

Examining the Influence of Social Media as Platforms for Voter Mobilisation and Participation in Nigeria's Southern Region

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Abstract

The subject matter of social media as platforms for voter mobilisation and participation in Nigeria has continued to generate interest in the academic and social domains. The influence of the platforms remains an issue of raging debates and academic exercises leading to greater insights. Despite the focus and interest, little is known about the use of certain mechanisms and messages in the mobilisation of the electorate. Accordingly, this study was conducted to examine the influence of social media as platforms for voter mobilisation and participation in Nigeria. Anchored on the cognitive mobilisation and agenda-setting theory, the study sought to examine social media mechanisms, specific messages and their influence during 2023 election. The study is based on a cross-sectional survey research design and relied on questionnaire as instrument of data collected administered to 587 sample of respondents statically determined from 9,259,968 which is the population of registered voters in the three select states of Delta, Edo and Rivers. Mixed-sampling technique of purposive, stratification, and simple random were adopted to select respondents. Results of the study demonstrate that Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) were the two most prominent social media platforms utilised for mobilisation as mechanisms like regular posts, narratives, counter-narratives, influencers, and emotionally-charged messaging were utilised. Various emotionally-charged messages were crafted, particularly bordering on faith on the electoral umpire and the vote cast as power to shape the future. The researcher concludes that though social media have great influence, it is not, however, absolute in respect of the behaviour and decisions of voters. The practical implication of the study is for political stakeholders to learn about the need for messaging in future polls.

Keywords: Campaigns, Electoral Umpire, Electorates, Mobilisation, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media have risen to become great tools for communication and as platforms for information dissemination. The introduction, adoption, acceptance, and use across the worlds have transformative impact on political communication and elections in the twenty-first century. This is buttressed with the assertion that new and social media are important tools that have

transformed the political landscape (Olaniran & Williams, 2020). This is easily seen in the creation of viable and direct channels between the citizens and politicians in order for them to have a two-way communication and information flow. From the transformation brought to rapid mobilisation to the bypassing of the traditional media gatekeepers, and enhancing modern participation formats in forms of shares, comments, likes, and organising, the social media phenomena in the political space is one with great impacts (Garcia, 2025; Kumar et al., 2023).

The use and adoption of the various social media platforms for diverse socio-political activities is causing a shift from the heavy dependence on the traditional media channels to more modern forms in many scenarios. In the international domain, this is not restricted to just the core political activities of mobilising but extends to social mobilisation of publics. Some of the international events that define the effective use of social media include the Barack Obama 2008 campaigns, the Arab Springs, the BlackLivesMatter, the EndSARS and other notable events of the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s. These events happen to herald the awareness and knowledge of the place of social media in global political communication, particularly social mobilisation aspects. The reawakening of the place of technology in mobilisation has caused tremendous changes in communication online and offline. This is particularly the case in consideration their place and importance in social mobilisation.

According to Inobemhe and Santas (2022), social media platforms are effective in mobilising people for collective action. The researchers took it from the perspective of mobilising for social movements as seen during the EndSARS protest because the social media platforms were seen as effective in the creation of accessible arenas for public debates and discourse on the matter of police brutality throughout the period. In our modern communication world, social media are used to rapidly spread information and misinformation. Through tools and mechanisms like real-time updates, shared visuals, and hashtags, users can leverage social media to bypass censorship, push awareness campaigns (as in the case of #BlackLivesMatter, #EndBadGovernance, #EndSARS), foster virtual communities, enable quick mobilisation for protests as well as coordinating the activities, and also promoting political movements.

In Africa, digital revolution has changed the pattern of political communication. As seen across the continent, digital platforms including social media caused a fundamental alteration to the political communication patterns, shifting power from the traditional media gatekeepers to a more liberal approach in which direct engagement between the citizens and their leaders take place virtually. It has also facilitated mass mobilisation and civic activism in an unprecedented manner (Ajaegbu & Ajaegbu, 2024). Nevertheless, the transformation is seen to be a double-edged sword in the sense that the rapid digitisation of communication across the continent also culminates in new challenges like increased government surveillance and

push for regulations as well as the spread of fake news and misinformation (Inobemhe et al., 2022). Regardless of the issues, people across the continent continue to adopt and use social media for information sharing and communication.

