



EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The importance of the social media as a vital tool for political communication and mobilization, since its inception cannot be overemphasized. The explosion of social media in recent times, has dramatically transformed the way information is created and disseminated. The social media offers a dynamic space for political participation, information sharing, and mobilization. The rise of platforms like Facebook, X (Formally Twitter), Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube has reshaped political campaigning and voter turnout strategies, offering both opportunities and threats to democratic processes.

This paper examines the complex relationship between social media platforms and political engagement among youth and citizens in Nigeria. Specifically, it investigates the influence of various social media handles for political mobilization in Ekiti State of Nigeria through an exploration of user behavior, platform characteristics, and the evolving nature of political communication. The

findings suggest that while social media is a powerful tool for political mobilization, there is every need for critical media literacy and innovative political strategies.

Keywords:

Social Media, Political Mobilization, Activism, Misinformation, Grassroots

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Communication is essential and at the centre of all political activities. Macnamara, (2008) observes that the mass media have since emerged as the most common source of information about election campaign in democracies and societies in transition around the world. More so, the new technologies offer various platforms where information and other socio-political communication can be constructed and discussed. This has made the medium become a formidable one; the mobilizing structure of the social media and all resources necessary for popular mobilization, which in this case is contained in social media as the fastest and easiest means to mobilize (Stark, 2010).

The use of social media in politics is increasing over time. Political parties are using popular social media to influence their target audience. The role of media continues to be useful in mobilizing and drawing citizens to focus on issues that are perceived as important and in priming public opinion among many people globally get engaged in the political process of governance and democratization (Kalyango, 2020; Montero, 2019 - 2023). The massive boom in the online and wireless digital media augmented traditional media, namely radio, newspapers, television, and magazines (Montero, 2019 - 2023). The social media have emerged as the most common source of information about election campaigns in democracies and societies in transition around the world (Macnamara, 2018).

In terms of the sheer volume of information available to citizens via the media on issues - political parties and leaders – electioneering campaigns often represents a high point for political communications. Concerns about political bias in the mass media are at the heart of debates about the roles and responsibilities of the media at election time. Behind these concerns is the assumption that there may be effects, intended or unintended, on public opinion and political behaviour and, ultimately, electoral outcomes (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2019 - 2023). Generally, the use of social media and politics refers to the use of popular online social media platforms for political campaigns and activities (Kimseng, 2017). There are various popular social media such as Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, Linked In, Pinterest, Viber and so on. These media can be used by political organizations, political parties, political corruption and global politics (Kruse, 2018). In recent time internet and social media are a strong platform that makes strong interactive communication channel to circulate news. Social media has strong power to influence and change not only the message but also values, political corruption and dynamics of political conflict. Social media made the election process, extreme politics, and global political conflict less susceptible and private to the people perception.

Earlier definition of the concept of social mobilization simplified it as the process of dialogue, negotiation and consensus building for action by people, communities, and organizations etc. to identify, address and solve a common problem (UNICEF, 1997). However, more recent definition broadened the concept as; a broad scale movement to engage people's participation in achieving a specific development goal through self-reliant efforts. It involves all relevant segments of society: decision and policy makers, opinion leaders, bureaucrats and technocrats, professional groups, religious associations, commerce and industry, communities and individuals. It is a planned decentralized process that seeks to facilitate change for development through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. It takes into account the felt needs of the

people, embraces the critical principle of community involvement, and seeks to empower individuals and groups for action. (UNICEF, 2002).

Social mobilization is borne out of the need to organize people into groups to ensure their involvement and participation in development programmes. The goal of social mobilizations is the provision of a continuum of activities in a broad strategic framework to facilitate change. The process encompasses dialogue and partnership with a wide spectrum of societal elements with an outcome which are people's active involvement in the process starting with identifying a need to implementation, and achieving the development objective and evaluation effort. There are different parts to social mobilization such as: the motivation and organization of different groups that results in the successful transformation of development goals into societal action; involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare; a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through face-to-face dialogue.

