

The Impact of Social Media on Political Participation and Mobilization in Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated the influence of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. By the use of purposive sampling, five (5) tertiary institutions were selected for the study. The Instrument used was a well validated questionnaire. Three (3) research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level. Descriptive design was employed for this study. A sample size of Two hundred (200) respondents from five (5) purposively selected tertiary institutions was used and the data collected were analyzed using Chi-square statistical method of analysis. The study revealed that there is significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events; there is significant social media users' engagement with political information, opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes and finally there is significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion. The study concludes that social media is one of the panacea for Nigeria's political problems, and that more efforts are needed to address its regulation and accountability. The study recommended that there is need to improve digital infrastructure and affordability among Nigerians. Also, the researcher recommended that there is need for promoting digital education and civic engagement among Nigerians.

Keywords: Political participation, political mobilization, social media, governance and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a powerful tool for political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, especially among the youth. According to a survey by NOI Polls, 39% of Nigerians use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp to access political information and express their opinions on national issues engage in dialogues, and organize collective actions. Social media has also enabled citizens to organize protests, demand accountability from the government and expose electoral malpractices. For instance, the #EndSARS movement in 2020 was largely driven by social media activism, as young Nigerians used hashtags, videos and live streams to document police brutality and call for reforms. Similarly, the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign in 2018 used social media to advocate for the reduction of age limits for political candidates and mobilize young people to register and vote. However, social media also poses some challenges for political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include the spread of fake news and misinformation, the manipulation of public opinion by political actors and the harassment and intimidation of online activists. Moreover, social media can create echo chambers and polarization among different groups of users, as well as exclude those who lack access to digital technologies or literacy skills. Therefore, while social media has a positive impact on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, it also requires critical awareness and civic education to ensure its responsible and effective use.

Political participation refers to the activities that citizens undertake to influence the government or public policies. It can take various forms, such as voting, campaigning, protesting, lobbying, petitioning, etc. Social media can facilitate political participation by providing a platform for citizens to access information, voice their views, interact with others, and mobilize for action. According to a study by Okoro and Nwafor (2013), social media has increased the level of political awareness and interest among Nigerian youths. They found that 76.7% of the respondents used social media for political purposes, such as following news updates, joining political groups, commenting on issues, and sharing information. They also found that social media had a positive impact on the respondents' political efficacy, trust, and engagement.

Another study by Ezebuenyi, *et al.*, (2014) examined how social media influenced the electoral participation of Nigerians in the 2011 general elections. They found that social media was used by both politicians and voters to disseminate campaign messages, monitor electoral processes, report irregularities, and mobilize support. They also found that social media had a significant effect on the voters' turnout, choice of candidates, and perception of credibility.

Political mobilization refers to the process of rallying people around a common cause or goal. It can involve persuasion, recruitment, organization, coordination, and action. Social media can

facilitate political mobilization by providing a platform for activists, movements, parties, and candidates to communicate their agendas, recruit followers, organize events, coordinate strategies, and execute actions. According to a study by Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2014), social media played a crucial role in the citizens' mobilization and participation in Nigeria's 2011 general elections. They found that social media was used by various actors to create awareness, generate debates, expose corruption, demand accountability, and call for change. They also found that social media contributed to the emergence of new forms of civic engagement and resistance.

Another study by Fasanwon, (2020) analyzed how social media was used for political mobilization in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. He found that social media was used by different stakeholders to promote their ideologies, visions, and aspirations. He also found that social media was used to broadcast news and ideas that mobilized people into violent political activities.

However, social media also has some challenges and risks, such as misinformation, manipulation, polarization, and violence. Therefore, there is a need to use social media responsibly, critically, and constructively for the benefit of the nation. According to Akinyetun (2022), social media influences political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria by providing a platform for citizens to access political information, express their opinions, and engage with other like-minded individuals and also vent their anger on national issues that are not favourable to them. He argues that social media users in Nigeria are mostly young, educated, and unemployed, who seek alternative avenues for political involvement and empowerment.

Similarly, Madueke, *et al.*, (2017) assert that social media use has grossly affected the participation of individuals in the day-to-day political process by enhancing opinion poll avenues and freedom of speech. They contend that social media allows citizens to speak directly to their government and cross-pollinate ideas without fear of physical assault or harassment. However, social media also has some negative effects on political participation in Nigeria. As noted by Oyewole, *et al.*, (2020), social media platforms have increased the spate of hate speech and stoked political unease by disseminating false or misleading news and information. They suggest that there is a need for more regulation and education on the responsible

