

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS PLATFORMS FOR VOTER MOBILISATION IN NIGERIA'S SOUTH-SOUTH
REGION DURING THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

By

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Abstract

Election participation is regarded as a civic duty in a functioning democracy. Social media platforms are increasingly being used and adopted as effective communication tools in the modern era. Ignoring these crucial platforms as mobilisation tools could result in the exclusion of a thriving population that uses the communication tools. In order to investigate the impact of social media as venues for voter mobilisation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election, this study used a survey as its research design and administered the questions online. The South-South region's Edo, Delta, and Rivers states made up the study's geographic scope, and 548 valid responses were obtained from local residents and voters. The results show that social media had a significant role in voter mobilisation and engagement throughout the election. The results also demonstrate that several social media platforms, including Facebook, X, and WhatsApp, were frequently used as mobilisation tools and that their use affected voting decisions but not the overall voter behaviour, as is commonly observed in several social media-related election mobilisation research. The researchers came to the conclusion that while social media has a significant impact on voters' decisions, it does not have complete control over their behaviour. The researchers recommend using social media platforms as mobilisation tools consistently. The utility and efficacy of social media platforms in political mobilisation and participation is the study's socio-political implication.

Keywords: *Electioneering; Electorate; Participation; Social Media; Voters*

Introduction

Political communication plays a role in mobilising voters to participate. The goal is to interact with voters in an effort to win their support during an election. Voters' decisions to support a specific candidate are influenced by a number of variables. Voters are influenced by sociocultural, ethno-religious, and economic elements within the Nigerian political space and setting. Their actions and choice of which political party or organisation to support are consistent with the mobilisation theory of voter turnout. This makes voter mobilisation in the nation a difficult task because, in addition to these efforts, a number of other factors influence the final choice of whether or not to support a specific candidate or party in an election.

Voter decisions are frequently influenced by sociocultural influences (Umar, Salihu, Onyekachi & Aaron, 2022). In addition to societal and cultural considerations, people may base their decision to vote in an election on personal concerns. In a society like Nigeria, eligible voters' voting behaviour may be influenced by sociocultural elements such as educational attainment, degree of religious devotion, and economic concern (Olatunji, Abdullahi & Tejjideen, 2023). Furthermore, the socio-cultural elements are divided into rational and irrational categories as well as evaluative and non-evaluative. In a study, Akhter and Sheikh (2014) demonstrated how irrational and non-evaluative factors including caste, money, and religion affected Indian residents' voting behaviour. According to the results of another study, money used for vote-buying affected each voter's behaviour in several Nigerian elections (Adeleke, Lawal & Akinyemi, 2024; Ajayi, 2025; Uwa & Emeka, 2022; Yakubu, 2020).

Voter behaviour and decision-making during elections are influenced by a number of factors in addition to sociocultural ones. These elements are personal in nature. At that level, the person is impacted by his or her personal beliefs, psychological makeup, and the social concerns they are exposed to at a given moment. This suggests that a person's perception of the political messages they are exposed to may depend on a variety of circumstances.

Accordingly, Şener et al. (2023) found socio-psychological elements that may affect people's voting choices in our culture. This has also been supported by the claim that voter behaviour is influenced by personality, gender, conscientiousness, stability, dominance, and a number of other personal-level characteristics (Kumar & Reddy, 2024). Essentially, voting behaviour intention is strongly indicated and determined by psycho-social elements including personality and demographics.

Voter behaviour, which results in a vote, is also influenced by sociocultural, socio-psychological, and associated personal-level elements. However, political power-seeking individuals and organisations typically try to mobilise as many votes as they can. This is based on the fact that political actors typically make political judgements and take action, even though it is known that a number of factors other than the actions of political actors may influence individuals' decisions to support or oppose particular politicians and political parties during elections. Despite other elements and concerns in many societies, a number of academics have also supported the significance of voter mobilisation (Mann & Haenshen, 2024; Wurst, Pohl & Haßler, 2023; Yamao & Hamanaka, 2021). To put it plainly, voter mobilisation is still taken into account despite the fact that people have free will in addition to a number of outside variables that may influence a decision.

Social media serves as a platform for voter mobilisation, which is an essential part of a political campaign. According to John and Ibe (2019), social media is essential for political parties and politicians because it gives them a platform to garner support, encourage candid involvement, and have ongoing, open discussions. Additionally, social media mobilisation is an example of a digital campaign that is enabled by digital media. Atalay (2023) claims that digital media efforts are more participatory, focused, and captivating than traditional media ads that are emotionally charged and aimed at broad audiences. Similar to this, Agbim, Etumnu, and Iredibia (2023) claimed that social media has developed into a useful campaign tool that allows political parties and their candidates to communicate directly with voters, reach a large audience, and influence public opinion. This suggests that the many benefits of technology, such as its engaging and interactive features that allow citizens to communicate directly with political players, have altered the dynamics of political campaigns.