In all these efforts, social mobilization process ensures that, members of institutions, community networks, civic and religious groups and others work in a coordinated way to reach specific groups of people for dialogue with planned messages (Wikipedia, 2011). In other words, social mobilization seeks to facilitate change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. In fact, social mobilization aims at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country.

From the above explanations, social mobilization could be defined simply as a means of inspiring people to active action and engagement concerning social issues. The key for mobilization is to inspire and motivate individuals to go from the comfort of their homes to engage in development actions. The development of the internet has provided an alternative means for mobilizing the public. Social

media allow organizers such as professionals, civil society and government who are recognized as key agents of social mobilization to involve like-minded people in a particular desirable activity at a very low cost, to action. Instead of attending meetings, workshops and rallies, un-committed individuals can join a Facebook group or follow a Twitter feed at home.

The role of media continues to be useful in mobilizing and drawing citizens to focus on issues that are perceived as important and in priming public opinion among many Africans to get engaged in the political process of governance and democratization (Kalyango, 2011; Montero, 2009). The massive boom in the online and wireless digital media augmented traditional media, namely radio, newspapers, television, and magazines (Montero, 2009).

This study examines whether the online and wireless digital media have aided political mobilization in Nigeria more than the traditional media in the past five years. The digital media, such as cellular phones, have penetrated remote areas in many African states that are inaccessible to traditional media.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The basic aim of this study is to examine effectiveness of social media as a tool for political mobilization in Nigeria, using Ekiti State as a case study. Specific objectives include:

- i. To find out the extent to which social media can influence the behaviour of voters in Ekiti State.
- ii. To ascertain the effectiveness of social media as tools of political mobilization in Nigeria, using voters in Ekiti State as case study.
- iii. To ascertain the challenges inherent in the use of social media for political mobilization in elections.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions which are in line with the objectives will be answered in this study:

- i. To what extent does social media influence the behaviour of voters in Ekiti State?
- ii. How effective is social media as tools for political mobilization in Nigeria?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of political mobilization dates back centuries, with traditional media like newspapers, radio, and television playing crucial roles in shaping public opinion and organizing political activities. In the 20th century, mass media became a powerful tool for political leaders and movements, providing a platform to disseminate information and influence voters. The advent of the internet and digital media in the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a significant shift, democratizing information dissemination and enabling more decentralized forms of political mobilization (McChesney, 2015). Two primary theoretical frameworks are pertinent to understanding social media's role in political mobilization: social movement theory and communication theory. Social movement theory examines the strategies and mechanisms through which social movements emerge, grow, and achieve their objectives. It emphasizes the importance of resources, political opportunities, and collective identity in mobilizing supporters (Tarrow, 2011). Communication theory, on the other hand, focuses on the processes and effects of communication within societies. It explores how media channels, including social media, influence public perception, political discourse, and engagement (McQuail, 2010).

Existing research has extensively examined the impact of social media on political mobilization. Studies have shown that social media platforms facilitate rapid information sharing and coordination, making them effective tools for organizing protests and political campaigns. For instance, the role of social media in the Arab Spring has been widely documented, highlighting how platforms like Twitter and Facebook were used to mobilize protestors and spread information in authoritarian contexts (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

Social media has radically transformed political communication, enabling individuals, political groups, activists, and marginalized communities to amplify their voices on a global scale. Unlike traditional media channels, which have long been dominated by political elites, corporations, and established media outlets, social media platforms provide an egalitarian space where anyone with an internet connection can broadcast their views. This shift has democratized political discourse, empowering activists and dissidents to challenge dominant narratives, organize for social change, and amplify their causes in ways that were once unimaginable. This section delves into the role of social media as an amplifier for political voices, examining both its benefits and limitations, while also highlighting key case studies in which social media has been pivotal in advancing political movements.

Calderaro (2018) argues that the internet and social media have made a great interest among people whether the social and other internet communication platform has any impact on the political activities. His research evaluated the relationship between social media and politics from multiple angles. He also argued that social media has not only been used to circulate news on the national border but also helps to circulate beyond the national borders. By circulating information, social media helps to increase political knowledge and this ensures more participation in political activities.

