

Examining Social Media Usage for the Mobilization of the 'Obi-Dients' During the 2023 Presidential Election in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Political stakeholders' mobilization is one of the necessary requirements for a robust political process in every democratic dispensation. Over the years, numerous political actors have devised different means of ensuring that citizens are well mobilized to be active in political discourse and actions. The emergence of social media, an offshoot of technological advancement, in particular, has expanded opportunities to get the citizens more engaged in the political process of which political mobilization is germane. Therefore, this study basically sought to evaluate social media use as tools for voters' mobilization during 2023 Presidential Election in the two states of Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. The study which was anchored on Technological Determinism Theory employed descriptive statistics with survey method. Accordingly, a sample size of 400 was drawn from the sample population of 5,722,778 using Taro Yamane's sampling determination formula. The questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The data collected were presented and analyzed using simple frequency count, percentages and tables. The major findings of the study shows that social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube among others serve as the prominent channels of political mobilization of Obi-dients. The study further reveal that social media were used by Obi-dients to express their political opinion, create awareness and generation of grassroots support for Obi-dients' movement. The study also reveals that social media were of great influence in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria by increasing political participation which in the long run influenced the voters' preference of candidates. This study recommends that Political parties and candidates should leverage on social media platforms in all electioneering processes. Election regulatory bodies should put in place well-articulated guidelines on how political actors should use the social media networks for electioneering campaigns.

Keywords: Social Media; Mobilization; Campaigns; Citizens; Election, Engagements



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INTRODUCTION

The influence of social media on political discourse has become increasingly significant, and has become a tool used by audience to source for information and express their mind. It has empowered people globally including

Nigerians, serving as a platform for expression of views on both personal and collective issues and a tool for projecting a course. Ozuru and Ekeanyanwu (2013) agree with this notion that "social media networks have spiced up

ways in which information are disseminated; emphasizing the fact that “social media platforms have also increased the capacity of societies and people to tell their own stories, generate their own stories and people to disseminate same without the traditional gate keeping managed by the traditional media”, (Ibrahim, 2023 p.88). According Oji, and Erubami, (2020), these social media platforms have unique defining features that shape user experiences and how users connect, share content, and engage in communities ranging from the facebook’s personal connections to twitter’s microblogging, instagram’s visual features among others. These features have empowered voters to engage more dynamically in political communication allowing them to articulate through their enabling user interface and navigations capabilities. The most integrating feature of social media platforms is that it prioritize intuitive and user-friendly designs to encourage exploration, content discovery, and ongoing engagement. Platforms offer notifications and alerts to keep users informed in real-time. Through these features, various contents format are thrown up. Different platforms focus on varying contents in various formats such as the Twitter which emphasizes short-form text with multimedia, Instagram features that prioritizes visual content such as photos, videos, and ephemeral Stories, and LinkedIn that caters to professional content like articles and job postings, as well as TikTok which specializes in short, viral video clips.

In the same vain Nsude, Ogbodo, and Nwamini, (2021) With the versatile inherent features, social media platforms enhance interactivity and engagement mechanism whereby users can interact through likes, comments, shares, retweets, reactions, and private messaging. Platforms such as the Facebook uses diverse reactions and supports groups for community engagement. While Twitter provides retweets and hashtags for content sharing and discovery, Instagram enables likes, comments, and direct messages, and LinkedIn allows endorsements and recommendations as professional social proof. This relational novel shift in patterns of engagement tends to promote social connectivity. Social media platforms connect users with different purposes, such as personal relationship maintenance (Facebook), professional networking (LinkedIn), creative expression (Instagram), microblogging (Twitter), and trending viral content sharing (TikTok). Most social platforms including public and private deploy messaging features, with some offering group chats and video calls, enabling efficient real-time communication.

Social media platforms features like Groups, Forums, or open discussion boards influences community building, help users rally around common interests, causes, or hobbies, facilitating social interaction beyond individual connections. Users can join groups or communities based on shared interests or goals, as seen on platforms like Facebook, where users can participate in various activities

and join interest-based groups. Social media platforms users can customise privacy settings to control profile visibility, manage who can see their content, and opt out of tracking or marketing, supporting diverse privacy preferences. One of the most prominent features of social media platforms is that it ensures versatility by providing access across desktop and mobile devices with responsive interfaces that adapt seamlessly to different screen sizes, often featuring Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) for browser accessibility. The Obidients movement clearly aligns with these defining features of the social media, no wonder, various social media platforms were deployed in articulating their ideologies. This also subsumes the fact that a significant proportion of the Obidients are either digital natives or digital migrants.