use of social media for political purposes. The study therefore seeks to investigate the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria by engaging in research study that will expose some challenges being faced as well as the risks that need to be addressed in order to ensure a healthy and democratic political culture in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria is a significant topic of inquiry, especially in light of the recent general elections in the country. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, have been widely used by citizens, politicians, and civil society groups to disseminate information, express opinions, engage in debates, and mobilize support for various causes and candidates. According to some scholars, social media can enhance political participation by increasing access to information, facilitating communication and interaction, creating a sense of community and solidarity, and empowering marginalized groups (Dungse, *et al.*, 2018; Egbunike, 2017; Aleyomi & Ajakaiye, 2014). However, social media can also pose challenges and risks for political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as spreading misinformation and propaganda, inciting violence and hate speech, polarizing public opinion along ethnic and religious lines, and undermining the credibility and legitimacy of electoral institutions and processes (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Chilwa & Odebunmi, 2016; Ezebuonyi, *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the statement of the problem for this research is to examine the extent and nature of the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, as well as the opportunities and challenges that social media present for enhancing democratic governance and development in the country. It is against this background that this study examines the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria using Political Science students in some selected tertiary institutions in Lagos State as a case study.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- explore how social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp are used by

politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events;

- examine the extent to which social media users engage with political information, opinions, and campaigns online, and how this affects their offline political behaviour and attitudes; and
- investigate the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Three research hypotheses were formulated based on the research questions:

- 1) There is no significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events.
- 2) There is no significant social media users' engagement with political information, opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes.
- 3) There is no significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion.

LITERATURE REVIEW-

Concept of Social Media on Political Participation and Mobilization

Social media platforms have become increasingly important for political communication and engagement in the 21st century. They offer new opportunities for citizens to access information, express opinions, connect with others, and mobilize for collective action. However, they also pose challenges and risks for democracy, such as political polarization, misinformation, and manipulation.

One of the key questions in this field is how social media use affects political participation, which can be defined as any activity that aims to influence public policies or outcomes (Verba, *et al.*, 1995). Political participation can take various forms, such as voting, campaigning, protesting, petitioning, donating, or contacting officials. Previous studies

have suggested that social media use can promote political participation by increasing political interest, efficacy, knowledge, discussion, and exposure to diverse viewpoints (Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova, *et al.*, 2014; Halpern and Gibbs, 2013). However, there is also evidence that social media use can have negative effects on political participation by creating echo chambers, selective exposure, confirmation bias, and incivility (Knoll, *et al.*, 2020; Kubin and von Sikorski, 2021; Sunstein, 2017).

Another important question is how social media use influences political mobilization, which can be defined as the process of organizing and coordinating collective action for a common cause (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). Political mobilization can involve various actors, such as social movements, political parties, interest groups, or individuals. Previous studies have shown that social media use can facilitate political mobilization by lowering the costs of communication and coordination, enhancing the visibility and legitimacy of causes, creating online communities and networks, and generating emotional resonance and solidarity (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, *et al.*, 2014). However, there are also challenges and limitations of social media use for political mobilization, such as digital surveillance, censorship, repression, fragmentation, and slacktivism (Earl and Kimport, 2011; Morozov, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Youmans and York, 2012).

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the complex and multifaceted effects of social media on political participation and mobilization. It has shown that social media use can have both positive and negative impacts on democracy depending on various factors such as the type of platform, the content of messages, the characteristics of users, and the context of situations. It has also identified some gaps and directions for future research in this field such as exploring the causal mechanisms behind the observed correlations between social media use and political outcomes using experimental methods or longitudinal data; comparing the effects of different social media platforms or features on political behaviour using cross-platform or cross-national analyses; examining the role of social media in depolarizing or bridging ideological divides using deliberative or dialogical approaches; and investigating the ethical implications of social media use for

political purposes using normative or critical frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design type as the information collected from the participants were used for the purpose of predicting, describing and interpreting existing opinions of undergraduates as it relates to impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. The population of the study consists of randomly selected Political Science undergraduates from purposively selected tertiary institutions in Lagos State. A total of Two hundred (200) respondents participated in the study. Five (5) tertiary institutions that offer Political Science as a course were purposively selected for this study. Through the use of simple random sampling technique, forty (40) respondents were selected irrespective of their gender. The main instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire of 15 items on social

media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. The questionnaire consisted of two sections (A and B). Section A consisted of demographic data of the respondents, while Section B, contained fifteen statements based on the stated objectives raised in the study using four point Likert scale type of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). To validate the instrument, the self-designed questionnaire was presented to the experts in the field to determine the construct and content validity. Modifications made were used to improve the quality of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha $r = 0.914$ the result of the reliability confirmed that the research was reliable. Simple percentage was employed to determine the frequency of data collected, while chi-square statistical tool was used for analysis of data collected.

Table 1: Analysis of Respondents Personal Data (n=200)

Sex	Respondents	Percentage
Male	135	67.50%
Female	65	32.50%
Total	200	100%

From the above table 1, it shows the percentages of the result from the respondent where male and female with 135 (67.5%) and 65 (32.5%) respondents respectively.