Social media also can be used in a political campaign and social movement. Yildirim (2020) argued that social media is shaping political campaigns and this has a great impact to change the game plan of politics. The social media platform has provided the option to the newcomers to speak to constituents about political policies. This also changed the communication pattern of political parties than ten years ago. Munir (2018) has researched how social media affect the voting behaviour of youth. From this study, it has been found that young voters search for information about their like-minded political expert on social media. He also argued that politically aware voters are more active to get political information. Political Mobilization may be defined as the development of social and hence

political relationship between individuals and political parties. Political mobilization through social networking sites indicates subtle change in the minds of the audiences or voters to change their thought process or to think about any particular political parties as they have been exposed to that political party through different forms of social media. Since social media provides an interactive forum, it also gives an idea to the politicians about the expectations of the people from the government or whether people are happy with the incumbent government or not.

According to Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2018), the status of social media has been particularly highlighted in politics, given the fact that the use of social networking sites like (Facebook) and microblogging sites (Twitter) are believed to have the potential of attracting youth population and positively influencing political involvement. They also laid emphasis on social media becoming a core part of public discourse and effective communication in the modern society. The fast development of social media has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas. to the newcomers to speak to constituents about political policies.

Munir (2018) has researched how social media affect the voting behaviour of youth. From this study, it has been found that young voters search for information about their like-minded political expert on social media. He also argued that politically aware voters are more active to get political information. Political Mobilization may be defined as the development of social and hence political relationship between individuals and political parties. Political mobilization through social networking sites indicates subtle change in the minds of the audiences or voters to change their thought process or to think about any particular political parties as they have been exposed to that political party through different forms of social media. Since social media provides an interactive forum, it also gives an idea to the politicians about the expectations of

the people from the government or whether people are happy with the incumbent government or not.

Despite the wealth of research on social media and political mobilization, several gaps remain. Firstly, there is limited understanding of how different demographic groups use social media for political purposes. Most studies focus on young, urban populations, overlooking older and rural demographics. Secondly, the impact of misinformation and fake news on political mobilization is an area that requires further exploration. While there is acknowledgment of its existence, its specific effects on political behavior and outcomes are not well understood (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Lastly, there is a need for more longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of social media on political engagement and mobilization.

Against this background, this study will examine the effectiveness of social media in political mobilization as it applies to voters in Ekiti State.

CHAPTER THREE: MATERIALS AND METHOD

In this study, a survey was adopted, which is primarily based on quantitative data. Therefore, data collection was carried out through the administration of a questionnaire instrument served to eligible voters residing in Ekiti State. The instrument became appropriate for this study because of its relevance in the field of social research. Among others, it enables a wider audience to be reached, which helps in gathering authentic and detailed information on the topic under study. Anchored on the cluster sampling technique, five local government areas, which are Ado, Irepodun/Ifelodun, Ijero, Ekiti West and Efon, were selected based on the presence of central political wards.

The study area is Ekiti Central. Residents of this area are predominant civil servants, traders and political office holders. Apart from the English language that is considered as the Linqua Franca, the native of this study area speak “Yoruba” as their ancestral language.

A sample size of 200 respondents was drawn from the population of 245, 500 according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data. Purposive sampling technique was adopted and found suitable for this study. This is because this technique allows the researcher the opportunity to identify respondents who have connection with the subject matter of the research and are qualified to respond on the issue. The researcher selected 200 respondents by identifying the five (5) headquarters of the local governments. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire. This was used to ascertain respondents' perception on the effectiveness of social media for political mobilization among voters in Ekiti State.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1: Analysis of Findings

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	120	60
Female	80	40
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that out of 200 respondents, 120 (60%) were males while 80 (40%) of the respondents were females. Therefore, the number of male respondents was more than the number of female respondents.