Nigeria, a country with a very high population density has its largely youthful population as serious social media users. According to Jimoh (2024), the country's large youth population spends long hours on a daily basis, navigating social media platforms. This is coupled with the data that reveal a notably high social media penetration rate estimated to be over 33 million active users (Jacob, 2021; Kemp, 2021). Accordingly, various social media platforms like WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram have become integral to political discourse, particularly among young persons (the youth) of the country (Agada & Ogande, 2025; Jalo, 2025). It is more like a takeover through alternative platforms offered in twenty-first century's digital age.

Though the use of social media as tools for mobilising the electorate for participation precedes the 2011 elections, the period however marked the first time it became noticeable as the platforms were used to campaign and mobilise voters across various political parties. The two leading candidates, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari leveraged social media tools to advance their cause and reach out to the electorate. Opeibi (2019) reveals that 2011 marked the period that politicians in Nigeria recognised the use of online platforms as channels to engage ordinary citizens and potential voters. Furthermore, the researcher shows that aside voter mobilisation, political stakeholders used the social media platforms to rebrand their identity and broadcast their political messages to a wider audience. In view of the volume of election-related contents online, subsequent elections in the country heralded a wider and greater acceptance of social media platforms either as mobilisation tools for politicians and their parties or participation platforms for the citizenry.

The elections conducted in 2015, 2019, and 2023 in the country witnessed a steady increase in the reliance on the social media as platforms for voter mobilisation (Obinna & Chiadika, 2025). The most visible example of the use of the platforms was seen in the mobilising roles by the "Obidient" movement which used social media for mass mobilisation and crowdfunding during the 2023 elections (Agbim et al., 2023; Igwe & Maduka, 2025). The movement's great acceptance and use of social media has been referenced in a study in which results demonstrate that the Labour Party was recognised as the political party with the most social-media-focused campaign (Inobemhe et al., 2025). Within the period, social media were not just mere channels for campaigns but effective tools that were used to target voter behaviour change and engagement with the electorate. This has been demonstrated many by researchers that highlight the impact of social media on electoral activities and voting behaviour of the electorate (Ohaja et al., 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, studies have shown that the use of social media within the Nigerian electoral space has had significant and positive influence such as enhanced participation, voter education, and increased political awareness (Akpofure & Efebeh, 2025; Ayeni, 2019; Ibanga et al., 2020; Inobemhe, 2025; Kuye-Aremu & Adelabu, 2025). In fact, empirical evidence also shows that social media are veritable tools for mobilising support of the Nigerian electorate (Alaba & Ogande, 2025; Alade, 2025; Nwankwo, 2025; Odon, 2024). Despite the positive influence of social media, there are challenges that range from the proliferation of fake news, online manipulation, hate speech, and misinformation among others capable of occasioning distortions in public perception and an eventual compromise of electoral integrity.

Whereas empirical evidence from studies such as Aideloje et al. (2024), Alaba and Ogande (2024), Odon (2024), and Olayinka (2025) cover areas like the general impact and influence of social media platforms, little is known about the mechanisms leveraged across the various platforms to influence both the mobilisation and participation of the electorate, particularly in different demographics. Relatedly, not much is also known about the use of specific messages and the influence of such on voter mobilisation and participation in elections across Nigeria. Therefore, this study addresses these limitations and takes on the influence of specific messages on the voters during the 2023 presidential election in South of Nigeria. Particularly, the researcher examines the use of social media during the election taking on the types, political party usage, mechanisms adopted and the influence of specific social media-disseminated messages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the social media types used for mobilising voters during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?
2. What political party mostly utilised social media as tool for voter mobilisation during the election?
3. What are the mechanisms deployed by political parties to mobilise the voters?
4. What is the influence of specific social media messages on voters' decision during the election?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Social Media

The concept of social media is multidisciplinary as the platforms have since become popular in different fields. However, some scholars and researchers have attempted to explain the social media phenomena. According to Davies (2016), social media refer to interactive Internet applications that facilitate

communication either by an individual or group of individuals, the curation, and distribution of user-generated content. This definition as offered by the scholar prepares the ground for a comprehensive understanding of what the concept of social media entails. Currently, the platforms that fall under the social media category are highly interactive and require the Internet to establish connections. This implies that social media are numerous platforms with great features. Therefore, the concept considered as an umbrella word for such platforms that enable connections between users and allow for dissemination of information.

Another understanding of social media is based on the explanation offered by Islam et al. (2019) in which social media are described as applications and tools that enable users (groups and individuals) gather, share, and communicate information which could be in form of images, messages, and content in a collaborative manner with others in real time. This is an emphasis on the instantaneity and interactivity nature of social media. Under the categorisation of social media are platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, SnapChat, and WeChat among others. These information-sharing and communication platforms transcend physical and virtual boundaries enabling connection across different parts of the world.