Table 2: Percentage of Respondent According to Level of Education (n=200)

Level	Respondents	Percentage (%)
100	35	17.5
200	60	30
300	75	37.5
400	30	15
Total	200	100%

The table above revealed that 100 Level students had 35 (17.5%) respondents, 200 Level students had 60 (30%) respondents, 300 Level students had 75 (37.5%) respondents, while 400 Level students had 30 (15%) respondents. This shows that the respondents in 300 Level had the highest number of respondents than any other groups.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Hypothesis One: There is no significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events.

Calculated $X^2 = 300.46$

But the critical/Table value = 5.226

Degree of Freedom = 12

Table 3: Table Showing Hypothesis I Respondents' Response with Remarks

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Calculated X ²	D.F	Critical Val.	Remark
1	80	50	10	10	300.46	12	5.226	Rejected
2	60	45	25	20				
3	70	70	0	10				
4	35	40	35	40				
5	40	20	50	40				

Decision Rule

Table above indicates that the calculated Chi-square of 300.66 is significantly greater than the table value of 5.226 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 12. The null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events” was rejected. The alternative hypothesis is accepted which means that there is significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use

by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events.

Hypothesis II

There is no significant social media users' engagement with political information, opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes.

Calculated X² = 356.17

But the critical/Table value = 5.226

Degree of Freedom = 12

Table 4: Table Showing Hypothesis II Respondents' Response with Remarks

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Calculated X ²	D.F	Critical Val.	Remark
6	70	40	10	0	356.17	12	5.226	Rejected
7	80	40	0	0				
8	60	30	20	10				
9	50	60	10	0				
10	80	40	0	0				

Decision Rule

Table 4 above indicates that the calculated Chi-square of 356.17 is significantly greater than the table value of 5.226 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 12. The null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant social media users' engagement with political information, opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes” was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was accepted which means that there is significant social media users' engagement with political information,

opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes.

Hypothesis III

There is no significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion.

Calculated X² = 341.36

But the critical/Table value = 5.226

Degree of Freedom = 12

Table 5: Table Showing Hypothesis III Respondents' Response with Remarks

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Cal. X ²	D.F	Critical Val.	Remark
11	90	45	5	10	341.36	12	5.226	Rejected
12	105	40	5	0				
13	100	20	30	0				
14	90	50	10	0				
15	120	20	10	0				

Decision Rule

Table 5 above indicates that the calculated Chi-square of 341.36 is significantly greater than the table value of 5.226 at 0.05 level of significance

and degree of freedom of 12. The null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing

democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion“ was rejected. The alternative hypothesis is accepted which means that there is significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data collected from the respondents, the researchers found that there is significant effect of social media platform (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) use by politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events. These results agree with Naveed (2012), when he opines that Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become influential tools for politicians, activists, and citizens to communicate, campaign, and mobilize for political causes and events.

First, social media enables politicians to directly connect with citizens and build a strong relationship with them. According to a study by Fatema, *et al.* (2022), social media has a positive and significant impact on the relationship between politicians and citizens through the moderating effect of political slogans. Politicians can use social media to convey their messages, values, and visions to the public and solicit feedback via comments and likes. Political slogans play a significant role in shaping the image of a political party or leader in the eyes of citizens.

Second, social media encourages political participation of citizens in the form of expressing opinions, sharing information, and joining movements. As Melenciano (2020) writes, social media allows us to see a reality that has been entirely visible to some people and invisible to others. By witnessing the injustices and brutality that some groups face, such as African Americans or protesters in authoritarian regimes, citizens can become more aware and empathetic of their struggles and demands. Social media also provides new ways to organize actions, such as rallies, marches, or boycotts, that can pressure the authorities to respond or reform.

Third, social media also poses some challenges and risks for political communication and

mobilization. For instance, social media can be used to spread misinformation, propaganda, or hate speech that can undermine democracy and human rights. Vox, (2019) reports that some politicians use social media platforms to manipulate public opinion, polarize society, and attack their opponents or critics. Social media can also create echo chambers or filter bubbles that limit the exposure of citizens to diverse perspectives and sources. Moreover, social media can be subject to censorship or surveillance by governments that seek to control or suppress dissent.

From the data collected and analysed as per the second hypothesis, the hypothesis which states that “there is no significant social media users’ engagement with political information, opinions, and campaigns online on their offline political behaviour and attitudes” was rejected. These findings are in conformity with Gil de Zúñiga, *et al.*, (2012) in their finding when they asserted that one of the key questions in the field of political communication is whether and how social media use influences the political behaviour and attitudes of citizens. Some scholars argue that social media platforms foster civic engagement, political participation, and deliberation by providing users with access to diverse sources of information, opinions, and campaigns online. Others contend that social media use has little or no effect on offline political outcomes, or even a negative one, by creating echo chambers, spreading misinformation, and increasing polarization.

