, 2022).

In another instance, social media was instrumental in the arrest and trial of one Mr Uduak Akpan who lured, raped, killed and buried one Miss IniObong Umoren in 2021 (Essien, 2021). Through social media, some women in Akwa Ibom State also organized a solidarity walk demanding justice for the deceased (Samuel, 2021). Additionally, social media was instrumental to the freedom of one Mr. Kufre Carter, a journalist who was detained by the Department of State Services (DSS) for a month despite perfecting bail conditions. His release was however ordered by the Director-General of the DSS, Yusuf Bichi, who also lambasted the attitudes of the state government over the violation of the human rights of citizens in the state (Odunsi, 2020).

Social Media and Civic Political Engagements/Participation in Akwa Ibom State

Political participation is a core feature of the political culture of an entity. In Akwa Ibom State, political culture has been a participant since the intensity of social media platforms with many, especially the youths participating in political affairs such as voting, contesting in elections, campaigns, street protests, political party affairs, criticism of government policies, etc. For instance, the surge in the use of social media in Nigeria and the State has resulted in citizens

defying all the odds to protest on public/political issues (see Udoms, & Atakpa, 2021). One of such was the EndSARS protests in Uyo which was carried on by the youths and even some adults across the state. The protesters chanted songs as they moved from the Ikpa Road junction leading to the campus of University of Uyo campus and back. This was influenced by the manifestation of similar activities in states like Lagos, Rivers, Edo, and Delta which were posted across social media platforms (Umo, 2020).

Also, the 'Obidient Movement' on social media led by Mr Peter Obi of the Labour Party in the just concluded 2023 elections engineered massive political participation in Akwa Ibom State, through diverse publications on social media platforms. It also resulted in massive street rallies which consisted of all strata of residents including children, the aged, and even the disabled. This also opened leeway for young people in the state to contest for political offices, an act which was initially seen as forbidden for the youths. One of such is one Miss. Uforo Udosen, a 29-year-old lady who contested the House of Assembly Elections under the Ikot-Abasi/Eastern Obolo Constituency of Akwa Ibom State (INEC, 2023). Still in the state, a 35-year-old man, Mr Martin Esin, capitalized on the social media wave to clinch a position in the Federal House of Representatives, representing Oron/Mbo/Okobo/Udung Uko/Urue-Offong Oruko Federal Constituency (Media Nigeria, 2023).

Empirical Literature Review

The role of social media in a political system has witnessed multifarious studies. Concerning democratic governance, such studies have emphasized the role of social media in aspects like human rights protection, political participation, public opinion, etc.

Babaleye, et al., (2020) found that concerning democratic consolidation, social media platforms have been important in pressing Nigerian politicians to do the right thing. This was achieved after the administration of questionnaires to 200 respondents at Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti.

According to Oparaugo (2020), social media has a great impact on the voting patterns of the electorates, especially the youth who constitute the largest portion of social media users in Nigeria. He added that social media aids politicians in establishing a more direct contact with the voters.

In a different twist, Madueke et al., (2017) revealed in their study that as a developing country, social media has not only been beneficial in ensuring popular participation but also cutting down the costs of seeking public opinion through manual/mechanical means. Hence, social media has aided democracy in serving as a platform for the expression of public opinion, an activity which was difficult before this time.

Olowokere & Audu-Bako (2019) established that social media is not only for individual citizens but the government alike. In their analysis of social media use in the 2019 elections, each of the key stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral process including the INEC, politicians and political parties, and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) made extensive use of the social media. While the INEC used social media basically to broadcast messages on the elections and receive feedback from the public, the politicians and political parties used social media to reach out to the voters and canvass for support. The CSOs also used social media to reach out to the people to organize lectures, receive opinions about particular candidates, and share the general plights of Nigerians with candidates.

Asemah et al., (2013) submitted that social media play an important role in promoting and protecting human abuses because they serve as agents of information and they can educate the public on their fundamental human rights. However, Owede & Government (2020) after sampling over 300 undergraduates at Niger Delta University (NDU) in Bayelsa state concluded that students were quite aware of their fundamental human rights, but the level of awareness of these rights was not made possible via social media.

Zanzoun (2017) did not only assess the role of social media in democratic governance but also stated the limitations to its uses. Accordingly, the observed patterns from participants' answers in the interview revealed that the use of social media, particularly Facebook helped in the promotion of human rights but the rate of illiteracy remains a persisting challenge and an endless worry for human rights activists on social media.

