AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.13 (3), September-December, 2024 https://ajemates.org

SOCIAL MEDIA ENTREPRENEURS AS MODERN POLITICAL INFLUENCER IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The place of social media celebrities on matters of concern globally, and Nigeria in particular has taken a center stage. They are known to create contents, make comments and share ideas that keep their followers and general public attracted to their social media platforms. A lot of researchers have qualitatively and opinionatedly examined their impacts in different human endeavours, including fashion, music, sports, education, real estate, digital gadgets, just to mention a few, but it seems there is less attention to their role in political affairs. To this effect, the study empirically investigated social media entrepreneurs' influence in some aspects of politics in Nigeria with a view of underscoring its implications on political science education. It was a descriptive study guided with four research questions. The sample size was 399 political science lecturers in Colleges of Education in Southeast. A researcher's developed and face validated instrument with satisfactory reliability coefficients: 0.81, 0.77, 0.75 and 0.77 respectively, was used to collect the data. Descriptive statistics, particularly pie chart and percentage were deployed for the data analysis. It was found that social media entrepreneurs influence partisan politics; electioneering campaigns; voters' turnout, and political discussions. This implies that political science curricula may increasingly incorporate the study of social media influence on matters of partisan politics, electioneering campaigns, voters' turnout and political discussions. This will enable departments of political science and political parties to harness and maximize the potentials in social digital platforms for advancing politics.

Keywords: Social Media Entrepreneurs, Political Influencers, Political Science Education, Partisan Politics, Electioneering Campaigns, Voters' Turnout, Political Discussions.

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Introduction

The rise of social media has significantly transformed the political landscape, with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, just to mention a few playing central roles in shaping public discourse. Social media have become an integral part of people's everyday lives, with around 4.62 billion people globally being estimated to be on it (Wellman, 2022). These sets of people and or groups leverage social media platforms for political, economic, or social purposes to influentially drive and redirect political narratives. Supporting this, Goodwin, et al., (2023) argued that more recently in Nigeria, a lot social media influencers have emerged, increasingly taken positions on political and societally relevant topics, such as climate change, justice, education, gender equality, security challenges, conflicts, among others. This seems to make these set of people, often referred to as social media entrepreneurs or influencers to become influential in political and other matters.

Social media entrepreneurs are individuals who leverage social media platforms to build businesses, brands, or personal ventures. They create content, market products or services, and engage with audiences to generate revenue. They often use platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, or Facebook as their primary business channels, capitalizing on the vast reach and accessibility of social media to reach target markets without the traditional overhead of brick-and-mortar businesses (Oladipo, Onaolapo & Ekpenyong, 2020). This makes them so important. Supporting this, Peter and Muth (2023) asserted that social media influencers have become an indispensable part of social media, informing audiences, especially young ones, about various topics, such as beauty, lifestyle, or food. Consenting to this, Riedl, Lukito and Woolley (2023) asserted that in politics, these social media personalities, often referred to as influencers are power players who advocate for candidates, put through policy proposals, cause ideological changes, and affect popular perceptions. They added that influencers take form of politicians, lobbyists, advisors, donours, corporations, industry groups, labour unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to name a few. With such scope of coverage, there is no denying the fact that possess the charisma to influence people' perspective and choices in different walks of life, including politics. In modern politics, they are understood to play important roles that their followers tend to key into.

As modern political influencers, these individuals and groups leverages digital platforms, particularly social media,

to shape public opinion, engage in political discourse, and advocate for specific policies, ideologies, or candidates (Roselius, 2017). In essence, modern political influencers often gain influence through content creation, including videos, posts, blogs, or podcasts, which resonate with specific audiences or their followers. They can range from activists, commentators, and journalists to celebrities or social media personalities who incorporate political content into their broader online presence. Wellman (2022) buttressed that this category of influencers are content creators that endorse a political position, social cause, or candidate through media that they produce and/or share on a given social media platform. Political influencers may do so with the purpose of exerting political influence over their audience members, to perform allyship for a political or social cause (Wellman, 2022), to access monetary or other gains, or combinations thereof.