According to the optimistic view, social media use can enhance the political engagement of citizens by exposing them to a variety of political information, opinions, and campaigns online. For example, Gil de Zúñiga, *et al.*, (2012) found that using social media for news and information was positively associated with different forms of civic and political participation, such as voting, protesting, contacting public officials, and joining civic groups. They argued that social media use can increase the political knowledge, efficacy, and interest of users, as well as their social capital and mobilization potential. Similarly, Valenzuela, *et al.*, (2019) showed that using social media for expressive purposes, such as sharing opinions, commenting on posts, and joining groups, was positively related to offline political participation and internal efficacy. They suggested that social media use can foster a sense of civic identity and agency among users, as well as a sense of belonging to a political community. However, the

optimistic view has been challenged by several studies that found little or no evidence for a causal link between social media use and political behaviour and attitudes. For instance, Boulianne, (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 studies and concluded that the overall effect size of social media use on political participation was small and inconsistent across different contexts and measures. She argued that social media use may have a limited impact on political outcomes because most users are not interested in politics or exposed to diverse viewpoints online. Moreover, Coppock, *et al.*, (2018) conducted a large-scale randomized controlled trial and found that deactivating Facebook for four weeks had no significant effect on the political knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour of participants. They suggested that social media use may have a negligible effect on political outcomes because users can easily substitute other sources of information and influence offline. Therefore, more integrative and contextualized theories are needed to explain the multifaceted and dynamic relationship between social media use and political outcomes.

Hypothesis three which states “that there is no significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria, such as enhancing democratic participation, promoting accountability, fostering dialogue, spreading misinformation, inciting violence, and manipulating public opinion” was rejected. Research has shown that the impact of social media on political participation and mobilization in Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be easily dismissed or affirmed. Social media platforms have been used by various actors and groups to enhance democratic participation, promote accountability, foster dialogue, spread misinformation, incite violence, and manipulate public opinion in different ways and contexts. According to a study by Madueke, *et al.*, (2017), social media use has grossly affected the participation of individuals in the day-to-day political process in Nigeria. The study found that social media users were more likely to vote, join political parties, attend rallies, and contact public officials than non-users. Similarly, a study by Oyeboode, (2022) found that social media use and gratification influenced political participation among Nigerian youths. Another positive aspect of social media is that it can create spaces for public deliberation and dialogue among diverse groups and perspectives.

Social media can facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions among citizens, politicians, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders on various political issues and events. For example, a study by Okoro and Nwafor, (2013) analyzed how social media platforms were used for political communication during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The study found that social media enabled citizens to express their views, criticize candidates and parties, mobilize support, and monitor electoral processes.

However, social media also has some negative aspects that can undermine political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. One of these aspects is the spread of misinformation and disinformation that can distort facts, mislead voters, and erode trust in democratic institutions. Social media platforms can be used by malicious actors to disseminate false or misleading information about political actors, issues, or events for various purposes, such as influencing public opinion, discrediting opponents, or inciting violence. For instance, a study by Ezebuenyi, *et al.*, (2014) examined how new media platforms were used for political information management during the 2011, 2015 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study found that new media platforms were used to spread rumours, propaganda, and hate speech that affected the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process.

Another negative aspect of social media is that it can create echo chambers and polarization that can reduce the quality and diversity of political discourse. Social media platforms can allow users to select and consume information that confirms their existing beliefs and preferences, while avoiding or rejecting information that challenges or contradicts them. This can lead to the formation of homogeneous groups that reinforce their own views and opinions, while demonizing or dismissing those of others. This can result in a lack of mutual understanding, tolerance, and compromise among different political actors and groups. For example, a study by Chilwa and Odebunmi, (2016) analyzed how social media users framed terrorist attacks in Nigeria on an online forum called Nairaland. The study found that social media users adopted different stances and engaged in different ways depending on their ethnic, religious, or political affiliations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is significant impact of social media on political participation and mobilization

in Nigeria. Social media has been used by some Nigerian youths to engage in civic and online activities, it has really translated into effective offline participation or democratic accountability when putting 2023 general elections into consideration. In the same vein, many factors, such as ethnicity, voter apathy, digital divide and political violence, limit the potential of social media to influence political outcomes in Nigeria. Therefore, social media cannot be asserted to be sufficient catalyst for political change in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to improve digital infrastructure and affordability among Nigerians.
2. There is need for promoting digital education and civic engagement among Nigerians.
3. Relevant government agencies need to strengthen media regulation and accountability.
4. Encouraging dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.
5. Social media users in Nigeria should be more critical and responsible in consuming and sharing political information online.
6. Government should enact and enforce laws that regulate the use of social media for political purposes, while respecting the freedom of expression and opinion of the citizens.

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