Table 2: Distributions of Respondents by Age

Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage
15 – 30	50	25
31 – 35	45	22.5
36 – 40	55	27.5

41 - 45	25	12.5
46 and above	25	12.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the age distribution in Table 2 above, 50 respondents, representing 25% were within the age brackets of 15-25, 45 respondents, representing 22.5% were within 31-35 age bracket, 55 respondents, representing 27.5% were within 36-40 age brackets, 25 respondents, representing 12.5% were within 41-45 age brackets, while 25 respondents, representing 12.5% were within 46 and above.

Table 3: Distributions of respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Students	55	27.5
Civil Servants	45	22.5
Traders	55	27.5
Farmers	45	22.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the distribution of Table 3 above, 55 respondents, representing 27.5% are students, 45 respondents, representing 22.5% are civil servants, 55 respondents, representing 27.5% are traders, whereas 45 respondents, representing 22.5% are farmers.

Table 4: Distributions of Respondents showing the extent to which the social media has influenced their political participation in recent times.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
To a very high extent	105	52.5

High extent	45	22.5
Low extent	35	17.5
Very low extent	15	7.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the distribution in table 4 above, 105 respondents, representing 52.5% were of the opinion that social media has influenced their political participation to a very high extent in recent times. 45 respondents, representing 22.5% agreed it has influenced them to a high extent, 35 respondents, representing 17.5% said it has influenced them to a low extent, whereas 15 respondents, representing 7.5% claimed it has influenced them to a very low extent.

Table 5: Distributions of Respondents showing the effectiveness of social media as a tool for political mobilization.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Highly Effective	120	60
Very Effective	40	20
Effective	35	17.5
Not Effective	5	2.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the distribution in table 5 above, 120 respondents, representing 60% were of the opinion that social media is highly effective as a tool for political mobilization. 40 respondents, representing 20% agreed it is very effective, 35 respondents, representing 17.5% said it is effective while 5 respondents, representing 2.5% claimed it is not effective at all.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Answer to research question one: To what extent does social media influence the behaviour of voters in Ekiti State?

Data from table 4 above shows that a total of 105 respondents, representing 52.5% were of the opinion that social media has influenced their political participation to a very large extent.

This shows that the social media influences the behaviour of voters in Ekiti State.

Answer to research question two: ii. How effective is social media as tools for political mobilization in Nigeria?

Data from table 5 shows that 120 respondents, representing 60% were of the opinion that social media is highly effective as a tool for political mobilization.

This shows that social media is highly effective as a tool for political mobilization.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

In order to assess the impact of social media for political mobilization in Ekiti State, the researchers prepared a questionnaire to elicit information from the respondents and came out with the following findings in respect of the questions raised in the study. Findings revealed that residents of the study areas use various media, which include conventional and non-conventional ones such as radio, television, newspapers/magazines, and social media platforms for political mobilization. However, the most common one is radio, which is followed by social media. This shows that social media is emerging as a substantial promotion tool during elections by the political parties to connect and express their vision, to influence voters, and to achieve its objective to help them increase their visibility or to gain majority votes during the election.

This goes along with the findings of Vankanavath and Deepak[2019] work on the influence of social media as a tool of political marketing in general elections in India, in which they considered social media as an emerging substantial promotion tool during elections by the political parties to connect and express their vision, to influence voters, and to achieve its objective to help them increase their visibility or to gain a majority. Their findings also indicate that political parties possess a well-managed social media team that gains people's interest during elections and that also has wide opportunities for the marketing stream focusing on social media management and promotional work related to elections, political parties, and politicians. The findings also reveal that people frequently have access to news/information on political matters through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, and Twitter, with Facebook taking the lion share. In other words, the rural people get most of their political information through the Facebook social media handle than the other platforms.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is anchored that social media influence electorates in Ekiti State because most of the people believe in information emanating from it, which makes messages on the social media effective. Also, social media is important in the political mobilization process, as almost all politicians and political parties use it to get information across to the people. The influencing power of social media in the political mobilization process has made it indispensable for the politicians and the electorates in every election year.

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