They get involved for some reasons. Explaining this, Shahzeb, Apon and Dhara (2024) pointed out that the reasons social media entrepreneurs get involved in political matters might be because of ideological alignment (beliefs, interests, values or political ideologies); payments and monetization (financial incentives, gifts, sponsorships, non-monetary considerations or direct payments); social and political clout (gaining access to exclusive events and networking opportunities with political and business elites), and coercion (being compelled to participate in political campaigns to avoid potential repercussions). The aspect of their involvement as political influencers' is encompassing, including partisan politics, voters' registration sensitization, exercise of franchise, political and electioneering campaigns, political discourse and opinions, electoral conflict, public policies, political propagandas, election result uploads and monitoring, gender equality, climate justice, and sustainable lifestyles, et cetera (Byrne et al., 2017), even though this is not their primary focus. This makes the potential of social media entrepreneurs as opinion leaders and political influencers increasingly recognized by political actors, both in the context of elections as well as by single politicians seeking to increase their popularity among a younger audience (Peter & Muth, 2023). For this study, their influence on partisan politics, electioneering campaigns, voters' turnout and political discussions were investigated.

Often times, influencers align themselves with particular political parties, using their platforms to advocate for specific policies or candidates, in attempt to drive audience to keying into the same. Similarly, Peter and Muth (2023) noted that modern

political influencers on social media play an increasingly central role in electioneering, where their influence can shape the strategies, messages, and outcomes of political campaigns. use their platforms to encourage civic engagement, particularly among younger demographics who are less likely to participate in traditional political activities. This means they tend to promote political campaigns, especially for those their chosen candidate, and by extension promote voter registration, share information on polling places, and urging followers to participate in proper voting and monitoring of collation and results as part of their fundamental electioneering rights. Advancing the iisue of political discussion, Chwialkowska (2019) argued that social media has democratized access to political discussions, allowing individuals who might not otherwise have a platform to voice their opinions. By providing a conducive platform for political discourse, and engaging with diverse audiences, those from marginalized set, find the opportunity to lend their voices, even in non-formal languages. This helps them build more followership with people from different backgrounds.

However, Chwialkowska (2019) observed that social media entrepreneurs are also understood to contribute to voter suppression, either by spreading misinformation about voting procedures (e.g., incorrect polling times or requirements) or by promoting narratives that suggest voting is futile or rigged. In the same vein, Onu (2024) lamented that the nature of social media, which often rewards controversial or sensational content, also lead to increased polarization. This is evidence that social media entrepreneurs may exacerbate trends by posting provocative contents that may deepens ideological divides, thereby diminishing constructive political dialogue. This may pose threat to political development and improvement. In all of the issues reviewed, scholars seem to paid less attention to what these issues might mean for political science education. For this reason, the thrust of the study is on social media entrepreneurs as modern political influencers in Nigeria with emphasis on its implications on political science education.

Purpose of the Study

The study mainly examined social media entrepreneurs as modern political influencers in Nigeria; implications on political science education. Specifically, the study determined:

1. the extent of influence of social media entrepreneurs on partisan politics based on percentage.
2. the extent of influence of social media entrepreneurs on

electioneering campaigns based on percentage.
3. the extent of influence of social media entrepreneurs on voters' turnout based on percentage.
4. the extent of influence of social media entrepreneurs on political discussions based on percentage.

Research Questions

The following research questions were provided answers to in the study:

1. To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence partisan politics?
2. To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence electioneering campaigns?
3. To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence voters' turnout?
4. To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence political discussions?

Research Method

Research Design: The study adopted descriptive survey research design in carrying out the investigation. Nworgu (2015) described descriptive survey as the design that is aimed at collecting data and describing it in a systematic manner in line with the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The design was deemed appropriate for the study, because the researcher along with research assistants collected data from a portion of lecturers which was used to describe the extent to which social media entrepreneurs influence certain aspects of politics in Nigeria.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised 798 political science lecturers from government owned Colleges of Education in Southeast, Nigeria. This was comprised of 541 male lecturers and 257 female lecturers. The population was further composed of 506 lecturers from Federal Colleges of Education and 292 lecturers from State Colleges of Education.

Sample of the Study: The sample was composed of 399 political science lecturers, and was drawn through proportionate sampling procedure. The drawn sample size represents 50% of the population being targeted. This was made up of 271 male lecturers and 128 female lecturers. It further composed of 253 lecturers from Federal Colleges of Education and 146 from State Colleges of Education. The researcher thought 50% was appropriate for the study, as it was drawn in consonance with Nworgu who stated in 2015 that by proportionate sampling, 10% to 80% of the targeted population should be considered adequate for a research work.