Shadrach & Apuke (2020) found that Facebook and Twitter are the major social media platforms in use by the participants in the sampled area. In this regard, they noted that there is a high application of Facebook and Twitter in political discussions among Nigerians. Most users of social media in the sampled area read political posts, comment and make posts that have to do with the political issues of the state.

For Abdu et al (2018), social media has been imperative in ensuring civic political participation among the youths in Nigeria. According to them, offline political participation amongst youths is largely dependent on the use of Facebook because most of them rely on the platform to make informed decisions about their political choices.

Methodology and Materials

The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method describes the variables of the study, while the quantitative methodology is used in the analysis of data.

Research Design

For this study, the survey research design was used in the collection of primary data through the questionnaire and analyzed using the quantitative approach.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of the population of Akwa Ibom State. The population of the state is estimated at 7,200,000 in 2023 (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2023). Therefore, the population of the study is 7,200,000.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size of the study is 400. It was determined using the Taro Yamane (n) Formula (see Atakpa, Udoms & Enang, 2021). The Taro Yamane Formula (n) is a statistical used in social sciences and other fields to determine the sample size of a large population of a study. The formula has a 95% confidence level. It is represented and calculated thus:

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

Where:

n = sample size required

N = total population of the study

E = allowed error (0.05%)

By substitution:

Substituting the figures

$$n = \frac{7,200,000}{1 + 7,200,000 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{7,200,000}{1 + 7,200,000 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{7,200,000}{1 + 18,000}$$

$$n = \frac{7,200,000}{18,001}$$

n = 399.9
 n = 400, approximately.

The questionnaires were distributed among the 400 calculated respondents in the 3 senatorial districts of the State using the simple random sampling technique.

Sources of Data

The data used for the study were both primary and secondary. The primary data involved direct information from the respondents, while the secondary data were sourced from both online and printed sources such as websites, online journal publications, newspapers, and textbooks. These sources enabled the descriptive analysis of the variables of the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The Simple linear regression analysis was used in testing the hypotheses of the study; to estimate the relationship between the two quantitative variables.

Testing of Hypotheses

Testing Hypothesis 1: Social media has not significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State

Using the simple linear regression

Table 1(a): Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Standard Error of Estimate
1	0.66a	0.44	0.43		0.38

Source: SPSS, 2023.
 Predictor: Protection of Human Rights

Table 1(a) shows that there is a significant relationship between social media and human rights protection at R = 0.66. The R square at 0.44 indicates that social media accounts for 44% of variations which implies a significant effect on human rights protection in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1(b): ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
1						
	Regression	20.12	3	6.71	47.92	0.000^b
	Residual	25.61	364	0.14		
	Total	45.73	367			

Source: SPSS, 2023

Dependent Variable: Protection of Human Rights
 Predictor: (Constant): Social media

Table 1(b) reveals that the F value (which is the Mean Square Regression of 6.71) divided by the Mean Square Residual of 0.14 yields F at 47.92. From these results, the model is significant (Sig=0.000). Therefore, social media is a significant predictor of human rights protection at 3 degree of freedom (df).

Table 1(c): Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance (Sig)
		B	Standard Error	Beta		
	Constant	0.78	0.236		3.31	0.001
	EW	0.23	0.054	0.266	4.28	0.000

Source: SPSS, 2023.

Dependent Variable: Protection of Human Rights

Table 1(c) shows the degree of influence social media has on the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State (2015-2023) and the level of significance. The result is given as (social media: $\beta=0.23$; $t=4.28$; $p<0.01$). This implies that social media is a significant predictor of the dependent variable which is the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State.

Linear Regression Model is represented thus:

$$Y = a + \beta X$$

Where Y = Protection of Human Rights

a = Constant

βX = Coefficient of X

Therefore, Protection of Human Rights = $0.78 + 0.23EW$

Decision: Based on the results in Table 1(c), the level of significance for all the items are less than 0.01. Hence, we accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) and reject the null hypothesis (Ho). Therefore, social media has significantly promoted the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State.

Testing Hypothesis 2: The extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State is not high

Using the simple linear regression

Table 2(a): Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Standard Error of Estimate
1	0.74 ^a	0.55	0.54		0.34

Source: SPSS, 2023.

