

Social Media as Platforms for Voter Mobilisation and Participation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In a functional democracy, participation in elections is considered as a duty of citizens. In modern times, social media platforms are powerful tools for communication and there is a growing adoption and utilisation. Ignoring these important platforms as tools for mobilisation could mean excluding a vibrant population who are users of the communication tools. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the influence of social media as platforms for voter mobilisation and participation during the 2023 election in Nigeria and considered survey as research design also using online channels to administer the questionnaires. Select states of Edo, Delta and Rivers in the South-South region composed of the geographical scope of the study with 548 valid responses received from citizens and voters from the area. Findings demonstrated that social media were influential platforms for voter mobilisation and participation during the election. Findings further showed that various social media platforms such as Facebook, X and WhatsApp were prominently utilised as mobilisation tools and that their use influenced voting decision but not the general voter behaviour as widely found in many social media-related election mobilisation studies. The researchers concluded that though social media are of great influence on voters' decisions but do not have absolute power on voter behaviour and recommended continuous and sustained use of platforms as mobilisation platforms. The socio-political implication of this study is the usefulness and effectiveness of social media platforms in political mobilisation and participation.

Keywords: Elections; Electorate; Mobilisation; Participation; Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Voter mobilisation for participation is a function of political communication. The idea is to communicate with the electorate in a bid to obtain their support in an election. Several factors influence the decisions of voters to vote a particular candidate. Within the Nigerian electoral space and context, socio-cultural, ethno-religious, and economic considerations are some of the factors influencing voters. They align with the mobilisation theory of voter turnout in their behaviour and decision on the political party or group to lend their support. This makes voter mobilisation in the country a complex endeavour because aside such efforts at mobilising, various other considerations contribute to the eventual decision on whether or not to support a particular candidate or party in an election.

According to Umar et al. (2022), socio-cultural factors are often responsible for voter decision. Aside social and cultural factors, personal reasons could also form the basis upon which voters take voting decision in an election. Educational attainment, level of religious attachment and economic consideration are some of the socio-cultural factors that could influence voting behaviour of eligible voters in a society like Nigeria (Olatunji et al., 2023).

Additionally, the socio-cultural factors are categorised into evaluative and non-evaluative as well as rational and irrational. In a study, Akhter and Sheikh (2014) showed that the irrational and non-evaluative factors such as money, religion, and caste influenced the voting behaviour of citizens in India. Findings of another study further demonstrated that money in form of vote-buying influenced the behaviour of individual voters in different elections in Nigeria (Adeleke et al., 2024; Ajayi, 2025; Uwa & Emeka, 2022; Yakubu, 2020).

Aside the socio-cultural factors, other factors also affect voter behaviour and decision during elections. These factors are at the individual-level. At that level, the individual is affected based on his personal conviction and psychological frame coupled with the social issues to which s/he is exposed at a particular point in time. This implies that a number of factors could play a role in respect of how an individual receive political messages to which s/he is exposed. In line with the foregoing, Şener et al. (2023) identified socio-psychological factors that could influence voting decisions of persons in our society. This has also been buttressed with the assertion that personality, gender, conscientiousness, steadiness, dominance and several other personal-level factors influence voter behaviour (Kumar & Reddy, 2024). In essence, psycho-social factors such as demographic and personality are strong indicators and determinants of voting behaviour intention.

Additionally, socio-cultural, socio-psychological factors, and related personal-level factors influence voter behaviour which culminates in voting decision. Nevertheless, individuals and groups interested in political power usually attempt to get as many voters as possible through voter mobilisation efforts. The basis for this is that political calculations and actions are usually taken by actors despite the understanding that several factors aside actions of political actors could be responsible for why citizens take decisions to support or oppose some candidates and political parties during election. A number of researchers have also buttressed the importance of voter mobilisation despite other considerations/factors in different societies (Mann & Haenshen, 2024; Wurst et al., 2023; Yamao & Hamanaka, 2021). Put mildly, voter mobilisation is still a consideration regardless of the knowledge that citizens have a mind of their own in addition to several external factors that could affect decision.

Voter mobilisation is a crucial component of a political campaign and social media are the vehicles. John and Ibe (2019) lent credence that social media are crucial to political parties and politicians, providing platforms for them to gain support, promote open participation, and continuous as well as open conversations. Furthermore, digital campaigns as seen in the case of social media mobilisation depict digital media-enabled campaigns. According to Atalay (2023), digital media campaigns offer more interactive, targeted, and engaging approach as opposed to the emotion-laden and large masses-targeted traditional media campaign types. Similarly, Agbim et al. (2023) asserted that social media have become effective tools for campaign wherein political parties and their candidates can interact directly with voters, reach a wide audience, and shape opinion. This indicates that technology has changed the dynamics of political campaigns based on the numerous advantages including the engaging and interactive aspects where citizens can have direct access to political actors.