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Instrument for Data Collection: A researcher's drafted instrument titled Social Media Entrepreneurs and Politics Questionnaire (SMEPQ) was deployed for data. The instrument had five sections, namely: A for demographic data; B for partisan politics; C for electioneering campaigns; D for voters' turnout, and E for political discussion. The instrument was structured on 3 options, namely: I think so; I can't say, and I don't think so.

Validation and Reliability of the Instrument: The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts, two in the Departments of Guidance and Counseling/Measurement and Evaluation and Political Science, School of Education, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. Cronbach alpha method which involved single administration of 40 copies of the instrument to Private College of Education within the zone confirmed the instrument to be reliable at the reliability coefficients: 0.81, 0.77, 0.75 and 0.77 respectively, for sections B, C, D and E.

Method of Data Collection: In collecting relevant data for the study, the researcher employed the service of 5 research assistants with himself. The research assistants were briefed by the researcher on the mode of distributing and retrieving the instrument. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed to principals at the schools and retrieve on-the-spot, except in some circumstance whereby the principal preferred an appointment in his/her preferred location. The data collection phase elapsed within 3 weeks which was set out for it. The direct and on the spot retrieval of the instrument ensured that 100% return rate was recorded.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, particularly pie chart and percentage were used to present, interpret and analyse the data.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence partisan politics?

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Table1:

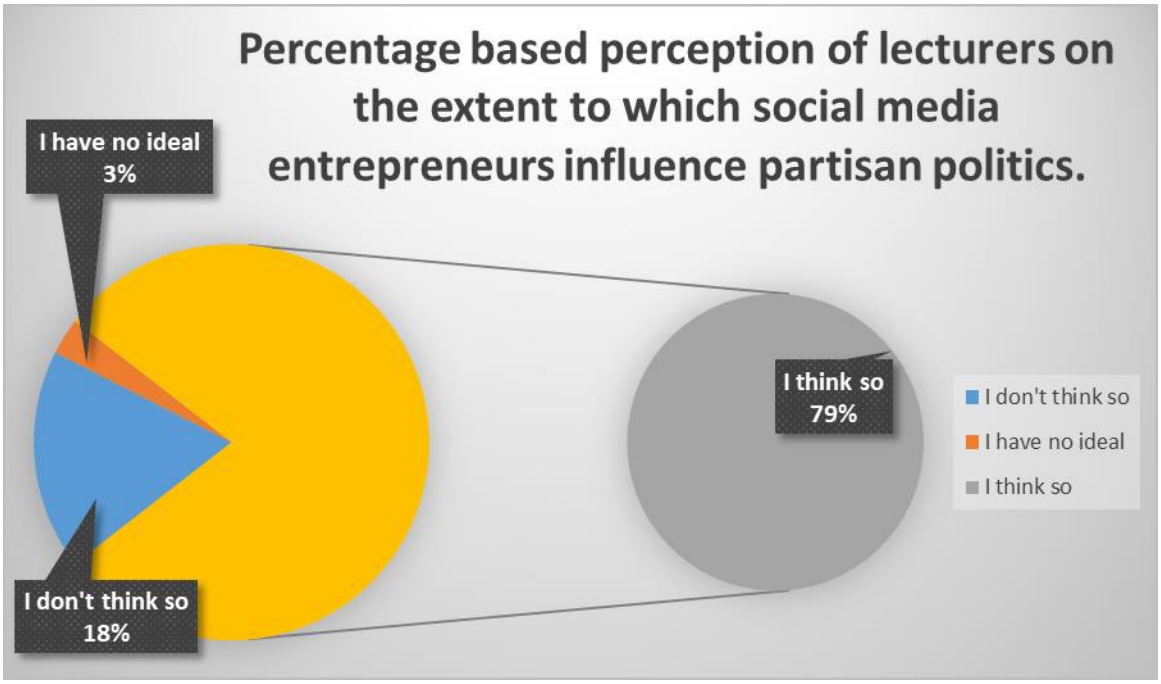
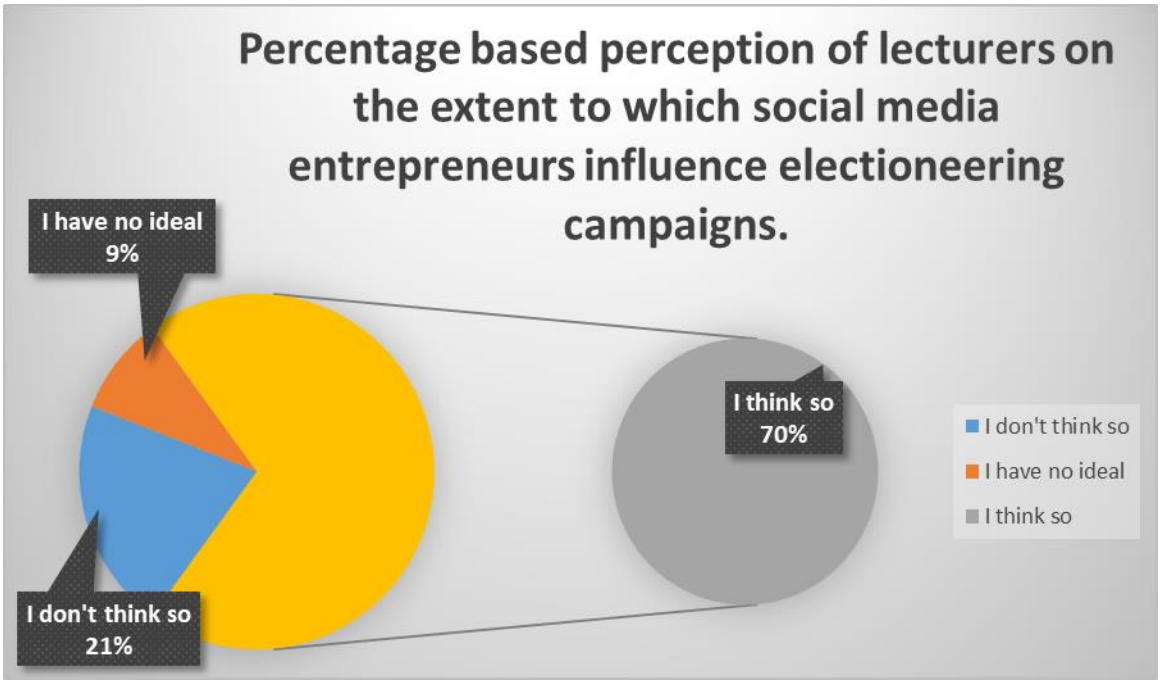