Social media are technological innovations of the twenty-first century that have made communication easier. Theocharis, Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber (2023) pointed out that social media created new options for online political engagement with no direct offline equivalent; hence this also covers political communication features. Social media platforms enable more online political participation since they are not limited by time or geography (Kim, Kim, & Cho, 2024). Voters who are exposed to communications that mobilise support for a political cause, party, or candidate in an election are more likely to align and participate. In the present era, these platforms are essential instruments for political campaigns (Cremers, Goyn, Krüper, Lehmann, & Liehr, 2022). According to Russmann (2022), political parties are prioritising investment in social media to assist their campaign goals, including winning elections, after realising the value of social media as efficient means for political mobilising.

In this region of the world, social media-enabled voter mobilisation has continued to gain traction. Different political parties and their candidates used social media platforms at various levels to interact with voters during Nigeria's general elections in 2023. According to study, these interactions produced outcomes. For example, it was discovered that Twitter (now X) had a significant impact on the Labour Party's Obidient Movement campaigns (Agbim et al., 2023). The study's noteworthy findings showed that social media use increased political awareness among the movement's followers and detractors during the 2023 presidential election. During the election, a number of additional social media platforms were also used to encourage voter mobilisation and participation. Voters, who were required to cast their ballots for the candidates of their choice at the polls, ultimately made the decision. Thus, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the platforms' impact on voter mobilisation for Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

Notably, social media made it possible for young people to actively participate in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. For example, a study by Ezeigbo (2024) showed that social media platforms were heavily utilised by Nigerian young during the election. This implies that the platforms are becoming more widely acknowledged as useful ways to interact with voters during elections. Future surveys that do not make use of these platforms are a cause for concern. Given that the majority of young voters spend a lot of time on social media every day, this is a problem. According to a previous Gallup study, 51% of American teenagers use social media for an average of 4.8 hours every day (Rothwell, 2023). Over 40 million people in the nation use social media platforms for an average of six hours per day, according to a related report published by the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) (Jimoh, 2024). According to several other noteworthy reports, users spend three to six hours a day on the platforms (Aduloju, 2020; Akinola & Opawale, 2022; Ngoso, 2019; Obafemi Yahaya, Oyinlola, Ayinla, & Moodu, 2023).

Due to the widespread adoption and use of social media platforms for political reasons, such as mobilisation and involvement, the political landscape has thus witnessed new aspects of participation (Inobemhe & Asemah, 2025). Increased access to social media is implied. Furthermore, the results of pertinent studies have indicated that platforms

were used more in the most recent Nigerian election (Aideloje, Olorogun & Dibie, 2024; Damulak, Mundi, Lekshak, & Joseph, 2024; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Okon, Ojedor, & Owolabi, 2025). In light of the aforementioned, what would happen if social media were not used, particularly in terms of raising awareness, mobilising voters, and encouraging participation? This study, which focusses on the use of the platforms during the 2023 presidential election, was conducted with these and the necessity to determine the platforms' influence in mind. This makes it possible to see the dynamics of upcoming elections more clearly without using the platforms as mobilisation tools. This evaluation study advances our understanding of how social media adoption affects Nigerian elections. Examining the various social media platforms utilised to encourage people to participate in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election was one of the study's primary goals. Additionally, it was carried out to determine the impact of social media on voter mobilisation for Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is provided by the noticeable reminder theory and cognitive mobilisation theory. When it comes to the effects of employing technology to increase voter participation, the noticeable reminder idea may be the most well-known (Malhotra, Michelson, Rogers, & Valenzuela, 2011). The idea clarifies how individuals interpret and react to reminders, especially when it comes to persuasive communication (Cialdini, 2009). The theory's premise, according to Thaler and Sunstein (2009), is that registered voters have a tendency to intend to vote but may falter due to time constraints combined with attention and preparation; in this scenario, only a gentle reminder of their intention is needed. According to Hirvonen Lassander, Sääksvuori, and Tukiainen (2025), this kind of action is equivalent to mobilisation. Since the audience pays attention to their phones and messages may not be disregarded after all, various channels that reach them via their mobile devices may be effective in that regard. This is also supported by Dale and Strauss's (2009) assertion that text messages delivered to voters' cell phones were successful in this situation.

The three main tenets of the theory are timeliness, relevance, and noticeability (Fogg, 2003). Reminders intended for voters must be obvious and have a propensity to capture their attention in order to be considered effective, according to the noticeability principle. The second criterion is relevancy, which means that for a reminder to have a long-lasting impact and influence someone to act in a way that the sender wants, it must be pertinent to their interests, values, and objectives. The idea of timing, the theory's final concept, is to make sure that reminders are sent at the appropriate time. Impact can only be maximised when these reminders are sent out on time. Initial exposure, encoding, reminder, retrieval, and response are all steps in the visible reminder process. The individual who was exposed to the message may change their behaviour or make a decision during the response stage. This theory serves as the foundation for the investigation into how social media propaganda affected Nigerian voters during the 2023 presidential election.