Social media are 21st century's technological advancements that simplified communication. This also includes political communication aspects as Theocharis et al. (2023) noted that social media occasioned new opportunities for online political participation with no direct offline equivalent. On account of being bounded by less space and time constraints, social media platforms facilitate more online political participation (Kim et al., 2024). As mobilisers canvass support for a political cause, party or candidate in an election, the voting publics who are exposed to such messages tend to align and participate. These platforms serve as critical tools for political campaigns in modern time (Cremers et al., 2022). Accordingly, Russmann (2022) explained that upon the realisation of the usefulness of social

media as effective tools for political mobilisation, political parties are prioritising investment in social media to support their campaign goals – part of which is to win elections.

Social media-enabled voter mobilisation has continued to gain grounds in this part of the world. In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, different political parties and their candidates used social media platforms at different levels to engage with the voting public. These engagements, research has shown yielded results. For instance, Twitter (now X) was found to be influential in the Labour Party campaigns nicknamed Obidient Movement (Agbim et al., 2023). Significant result from the study demonstrated that the use of social media platforms helped foster political consciousness on both supporters and non-supporters of the movement in the 2023 presidential election. Various other social media platforms were also leveraged for the purpose of voter mobilisation and participation during the election. However, the ultimate decider was voting public who were obligated to vote their preferred candidates at the polls. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the influence of the platforms on the mobilisation of voters to participate in the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election.

It is noteworthy that in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, social media opened the space for the youth to aggressively participate in the electoral process. For instance, a study by Ezeigbo (2024) demonstrated that the youth of Nigeria significantly used social media platforms during the election. The implication of this is that the platforms are increasingly being recognised as effective avenues to engage the population during elections. A point of concern is considering future polls without the use of these platforms. This is a concern considering the fact that majority of young voters spend long hours daily to navigate social media platforms. A Gallup report earlier revealed that 51 percent of teenagers in the United States of America spend an average of 4.8 hours are on social media in a day (Rothwell, 2023). A related report released by the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) also showed that in the country, over 40 million users spend an average of 6 hours daily on social media platforms (Jimoh, 2024). Different other reports of significance revealed related figures that ranged from 3 to 6 hours spent on the platforms on a daily basis (Aduloju, 2020; Akinola & Opawale, 2022; Ngoso, 2019; Obafemi et al., 2023).

The political landscape has, therefore, seen new dimensions of participation owing to the wide adoption and utilisation of social media platforms for political purposes including mobilisation and participation. The implication is that there is greater access to social media. Additionally, findings of relevant studies have shown a greater use of platforms in the recent election in Nigeria (Aideloje et al., 2024; Damulak et al., 2024; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Okon et al., 2025). Considering the foregoing, what then would be the outcome especially in terms of awareness creation, voter mobilisation and participation if social media were not utilised? These and the need to ascertain the influence of the platforms informed the conduct of this study which is primarily about the use of the platforms during the 2023 presidential election. This provides grounds for a clearer conception of the dynamics of future elections without the platforms as tools for mobilisation. This is an evaluation study that contributes to knowledge of the impact of social media adoption to elections in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the social media types used for mobilising voters for participation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. It was also conducted to ascertain the influence of social media as tools for mobilising voters for Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Noticeable reminder theory and the cognitive mobilisation theory provide the framework for this study. The noticeable reminder theory is possibly the most prominent in respect of the

effects of using technology to get voter turnout (Malhotra et al., 2011). The theory explains ways in which people process and respond to reminders, particularly as it concerns persuasive communication (Cialdini, 2009). According to Thaler and Sunstein (2009), the theory's assumption is that registered voters have the tendencies of having the intention to vote, but may falter due to the time constraint coupled with attention and planning, in which case just a nudge is required to remind them on their intention to vote. Hirvonen et al. (2025) explained that such action amount to mobilisation. Different avenues that come across to the audience through their mobile devices may be effective in that regard because they pay attention to their phones and messages received may not be ignored after all. This is also based on the position of Dale and Strauss (2009) that text messages sent to voters' mobile phones was effective in this context.