Table revealed that 79% of lecturers of political science think social media entrepreneurs influence partisan politics; 3% claimed not to have ideal of any influence, whereas 18% of them did not think partisan politics is influenced by social media entrepreneurs' activities. However, the social media entrepreneurial activities are considered to have influence on partisan politics because the percentage of respondents who perceived it so are more than 50%.

Research Question 2: To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence electioneering campaigns?

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Table 2

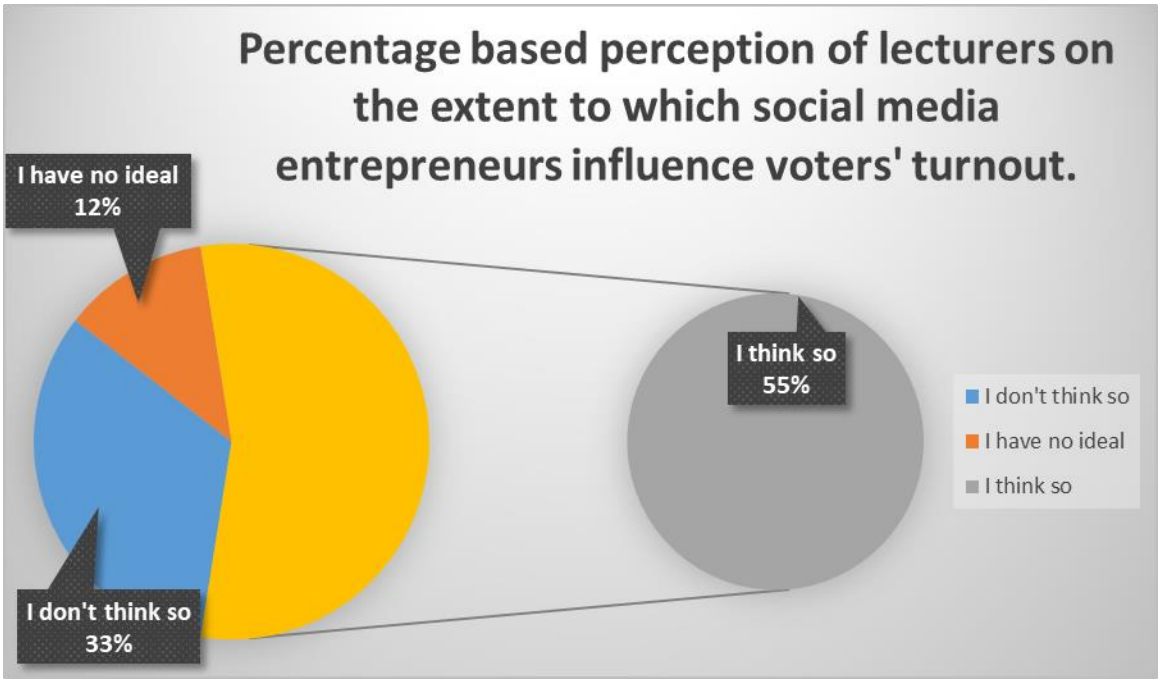


From table 2 it could be understood that 9% of lecturers claimed not to have any idea on whether or not social media entrepreneurs have influence on electioneering campaigns; 21% think it does not, while 70% think it influences electioneering campaigns. Base on this, social media entrepreneurs are considered to have influence on electioneering campaigns.

Research Question 3: To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence voters' turnout?

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Table 3

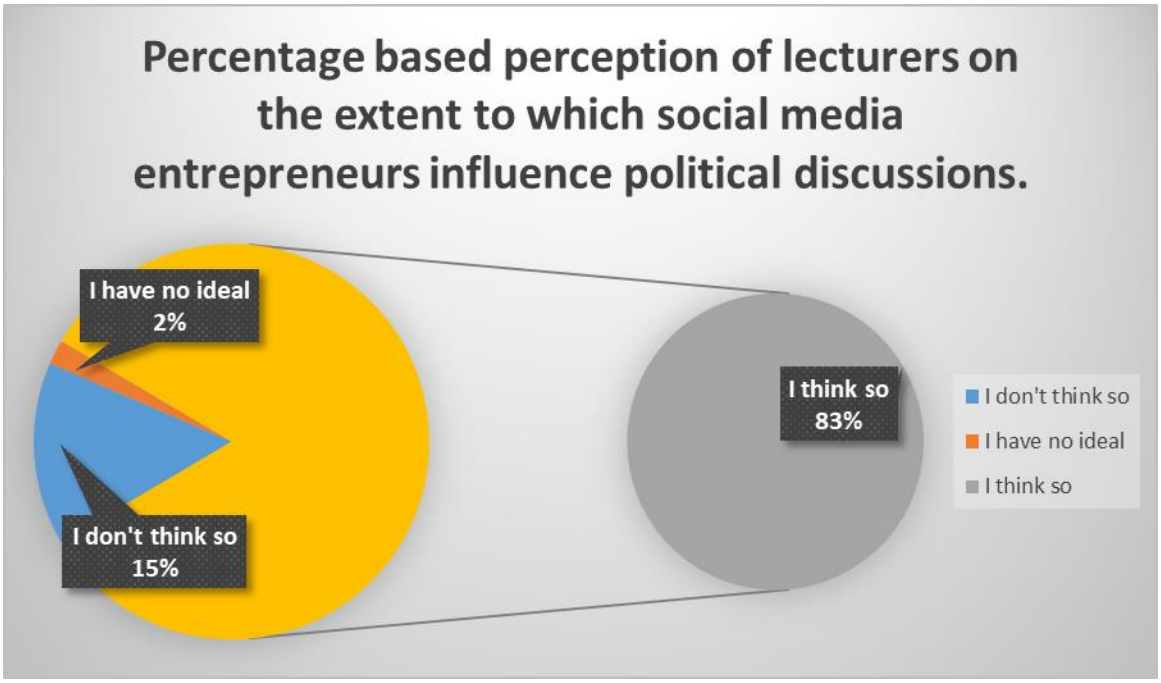


On table 3, 33% of lecturers revealed that social media entrepreneurs do not influence voters' turnout; 12% did not take any side, but 55% think that social media entrepreneurs influence voters' turnout. The latter with more than 50% rating is considered to have edge over the first two options, hence social media entrepreneurs have influence on voters' turnout.