Social Media and Voter Mobilisation in Nigeria

Social media platforms continue to garner acceptance and adoption as tools relied upon to perform varied tasks including learning, communication of different types (political, health, climate change, and crisis), and information dissemination among other aspects. In political communication, social media platforms are not just used to disseminate information but are leveraged as tools to mobilise voters to take part in the voting process of a country (Kim et al., 2025; Inobemhe & Asemah, 2025; Zhao, 2025). This is in addition to being twenty-first century's spaces for discussing and participating in politics (Abdu et al., 2018; Alodat et al., 2023). From this perspective, social media platforms serve as point of convergence where leaders and the citizens interact on different matters including policies, development and more. The platforms greatly transform the idea of mobilising people to participate in political events from the analogue to digital strategies.

As social media adoption continues to gain grounds in the electoral landscape of Nigeria, people have devised new ways to put them to judicious use. Content creation is one aspect that has gained grounds in Nigeria as influencers leverage the platforms to expand their followings (Olufemi et al., 2025). Politicians and other stakeholders also rely on the powers of influencers to advance their political cause (Borchers, 2025; Venu et al., 2025). As seen in Nigeria's 2023 elections, different influencers were visible in their assignment of supporting one political candidate or another (Uwalaka et al., 2024). The support base of major political actors in the country is often solidified by the hiring of social media influencers with large followings to

push certain narratives that promote their ideologies or desires to govern or perpetually remain in leadership positions.

Despite the positive use, there are challenges which are manifested in the rapid spread of fake news, hate speech, and misinformation across the social media platforms (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025; Inobemhe et al., 2020). According to Kuye-Aremu and Adelabu (2025), political arguments which often result in hostility online, fake news, misinformation on political matters and more, are some of the challenges associated with using social media. Relatedly, Shadrach (2023) shows that though social media was initially created for good, it is now being used for the wrong purposes by young persons. The researcher reveals that it is also the situation in Nigeria where young individuals use the platforms to spread evil. This implies that though social media can be a force for good, same platforms can also be used to promote negativities in society as seen in rapid spread of hate speech, fake news, and misinformation in twenty-first century virtual spaces in Nigeria.

Empirical evidence on the use of social media as platforms for mobilising voters to participation in election abound. In a study conducted by Matsilele and Nkoala (2022), the focus was on the use of social media as tool for partisan messaging by select female politicians in South Africa. Findings show that the six female politicians of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Democratic Alliance (DA), and African National Congress (ANC) leveraged media platforms to promote their activities. This use by the politicians asserts social media's agency in shaping public discourse. It also challenges the traditional sense of gatekeeping popular with the traditional media. The gap from the study is population and specific focus on politicians in South Africa. Therefore, this study bridges that gap by focusing on a population in Nigeria, and taking a look at the influence of specific social media messages disseminated in a particular election cycle.

A related study also reveals that Nigerians are active users of social media platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram and that they used the platforms to follow political conversations and were exposed to shared contents across the platforms during the 2025 local government elections conducted in Osun State (Kuye-Aremu & Adelabu, 2025). In the study, the researchers further demonstrate that fake news, online political arguments, political misinformation and more characterised the elections and are considered as major challenges with the use of social media. The gap from the study under review stems from the population and specific geographical scope. Consequently, this current study takes on a different population, particularly focusing on three states in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Furthermore, there are cases of practical knowledge gap from the reviewed studies. This informed the current study as the researcher attempts to create practical scenarios and generate insights as to the use of social media to mobilise voters taking a cue from the 2023 presidential election conducted in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on cognitive mobilisation and agenda-setting theory. The cognitive mobilisation theory has its roots traced to the works of Ronald Inglehard in the 1960s and the contributions later made by Russel J. Dalton. According to Dalton (1984), the cognitive theory is about individuals' capacity to gain cognitive cues to guide them toward a decision as in voting or participating in political activities. The theory's main focus is that people can develop skills (known as cognitive capacity) to understand politics through their exposure to information via channels like the media. The outcome of such exposure is an increase in political sophistication, thereby reducing reliance/dependence on political institutions like parties. In the digital era, social media are considered as the media of communication and information dissemination, and users exposed to information across platforms can experience cognitive development politically. This study is anchored on the cognitive mobilisation theory to systematise ideas about social media use, voter mobilisation and engagement.