The key principles of the theory are in form of noticeability, relevance and timing (Fogg, 2003). *Noticeability* principle is that reminders designed for the voters must be noticeable with the tendency to grab their attention and it is only on this note that such can be said to be effective. The second principle is *relevance* and this implies that the reminder has to be relevant to the person's interests, values and goals to have lasting effect and cause one to act in certain way as desired by the sender. *Timing* which happened to be the last principle of the theory is based on the idea of ensuring that reminders are delivered at the right moment. It is only when such reminders are timely that impact can be maximised. The process of noticeable reminder includes initial exposure, encoding, reminder, retrieval and response. At the response state, the person exposed to the message can have a behaviour change or make a decision. This theory provides the framework for this study to understand how social media messages influenced voters during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Cognitive mobilisation theory is the second theory upon which this study is anchored. This theory is based on the works of Russel Dalton (Dalton, 1984) focusing on how people are mobilised to take part in political cause. Dalton (1984) explained that cognitive mobilisation is critical in political engagement and involves the development of political consciousness, interest, awareness and sophistication. In the process, individuals are exposed to cognitive cues upon which they base their voting decisions. They also rely on such cues to take final decisions on participating in election-related matters. In the theory's most basic form, political engagements and education designed for an individual is to ensure that his/her mental capabilities are mobilised toward participation in politics (Amechi et al., 2018). In essence, the theory is about the use of cognitive cues to leverage voter education toward mobilising voters to participate in an election.

Another principle of this theory is political information by which it emphasises that political information is crucial as it is relied upon to stimulate cognitive mobilisation in addition to exposure to political discourse, news and education. According to Dalton (1984), reception of the political information precedes cognitive processing and based on this principle, the person is expected to process political information using cognitive mechanisms such as perception, memory and attention and this may lead to increased political awareness and eventually "interest" to participate. In the cognitive mobilisation stages, there is the place of initial awareness, interest development and sophistication. Being the last phase, sophistication is when the individual reaches that stage of full development of nuanced knowledge of politics and this includes the capacity to evaluate complex information and have opinions from informed perspective. This theory is applied to this study to provide grounds for understanding the application of social media for mobilising voters to participate in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

METHOD

This study is quantitative and survey method was adopted to elicit quantitative data from the respondents. Population of the study includes three states of South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The researchers purposively selected Delta, Edo and Rivers and wards such as West End, New Benin and PH Township were included as areas of the study. Closed-ended questionnaire was designed for this purpose relying on a 5-point Likert Scale instrument structured in the order of strongly disagree = 5, disagree = 4, can't tell = 3, strongly agree = 2, and agree = 1 in order to make for ease-of-data collection, presentation and analysis. This instrument was subjected to face validity by communication experts in the Department of Mass Communication, Glorious Vision University, Ogwa in Edo State, Nigeria. The Cronbach's alpha was utilised to determine the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. The result showed 0.935 composite reliability and this indicate strong internal instrument consistency. Multistage sampling technique was relied upon to arrive at the wards in which case online administration of questionnaire using Google Form was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to select the three states in the region, stratification was used to arrive at the cities, and purposive was again used to select the wards and persons that took the survey. Frequencies and percentages were relied upon to analyse data with the aid of the SPSS version 26.

RESULTS

TABLE 1: Political parties used social media for voter mobilisation in South-South Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Agree	238	43.4	43.4	43.4
Can't tell	17	3.1	3.1	46.5
Disagree	43	7.8	7.8	54.4
Strongly agree	211	38.5	38.5	92.9
Strongly disagree	39	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Revealed in table 1 above is that respondents are affirmative as to the use of social media as channels for voter mobilisation by various political parties during the presidential election. In the table, 43.4 percent strongly agreed to the notion indicating the adoption and use of the social media platforms during the period under review.

TABLE 2: Political parties that used social media channels the most for voter mobilisation in South-South Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
APC	156	28.5	28.5	28.5
Labour Party	285	52.0	52.0	80.5

Peoples Democratic Party	107	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 data demonstrated that Labour Party (LP) is the political with the most social media-centric political mobilisation strategies. This was shown by 52.0 percent respondents. It is an indication that the political party prioritised the use of social media platforms as means to mobilise the electorate to participate in the election.