Predictor: Social media

Table 2(a) shows that there is a significant relationship between the social media and civic political engagements at $R = 0.74$. The R square at 0.55 indicates that social media account for 55.4% of variations which implies a significant effect on civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State

Table 2(b): ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
1						
	Regression	25.06	3	8.34	75.82	0.000^b
	Residual	20.67	364	0.11		
	Total	45.73	367			

Source: SPSS, 2023

Dependent Variable: Civic Political engagements

Predictor: (Constant) Social media

Table 2(b) reveals that the F value (which is the Mean Square Regression of 8.34) divided by the Mean Square Residual of 0.11 yields F at 45.73. From these results, the model is significant (Sig=0.000). Therefore, social media is a significant predictor of civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State, at 3 degree of freedom (df); that is, $(3, 367) = 75.82$.

Table 2(c): Co-efficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance (Sig)
		B	Standard Error	Beta		
	Constant	0.81	0.203		3.97	0.000
	COMP	0.15	0.047	0.161	3.19	0.002

Source: SPSS, 2023.

Dependent Variable: Civic Political engagements

Table 2(c) shows the degree of influence and the level of significance of the social media on civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State. The result is given as (social media: $\beta=0.15$; $t=3.19$; $p<0.05$). This implies that social media is a significant predictor of civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State.

Linear Regression Model is represented thus:

$$Y = a + \beta X$$

Where Y = Civic Political engagements

a = Constant

βX = Coefficient of X

Therefore, civic political engagements = $0.81 + 0.15EW$

Decision: Based on the results in Table 2(c), the level of significance for social media is less than 0.01. Hence, we accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) and reject the null hypothesis (Ho). Therefore, the extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State is high

Discussion of Findings

Following the results from the descriptive analysis of data collected, it was shown that social media is a significant predictor of human rights protection in Akwa Ibom State. This finding is in tandem with the position of Asemah et al., (2013) that social media play an important role in promoting and protecting human abuses because they serve as agents of information and can educate the public on their fundamental human rights.

Second, the finding of the study that social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State resonates with the assertion of UNIP (2023) that social media has become an avenue for democratic governance, which is characterized by a responsive and responsible accountability system, preventing conflicts, promoting stability, managing crises, facilitating economic and social progress, maintaining the rule of law, human rights, civic participation and peaceful transfers of power through electoral processes. The finding is also corroborated by that of Abdu et al., (2018) that offline political participation amongst youth is largely dependent on the use of Facebook because more youth are often showcasing stronger reliance on it as their online platform for securing the political information they need to make an informed political decision. However, the finding counters the perception of Ekwe, et al.,

(2011) cited in Ajayi & Adesote (2015) that social media has been misused in disseminating unfiltered/unverified information and rumours which are inimical to strengthening democracy.

Conclusion

As established by the Media Dependency Theory, democratic governance is a need which should be met if the welfare of the citizens of a particular entity is to be protected and promoted. Hence, individuals and the government alike have instituted means to ensure a system which would ensure the inclusion of the majority of the citizens in the affairs of the state. One such is the media, which has metamorphosed into social media. Although there have been growing concerns about the role of these social media platforms in democratic governance, the study highlighted that as part of its contribution to democratic governance, social media has contributed to the protection of human rights in Akwa Ibom State as individuals resort to these platforms to call out abusers with the knowledge that their plights would gain a wider audience. It was also discovered that the extent to which social media has improved civic political engagements in Akwa Ibom State is high, as a result of the growing need for a better and more responsive, transparent and accountable government. This has led citizens and residents of the state to connect to orchestrate their plights through political protests, campaigns, rallies, voting, etc.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. A special human rights protection board should be established by the Akwa Ibom State Government and vested with the responsibility of receiving and investigating human rights violations reported via online platforms.
2. To further ensure civic political engagements/participation through social media, the Akwa Ibom State Government should promote its usage by political officials to disseminate information on current developments concerning their roles, and from time to time, engage citizens on live videos or "question and answer" sessions.
3. All forms of vile propaganda and blackmail on elected and appointed political personnel should be investigated by the special human rights protection board which should be established for receiving and investigating human rights violations reported via online platforms.
4. Political officials in the state who are aggrieved by social media critics should tender such to the agency above, with an evidential report of constitutional offences in such criticism. Any public/political official who resorts to harassment and intimidation against social media critics should be sanctioned.

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