Research Question 4: To what extent in percentage do social media entrepreneurs' influence political discussions?

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Table 4



Examining table 4 shows that 83% of responses think social media entrepreneurs influence political discussions; 15% of the responses were direct opposite to the first, while 2% of responses did not have of any influence. In all, the percentage ratings of those who think it has influence greater than 50%, hence their perspective is considered.

Discussion of Findings

The study reported that social media entrepreneurs have influence on partisan politics. This is in terms of the political parties' driven contents that they often post on their social media platforms, which are accessible to the general public, including those interested in party related matters. Similarly, Shahzeb, et at (2024) posited that there is an average 50-70 percent increase in engagement across platforms when an

influencer features a politician or explicitly shares partisan content on their channel, thereby making such content fit for on platform monetization.

It also reported that social media entrepreneurs influence electioneering campaigns. This is understandable perhaps because their platforms have often been deployed to canvassing for support to their preferred candidate(s), especially whenever election is approaching. The finding in consonance with Onu (2024) who reported that social media to a high extent influence students' political awareness. Students which the younger adults constitute a part of are known to be obsessed with surfing the internet for different influence of interest, and noticing that their beloved celebrity or influencer has announced acceptance of a particular candidate, by campaigning for him or her, will likely influence such followers to support the candidate too.

In furtherance, the study revealed that social media entrepreneurs influence turnout of voters. In the event of elections, possibilities are high that followers of a celebrity who has encouraged people to come out and exercise their franchise might attract acceptance, especially if the influencer is seeing casting his or her vote too. This is what the power of admiration does on admirers, who would do necessary things just to please the person they look up to. This was corroborated by Oladipo, et al (2020) whose findings revealed that social media has proven to be an essential tool to engage potential voters and create voting awareness which eventually leads to the followers showing loyalty by participating the elections.

Finally, the study reported that social media entrepreneurs have influence on political discussions. In tandem with the finding, Shahzeb et al (2024) posited that political actors prefer to engage with social media influencers over traditional media and journalists to bypass media and journalism ethics that may subject them to tough questions on policy issues and electoral commitments. This means that on social media platforms of the influencers, political matters or topics could be posted, requesting the general public and or his followers to share their opinions on the issues. A lot of followers often consider the social media as the flexible and affordable venue to air their views about political issues, historic and or contemporary.

Conclusion

Having empirical examined and analysed perceptions of political science lecturers in the study, it is understood that social media entrepreneurs as modern political influencers have been influencing a series of political issues in Nigeria. Social

media entrepreneurs influence partisan politics; electioneering campaigns; voters' turnout, and political discussions. The extent to which lecturers perceive the influence were slightly higher in the following orders: political discussions, partisan politics, electioneering campaigns, and voters' turnout. In all, social media entrepreneurs through their content creations, comments, shares and other inputs tend to influence the identified aspects of the followers' political life, hence should be harnessed for the better.

Recommendations/Implications for Political Science Education

Findings of the study imply that political science curricula may increasingly incorporate the study of social media influence on matters of partisan politics. This will enable departments of political science and political parties to harness and maximize the potentials in using social digital platforms to seek for more members and party affiliations, as well as examine the political behaviours of the general public in relation to social media.

It implies an open door for new areas of research on how to carry out, monitor, evaluate and report the success or failure of deploying social media influencers in electioneering campaigns. By this way, political science departments would be able to train students who understand how to leverage social media handles for reliable campaign information of the contesting political parties and candidate. As political campaigns increasingly use influencers, political science education might emphasize communication strategies and media training to prepare students for roles in digital campaigning and public relations.

It implies that social media platforms have become alternative monitoring mechanism for elections, as have been confirmed useful in reporting election results directly form the polling units, such that the public can easily follow up on the election proceedings via some reliable social media platforms of their preferred celebrity. This means the various departments of political science have to introduce digitally oriented curriculum that lays emphasis on how best to use social media handles to kick track of electioneering proceedings.

This implies that as influencers often promote particular ideologies, they can affect students' political beliefs. Political science educators may need to address how social media and influencer rhetoric shape political attitudes, perceptions, critical thinking and general political discourse. The use of social media analytics to study influencer's impact in attracting followers and audience to discussions on key political issues could become valuable skill in

political science programmes. Students might learn how to interpret trends, engagement metrics, and sentiment analysis.

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