The agenda-setting is another theory upon which this study is anchored. The theory's origin is traced to the extensive works of McCombs and Donald Shaw based on their 1972 study (Asemah et al., 2022). The assumption of the theory is that the media do not just reflect reality but filters and shapes it through the process of choosing what to focus on. As such, issues that are given the media attention become visible and noticeable to the point that members of the public perceive those issues as important compared to others not played up in same manner. This is the idea behind salient. In essence, media filters reality, the public gives priority to media's agenda (filtered and presented), the media transfers salience, and provide the public what to think about. In respect of the use of social media for political mobilisation, agenda setting is seen from the perspective of using the platforms to influence public perception on certain political matters with specific intention being to drive political engagement and action.

METHODS

The study is based on cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised electorate in three select states of South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The official records of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) puts the figure of registered voters in the three states of Delta, Edo, and Rivers at 9,259,968 implying a high level of registration. A sample of 587 was taken relying on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination formula. Mixed sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. Whereas purposive sampling was used to select the three states, major highways in the capital cities (of Asaba, Delta State, Benin City, Edo State, and Port-Harcourt, Rivers State) were stratified.

Household along the major roads were randomly selected to administer the survey instrument to persons ages 18 and above who are deemed as eligible voters under the electoral laws of Nigeria.

The survey instrument (questionnaire) was designed with 5-point Likert Scale and coded accordingly: (Strongly agree = 5 and Disagree = 1). The reliability check on the instrument to determine internal consistency was conducted in which case there was a good result (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.887$) implying that the instrument of data collection is good which confirms its reliability. This was preceded by the face validation by communication experts in the Department of Mass Communication, Glorious Vision University, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria. Through the services of research assistants, the study actualised 95.09% response rate with 558 copies of questionnaire retrieved from the field survey and considered valid due to completeness data. The data were analysed through the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 relying on descriptive survey techniques, particularly percentages, mean score, and standard deviation.

RESULTS

The study's data are presented in tables below.

Table 1: Social Media Channels Mostly Utilised by Political Parties for Voters' Mobilisation during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Prevalence	Frequency	Percentage
X [Formerly Twitter]	10	1.8
Facebook	109	19.5
Facebook; X [Formerly Twitter]	229	41.0
Facebook; Instagram	2	.4
WhatsApp	74	13.3
WhatsApp; Facebook	6	1.1
WhatsApp; Facebook; X [Formerly Twitter]	29	5.2
WhatsApp; Facebook; Instagram; X [Formerly Twitter]	46	8.2
WhatsApp; Facebook; Instagram; X [Formerly Twitter]; YouTube	7	1.3
Total	558	100.0

Source: Survey, 2025

Data in Table 1 demonstrate that Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) (41.0%) were the most utilised social media platforms for voter mobilisation as political parties leveraged the platforms to engage the electorate. A significant number of respondents (109, 19.5%) also think Facebook was greatly used and WhatsApp (74, 13.3%) was also identified as prominently deployed.

Table 2: Political Parties that Used Social Media as Channels for Voter Mobilisation the Most during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Survey Item	Frequency	Percentage
PDP – Peoples Democratic Party	109	19.5
APC – All Progressives Congress	159	28.5
LP – Labour Party	290	52.0
Total	558	100.0

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 2 data reveal that the Labour Party (290, 52.0%) was the political that utilised social media the most as channels for mobilising the electorate during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. In essence, the political party is the most pro-social media among the major ones that fielded presidential candidates. Furthermore, data in the table demonstrate that the All Progressives Congress (159, 28.5%) and Peoples Democratic Party (109, 19.5%) also utilised the platforms but not as greatly deployed by the LP.

Table 3: Mechanisms Used by Political Parties in their Voter Mobilisation Drive during the Election

Survey Item	Frequency	Percentage
Regular posts	102	18.3
Social media influencers	44	7.9
Narratives	68	12.2
Counter-narratives	59	10.5
Emotionally-charged messages	285	51.1
Total	558	100.0

Source: Survey, 2025

The data in Table 3 show that various mechanisms were used by the political parties in their quest to mobilise voters to take part in the elections.

However, emotionally-charged messages (285, 51.1%) were the most prominent across social media platforms implying that the parties appealed to the emotions of Nigerians during campaigns. Nevertheless, the parties also leveraged other mechanisms like regular post (102, 18.3%), narratives (68, 12.2%), counter-narratives (59, 51.1%), and social media influencers (44, 7.9%).