TABLE 3: Social media channels mostly used by the political parties for voter mobilisation in South-South Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Facebook	109	19.9	19.9	19.9
Facebook;Instagram	2	.4	.4	20.3
Facebook;Instagram;Others	1	.2	.2	20.4
Facebook;X [Formerly Twitter]	220	40.1	40.1	60.6
Instagram	1	.2	.2	60.8
Others	37	6.8	6.8	67.5
WhatsApp	73	13.3	13.3	80.8
WhatsApp;Facebook	6	1.1	1.1	81.9
WhatsApp;Facebook;Instagram	1	.2	.2	82.1
WhatsApp;Facebook;Instagram;X [Formerly Twitter]	46	8.4	8.4	90.5
WhatsApp;Facebook;Instagram;X [Formerly Twitter];YouTube	7	1.3	1.3	91.8
WhatsApp;Facebook;Instagram;YouTube	2	.4	.4	92.2
WhatsApp;Facebook;Others	1	.2	.2	92.3
WhatsApp;Facebook;X [Formerly Twitter]	29	5.3	5.3	97.6
WhatsApp;Facebook;YouTube	2	.4	.4	98.0
WhatsApp;Instagram;X [Formerly Twitter]	1	.2	.2	98.2
X [Formerly Twitter]	10	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In table 3, data show that Facebook and Twitter (now X) were the most prominent social media platforms utilised for mobilisation. This is demonstrated by 40.1 percent respondents who selected the two social media platforms. This is a demonstration of the growing popularity of the platforms in this part of the world.

TABLE 4: Political messages exposure and social media influence on decision to vote

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent [%]
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			[%]	
Agree	112	20.4	20.4	20.4
Can't tell	256	46.7	46.7	67.2
Disagree	6	1.1	1.1	68.2
Strongly agree	142	25.9	25.9	94.2
Strongly Disagree	32	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 above demonstrates that respondents could not really tell whether or not political messages influenced their decision to vote as seen in 46.7 percent stating they could not tell. However, significant number 25.9 percent and 20.4 percent respondents also claim platforms had influence on their voting decision.

TABLE 5: Extent of the social media influence on voters' decision to vote during the 2023 presidential election

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Can't tell	104	19.0	19.0	19.0
High	236	43.1	43.1	62.0
Low	25	4.6	4.6	66.6
Very high	168	30.7	30.7	97.3
Very Low	15	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In table 5, the majority of respondents (43.1%) indicated that the extent of social media influence was high. The implication is that within the context of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, social media had high influence on voters' decision to vote.

TABLE 6: Use of social media to influence behaviour and response towards certain messages and information

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Agree	154	28.1	28.1	28.1
Can't tell	263	48.0	48.0	76.1
Disagree	43	7.8	7.8	83.9
Strongly agree	37	6.8	6.8	90.7
Strongly disagree	51	9.3	9.3	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 contains data that show that the respondents could not tell whether social media influenced their behaviour and response towards certain information and messages during the period. This based on the position taken by 48.0 percent of respondents that selected "can't tell."

TABLE 7: Extent social media were used to influence behaviour and response towards certain messages and information during the 2023 presidential election

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent [%]
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			[%]	
Can't tell	277	50.5	50.5	50.5
High	108	19.7	19.7	70.3
Low	30	5.5	5.5	75.7
Very high	69	12.6	12.6	88.3
Very Low	64	11.7	11.7	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As seen in table 7, respondents numbering 277 representing 50.5 percent were also unable to tell the extent social media was used to influence their behaviour and response towards information and messages during the period. This is indicative of a possibility that they could not measure the level of influence.

TABLE 8: Voters' interest in voting the political party and candidate due to the information on them across social media platforms

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Agree	193	35.2	35.2	35.2
Can't tell	34	6.2	6.2	41.4
Disagree	99	18.1	18.1	59.5
Strongly agree	215	39.2	39.2	98.7
Strongly disagree	7	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 data indicate that majority of respondents (39.2%) were interested in the electoral process and specific political party and their candidates on account of the information about them to which they were exposed on social media.

TABLE 9: Extent to which information on the candidates across social media platforms arouse voter's interest in voting the political party and candidate

Parameter	Frequency	Percent [%]	Valid Percent [%]	Cumulative Percent [%]
Can't tell	87	15.9	15.9	15.9
High	226	41.2	41.2	57.1
Low	20	3.6	3.6	60.8
Very high	210	38.3	38.3	99.1
Very Low	5	.9	.9	100.0
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in table 9 depict the extent of information and interest on political party and candidate as 38.3 percent indicate that it was high. This is demonstrative of the growing popularity and use of social media platforms in elections in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

Examining social media as platforms/tools for voter mobilisation during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria defined the objective of this study. The rationale behind the conduct of the study was to identify prominent social media platforms that were effective in mobilising

voters for participation in the election. Additionally, the researchers also sought to ascertain the influence of social media as tools used for the mobilisation of voters to participate in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Accordingly, data from the survey showed that respondents (43.4%) agreed and (38.5%) strongly agreed to the notion that political parties utilised social media as instruments for mobilising voters in the South-South geopolitical zone toward participation in the 2023 presidential elections. Furthermore, data also demonstrated that all three major political parties used the platforms but LP happened to be the most prominent. Existing literature also demonstrated the use of social media during the election by various political parties. For instance, a study by Onwe and Ekuma (2024) showed that LP utilised social media during the election. Relatedly, other studies showed that the PDP (Oluwabiye, 2024) and APC's candidate Bola Tinubu (Jonathan, 2023) also significantly utilised the platforms as engagement and campaigns tools.