The second theory that forms the basis of our research is cognitive mobilisation theory. This theory, which focusses on how people are mobilised to participate in political causes, is based on the writings of Russell Dalton (Dalton, 1984). According to Dalton (1984), political engagement requires cognitive mobilisation, which entails the growth of political consciousness, interest, awareness, and sophistication. People are exposed to cognitive clues during this process, which they use to inform their voting choices. Additionally, they use these cues to decide whether or not to participate in election-related activities. According to Amechi, Innocent and Ikechukwu (2018), the theory's most fundamental form of political involvement and education is to make sure that a person's mental capacities are mobilised towards political participation. The approach essentially focusses on using cognitive signals in conjunction with voter education to encourage voters to cast ballots.

In addition to exposure to political discourse, news, and education, this theory highlights the importance of political information as a means of stimulating cognitive mobilisation. Dalton (1984) asserts that receiving political information comes before cognitive processing. According to this theory, people are expected to process political information using cognitive processes like perception, memory, and attention, which may result in heightened political awareness and ultimately "interest" in participating. Initial awareness, interest development, and sophistication are all part of the cognitive mobilisation stages. Sophistication, the final step, is reached when a person fully develops their nuanced political knowledge, which includes the ability to assess difficult material and make well-informed conclusions. This idea is used in this study to give context for comprehending how social media is used to encourage people to cast ballots in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

Methods

The survey approach was used to collect quantitative data from the respondents for this quantitative investigation. Three states in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone make up the study's population. Wards like West End, New Benin, and PH Township were included in the study, and the researchers purposefully chose Delta, Edo, and Rivers. To make data collection, presentation, and analysis easier, a closed-ended questionnaire was created with a 5-point Likert Scale instrument arranged in the following order: strongly disagree = 5, disagree = 4, can't tell = 3, strongly

agree = 2, and agree = 1. Communication specialists from the Department of Mass Communication at Glorious Vision University in Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria, tested the face validity of this instrument. The internal consistency of the questionnaire's items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Strong internal instrument consistency is indicated by the result's composite reliability of 0.935. In order to determine the wards, a multistage sample procedure was used, and a Google Form was used to administer the questionnaire online. The three states in the zone were chosen using purposive sample, the cities were chosen using stratification and the wards and survey respondents were chosen using purposive sampling once more. Using SPSS version 26, frequencies and percentages were used to evaluate the data.

Results

TABLE 1: Political Parties Use of Social Media for Voter Mobilisation

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 above shows that respondents are in favour of different political parties using social media to mobilise voters during the presidential election. According to the chart, 43.4% of respondents strongly agreed that social media platforms were adopted and used throughout the reviewed time.

TABLE 2: Political Parties that Utilised Social Media the Most

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 indicates that the Labour Party (LP) uses the most social media-focused political mobilisation strategies. This was predicated on the idea that 52.0% of respondents exhibited. It demonstrates that the political party prioritised social media platforms in order to motivate voters to cast ballots.

TABLE 3: Social Media Channels Mostly Utilised

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

According to data in Table 3, the most popular social media sites used for mobilisation were Facebook and Twitter (now X). The fact that 40.1% of respondents chose the two social networking sites shows this. This illustrates how the platforms are becoming more and more popular in this region of the world.

TABLE 4: Political Messages Exposure and Social Media Influence

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 above shows that 46.7% of respondents said they were unable to determine whether political communications had an impact on their voting decision. However, a sizable portion of respondents – 25.9% and 20.4%, respectively also assert that platforms influenced their choice to vote.

TABLE 5: Extent of the Social Media Influence on Voters' Decision

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows that most respondents (43.1%) thought social media had a significant impact. It follows that social media had a significant impact on voters’ decisions to cast ballots in Nigeria’s 2023 presidential election.

TABLE 6: Use of Social Media to Influence Behaviour and Response towards Certain Messages and Information

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to data in Table 6, respondents were unable to determine whether social media had an impact on their behaviour or how they responded to particular messages and information during that time. This is based on the opinion expressed by 48.0% of respondents who chose “Can’t tell.”

TABLE 7: Extent Social Media were Used to Influence Behaviour

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 shows that 277 respondents, or 50.5% of the sample, were also unable to determine how much social media influenced their conduct and how they responded to messages and information during that time. This suggests that they might not have been able to gauge the degree 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 [%]
Strongly disagree	7	1.3	1.3	100.0
Disagree	99	18.1	18.1	59.5
Can’t tell	34	6.2	6.2	41.4
Strongly agree	215	39.2	39.2	98.7
Agree	193	35.2	35.2	35.2
Total	548	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to Table 8 data, the majority of respondents (39.2%) expressed interest in the electoral process, certain political parties, and their candidates due to the information they were exposed to on social media.