Table 4: Specific Emotionally-Charged Messages that Motivated the Voters during the 2023 Presidential Election in South-South Nigeria

Prevalence	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
<i>Nigeria stands at a threshold of history</i> message on SM motivated me to participate in the 2023 presidential election	3.45	1.365	Significant
<i>Your vote will count</i> message on SM motivated me to participate	3.91	1.168	Significant
<i>No sell your vote</i> message on SM motivated me to participate	4.22	1.316	Significant
<i>Your vote is your power</i> message on SM motivated me to participate	3.99	.853	Significant
<i>Come out and vote to secure your future</i> message on SM motivated me	3.74	1.071	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 4 reveal that various messages were used to appeal to the emotions of the voters to get them to the polling units to perform their civic duties of voting. According to the data, messages crafted as *no sell your vote* ($\bar{x} = 4.22$. SD = 1,316), *your vote is your power* ($\bar{x} = 3.99$. SD = .853), *your vote will count* ($\bar{x} = 3.91$. SD = 1.168), *come out and vote* ($\bar{x} = 3.74$. SD = 1.071), and *Nigeria stands at a threshold of history* ($\bar{x} = 3.45$. SD = 1.365) were dominantly utilised by the major political parties of PDP, APC, and the LP for the purpose of mobilising the majority of Nigerian voters to vote.

Table 5: Political Messages' Influence on Decision to Vote during the 2023 Presidential Election in South-South Nigeria

Prevalence	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
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Political messages to which I was exposed across social media influenced my decision to vote	3.85	1.067	Significant
Social media was used to influence my behaviour and response towards certain messages and information	3.14	.993	Significant
To what extent were social media used to influence your behaviour and response towards certain messages and information during the 2023 presidential election	2.54	1.279	Not Significant
To what extent did the information on the candidates disseminated across social media platforms arouse your interest in voting the political party and candidate	2.59	1.326	Not Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 data highlight the place of exposure to social media messages and how that influenced decision to participate in election. As seen in the table, the mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.85$) is an indication that political messages encountered on social media influenced the electorate's decision to vote. Relatedly, social media was used to influence voters behaviour and reactions to certain messages and information ($\bar{x} = 3.14$. $SD = .993$). The implication is that social media showed significant influence. Conversely, the mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.54$. $SD = 1.279$) demonstrate that the influence on behaviour was insignificant while the score ($\bar{x} = 2.59$. $SD = 1.326$) implies that the extent that the social media information arouse interest in voting the political party and candidate was also insignificant.

DISCUSSION

Findings of the study show that different social media platforms were utilised by the political parties. As seen in the data presented in Table 1, 41.0% respondents are of the notion that Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) were the social media platforms mostly utilised for voter mobilisation during the electioneering campaigns across the states of the South-South geo-political region of Nigeria. In essence, there is knowledge and adoption of specific social media platforms among political parties in the country. This also resonates with results of previous studies that demonstrate the use of social media platforms are tools for mobilising voters during elections in Nigeria (Asuquo,

2024; Agada & Ogande, 2025). Specifically, results of some of the studies demonstrate the use of Twitter (now X) (Agbim et al., 2023; Chukwuma et al., 2023), Facebook (Dauda & Daranijo, 2025; Wunuke, 2025), and WhatsApp (Ngoka et al., 2024; Nwosu & Eze, 2025) as platforms for voter mobilisation the country's elections. The larger implication is that the ruling class and the citizens are actively engaged in communication through various social media platforms.

Political parties actively utilised various social media platforms to rally support for their candidates and political cause during the election. Accordingly, data reveal that 52.0% respondents think that among the three major parties, Labour Party (LP) dominantly utilised social media as platforms for mobilising voters during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Related results from different studies also demonstrated how political parties visibly used social media as tools for mobilising voters to participate in elections across the country (Asuquo, 2024; Bamidele et al., 2023; Ogande et al., 2025; Okolie & Orji, 2024). Observedly, the use of the social media and related online tools and platforms was mainstreamed into the core political activities prior to elections in the country as demonstrated in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections.

The mechanisms used by political parties in their voter mobilisation drive during the elections range from the regular posts on social media to deliberately creating certain narratives, counter-narratives, the use of influencers as well as crafting and deploying emotionally-charged messages. Data in Table 3 demonstrate that 51.1% respondents believe that emotionally-charged messages permeated the social media space and as such qualify as the mechanism used the most to mobilise the electorate during the election. Result of Ajiteru's (2025) study reveals that ethno-religious sentiments that characterised previous elections were adopted in the campaigns messages by major political parties to stoke emotions. This directly buttresses the result on the use of emotionally-charged messages during the 2023 election. It is actually based on the knowledge and understanding that Nigerians are emotional people, particularly when issues border on their ethnic nationality and religious affiliations.