Findings from the survey also showed that various social media platforms were utilised for mobilising the electorate during the period under review. As seen in table 3, the platforms prominent for mobilisation include Facebook and X (40.1%), Facebook (19.9%), WhatsApp (13.3%), WhatsApp, Facebook and X (8.4%), X (1.8%). These social media platforms were used for mobilising voters during the election. Previous studies also aligned with the foregoing result as data showed the prominent use of some of these social media platforms. For instance, Akporue and Efebeh (2025) showed that Facebook was greatly used to mobilise voters during the election. This is also similar to studies that confirmed the use of Twitter (now X) as a tool for voter mobilisation during the 2023 election (Agbim et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study by Uwakwe et al. (2023) also identified Facebook and WhatsApp as crucial tools used during the election.

On the influence of social media platforms, findings from the survey as presented in table 4 showed that 46.7 percent (majority) could not really tell whether exposure to social media messages influenced decision to vote during the election. In contrast, a significant number of respondents that represent 25.9 strongly agreed to the notion while 20.4 simply agreed to it. This implies that social media messages had some form of impact on the voting public. Additionally, data from the survey in table 5 showed that the extent of the influence of social media messages to make the electorate is high (43.1%) and very high (30.7%) implying that the decision to vote had some form of relationship with exposure to social media messages. This mirrored findings from a study conducted by Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023) in which it was revealed that social media platforms influenced voters' decisions to participate in the 2023 election. It also aligned with the construct of Dalton's cognitive mobilisation theory on how exposure to messages can help mobilise voters to participate in elections.

Furthermore, data from the survey revealed that respondents could not tell whether social media platforms were used to influence behaviour and response to certain information and messages as depicted in table 6 where data show that 48.0 percent took this position. In respect of the extent to which their behaviour was shaped on the grounds of their exposure, data in table 7 demonstrated that 50.5 percent of respondents could not tell the extent of the influence on behaviour. This is a validation of data presented in table 6 and implies that social media could not have been the major factor that shaped voters behaviour during the election especially as it concerns their reactions to information and messages during the period under review. This is in sharp contrast with findings from previous studies such as Akporue and Efebeh (2025) that showed that social media influenced behaviour during the period.

However, findings from the survey presented in table 8 also showed that 39.2 percent respondents strongly agreed while 35.2 percent agreed to the notion that they became

interested in voting the political party and candidate during the election based on the information about them across social media platforms. Relatedly, data in table 9 showed that the extent of the influence was high (41.2%) and very high (38.3%). The implication of these findings is that social media exposure had significant influence on voting decision of the electorate during the election. This mirrored the findings of a study conducted by Okon et al. (2025) that showed that social media played significant roles as platforms used to persuade voters to participate in the 2023 elections. This also validates the assumption of noticeable reminder theory as social media was used to mobilise and in some cases remind voters to go out and vote.

CONCLUSION

In line with the findings of this study and the discussion above, the researchers concluded that this study has provided insights in respect of the use of social media during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Social media platforms are important tools for mobilising voters to participate in the electoral process. Though the platforms as tools for mobilisation may be effective, such platforms do not have absolute influence on voter behaviour in an election, particularly in relations to determining how to react or respond to messages and information. This leads us to the conclusion that there are several other factors that could influence voter behaviour within the context of an election. This opens a window of opportunities for further studies, particularly on voter behaviour during elections. It becomes imperative to also isolate specific voter behaviour to be closely studied in experimental research to closely determine the extent of such influence. Therefore, the researchers recommend that:

1. Social media platforms should continually be used as tools/channels to mobilise voters owing to the impact on voter turnout as seen in different electoral situations in Nigeria and across the world.
2. There is a need to explore the use of social media in other electoral situations such as internal party affairs like primary elections conducted by political parties to elect their candidates. In essence, the use of social media within this context of internal party affairs such as congresses should be studied.

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