TABLE 9: Extent Social Media-enabled Information Enhanced Voters’ Interest on Candidates and Political Parties

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

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 9 shows the level of knowledge and interest in political parties and candidates, with 38.3% indicating that it was high. This illustrates how social media platforms are becoming more and more popular in Nigerian elections.

Discussion

According to the data, 43.4% of respondents agreed and 38.5% strongly agreed that political parties used social media to encourage voters in the South-South geopolitical zone to cast ballots in the 2023 presidential election. Additionally, statistics showed that while all three major political parties utilised the platforms, LP was the most well-known. Previous research also showed how different political parties used social media throughout the election. For example, LP used social media during the election, according to a study by Onwe and Ekuma (2024). According to related research, the APC candidate Bola Tinubu (Jonathan, 2023) and the PDP (Oluwabiyi, 2024) both made extensive use of the platforms as campaign and engagement tools.

The survey's results also show that during the period under evaluation, a variety of social media channels were used to mobilise voters. Table 3 shows that Facebook and X (40.1%), Facebook (19.9%), WhatsApp (13.3%), WhatsApp, Facebook and X (8.4%), and X (1.8%) are the most popular platforms for mobilisation. During the election, several social media sites were utilised to mobilise voters. The aforementioned outcome was also supported by earlier research, which revealed that certain of these social media platforms were widely used. For example, Akporue and Efebeh (2025) demonstrated that Facebook had a significant role in voter mobilisation during the election. Studies that verified the usage of Twitter (now X) as a tool for voter mobilisation during the 2023 election are likewise comparable to this (Agbim et al., 2023). Additionally, Uwakwe, Obioha, Njaka, Makwe, and Okika (2023) found that Facebook and WhatsApp were important election-related technologies.

Table 4 of the survey also shows that 46.7% of respondents (the majority) were unable to determine if exposure to social media messages affected their choice to cast a ballot. On the other hand, a sizable portion of respondents 25.9% strongly agreed with the idea, whereas 20.4% only agreed. This suggests that social media messaging influenced voters in some way. Furthermore, data from the poll in Table 5 indicated that social media communications had a high (43.1%) and very high (30.7%) influence on the electorate, suggesting that exposure to social media messages had some bearing on the decision to vote. This is consistent with research by Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023), which found that social media sites affected voters' choices to cast ballots in the 2023 election. Additionally, it was consistent with Dalton's cognitive mobilisation theory, which holds that message exposure can encourage voters to cast ballots.

Additionally, Table 6 illustrates that 48.0% of respondents were unable to determine if social media platforms were utilised to affect behaviour and response to specific information and messages. Results in Table 7 show that 50.5% of respondents were unable to determine how much their exposure had influenced their behaviour. This confirms the information in Table 6 and suggests that social media could not have had a significant role in influencing voters' behaviour during the election, particularly with regard to how they responded to messages and information during the relevant time frame. This is in stark contrast to earlier research, such that of Akporue and Efebeh (2025), which demonstrated that social media had an impact on conduct during that time.

According to other findings, 35.2 % of respondents agreed and 39.2 % strongly agreed that the information about the political party and candidate on social media platforms piqued their interest in casting a ballot. According to statistics in Table 9, the influence was both extremely high (38.3%) and high (41.2%). These results imply that the electorate's decision to vote during the election was significantly influenced by their exposure to social media. This is in consonance with the results of a study by Okon et al. (2025), which demonstrated the importance of social media as a platform for encouraging voters to cast ballots in the 2023 elections. This supports the visible reminder theory's premise as well because social media was utilised to encourage and occasionally remind people to cast their ballots.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The researchers came to the conclusion that this study has offered insights into the use of social media during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election in accordance with the study's findings and the preceding debate. Social media sites are crucial resources for encouraging voters to take part in the political process. Platforms may be useful as mobilisation tools, but they do not completely control voter conduct during an election, especially when it comes to deciding how to react or respond to messages and information. This leads to the conclusion that a number of additional factors may affect how voters behave during an election. This creates a window of opportunity for more research, especially on election-related voter behaviour. In order to precisely ascertain the degree of such influence, it becomes essential to also isolate particular voter conduct to be thoroughly examined in experimental research. Consequently, the researchers recommend that:

1. Given the impact on voter turnout observed in various political situations in Nigeria and throughout the world, social media platforms should be continuously employed as tools/channels to mobilise voters.
2. The use of social media in other electoral contexts, such as internal party issues like primary elections held by political parties to choose their candidates, needs to be investigated. Essentially, social media usage in relation to internal party events like congresses has to be researched.

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