In respect of the influence of specific messages that motivated the voters during the 2023 presidential election, results of the study highlight that various messages were crafted to pull voters out of their homes to participate in the elections. The data show that *no sell your vote* ($\bar{x} = 4.22$. SD = 1,316), *your vote is your power* ($\bar{x} = 3.99$. SD = .853), *your vote will count* ($\bar{x} = 3.91$. SD = 1.168), *come out and vote* ($\bar{x} = 3.74$. SD = 1.071), and *Nigeria stands at a threshold of history* ($\bar{x} = 3.45$. SD = 1.365) permeated the social media space during the period of electioneering campaigns. The implication is that political stakeholders in their campaigns considered these thematic areas such as the need to have faith in the electoral umpire and the system, the need to perform

civic duties by voting, and the power of the vote of an individual voter, and that Nigeria's survival depends on voting.

The foregoing results on specific messages resonate with findings from studies in which data demonstrate that Nigerians were exposed to all form of messaging during the election (Okolie & Orji, 2024; Oni et al., 2024). The most significant objective for the messages was to get the voters to actively participate in the elections. Elections in Nigeria are characterised and sometimes marred by voter apathy, suppression, and loss of faith on the electoral umpire (Bayode & Monday, 2023; Yusuf, 2023). Additional, the fact that certain messages designed for mobilisation were crafted and disseminated across social media platforms is an indication that platforms can also be used to set agenda for public discourse, particularly on socio-political issues. This mirrors the propositions of the agenda-setting theory as certain messages were designed and spread across social media in order to shape/influence how the voters think about the candidates and the election.

Political messages to which the voters were exposed across social media platforms influenced their decision to vote during the elections ($\bar{x} = 3.85$. $SD = 1.067$). Additionally, social media was used as medium to influence the behaviour and response towards certain messages and information disseminated to the voters. However, the extent social media influenced behaviour was not significant ($\bar{x} = 2.54$. $SD = 1.279$). Relatedly, the extent information on candidates on social media arouse interest on voting was also insignificant ($\bar{x} = 2.59$. $SD = 1.326$). This indicates that though social media influenced voting decision but the platforms had no absolute influence on general voting behaviour or choice of candidate during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the results on the influence imply that various other considerations must have played significant roles as demonstrated in studies in which results show ethnic, regional, and religious sentiments as some of the factors that greatly influenced voters in Nigeria, particularly during 2023 elections (Ezedikachi & Ogunsanya, 2025; Idowu & Iyabode, 2024; Joshua et al., 2025; Rufai et al., 2024). Specifically, Muhammad (2023) reveals that ethnicity and religion have become Siamese twins in the electoral space of Nigeria. This goes to demonstrate that irrespective of the level of campaigns and efforts, some Nigerians have their minds made up – greatly shaped by ethno-religious factors. On a related note, the data that show that voters were influenced but not the type of influence with absolute capacity to alter voting behaviours imply the cognitive capacity of the voters in agreement with the assumption of the cognitive mobilisation theory.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that various social media platforms were leveraged by the political class as tools for mobilising the electorate to

participate in the 2023 presidential election in different parts of Southern Nigeria. Accordingly, the study shows that LP party was visibly seen to utilise the platforms to engage voters while mechanisms such as emotionally-charged messages, the use of influencers, narratives and counter-narratives, and regular posts were prominent during the election. The results of the study further affirm the use of emotionally-charged messages to engage voters as various messages crafted include *no sell your vote, your vote is your power, your vote will count, come out and vote*, and *Nigeria stands at a threshold of history*. These political messages greatly influenced certain voting decisions and impacted voter behaviour during the polls. However, the influence cannot be considered as absolute as other factors were glaringly at play during the elections – ethno-religious and regional considerations were some of the glaring issues observed.

Accordingly, it is part of the conclusion that though social media may possess certain levels of influence as platforms for communication and dissemination of political information towards mobilising voters during elections, the platforms do not weigh absolute influence on the behaviour of voters during polls as seen during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election in the Southern Nigerian states of Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The practical implication of the findings of this study is that future elections can leverage emotional message crafting as a major strategy to engage and mobilise the electorate. As Nigeria prepares for elections in 2027, stakeholders can begin to look in-ward to develop effective messages through which the actions and behaviour of the electorate can be greatly influenced. Future studies should focus on comparative use of social media by various political parties while taking evaluative look at their use in subsequent off-cycle or general elections in Nigeria.

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