Articulation of ideologies, policy positions and goals are articulated by parties as a cardinal responsibility through party manifestos, serving as a template for their campaign messages which outline the candidates’ vision and plans if eventually successful at the polls. Complementing the preceding position, Baron as cited in Albert (2011) demonstrates that there are four potential motivations for running for office: First, an unpopular candidate could draw attention to themselves during the campaign time and procedure. Second, an unpopular but public-spirited candidate could run, not necessarily with the goal of winning, but rather in order to inform voters about strategically crucial public policy concerns that should be emphasized during an election year.

The candidate’s third objective may be to create a group of like-minded individuals for tactical social and political action. The fault and ultimate interest may be to win the election and become president or governor, depending on the position being contested. Campaign strategies in Nigeria typically involve a mix of traditional and modern approaches. Traditional methods include rallies, town hall meetings, door-to-door campaigns, and engaging local community leaders. In recent times, digital platforms and social media have become crucial for reaching a wider audience, with candidates utilising online platforms to disseminate campaign messages, share videos, and engage with voters (Okoro, Etumnu, & Okoro, 2019).

The emergence of social media has made it possible to have on-demand access to political messages at any time, from any place, and on any digital device. The use of social media in promoting political candidates in Nigeria by parties’ supporters and stakeholders is becoming more prevalent than they were ever before. Political stakeholders have multiplied and up-scaled the bar in terms of the level of use they display especially in social media campaigns. Political campaigns and voters mobilisation strategies have also changed in recent times to involve more usage of social media channels. Although several researchers (Bello, Yusuf, Yusuf & Akintola. 2017); While scholars such as Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya, Anumadu, and Okeke (2017), as well as Opeibi (2019),

have examined the role of social media in voter mobilization and electoral participation, there remains a notable gap in research on how social media contributed to the emergence of massive and unprecedented political awareness and consciousness in Nigeria particularly as exemplified by the Obi-dient movement during the 2023 elections. It is against this backdrop that this study was framed to focus on the extent to which social media aided or caused the arousal of massive and unprecedented political awareness and consciousness of Obi-dient movement in the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria; the implications; the extent of their influence in the campaign process and the determination of voters choice of candidates and way forward to social media use in voters mobilisation in elections in Nigeria. Studies have aligned with the predominant use of social media for political mobilisation purposes, deepening the conversation and amplifying the narratives, to the point that such potentials at mobilisation are restrictive to certain categories of users. For the Obidients, who are predominantly digital natives and migrants, it seems right to assume that social media use was effective at mobilising them. However, there exists no empirical finding to support this. Therefore, this study assessed the level of exposure, choice and frequency of social media used, message types and direction that were deployed to engaged and mobilised Obidients in the 2023 elections(Sauvage, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess Nigerian voters' level of exposure to the 'Obi-dient' movement in the 2023 Presidential elections political campaign messages on social media.
2. Ascertain the social media platforms used most by the 'Obi-dient' movement in the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria
- 3 To determine if political social media campaign messages of the 'Obi-dient' movement influenced Nigerian electorates' choice of presidential candidates in the election.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media are interactive platforms hosted on the internet that enhance easy exchange of information and socialization among users. They include several platforms that help actualize the essence of interaction such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram, and a host of other platforms, both universal and geo-specific. The concept, Social Media concept has been described in different ways by

scholars. For instance, Nwabueze (2014) defines social media as interactive web-based media that engage key players in a communication channel in defining and determining the message content. Also Shaw (2016) defines social media as "the means of interactions through web-based technology among people in which they create and exchange information, ideas and opinions in virtual communities and networks".

According to Obono (2016), social media represent new trends of communication among people who depend on the media for news and information. They enable individuals, groups, and organizations to create and share content, including videos, photos, images, texts, news, ideas, insight, humor, opinions, and gossip. In other words, social media facilitate social interactions and enable the development and diffusion of information. Social media, Obono added, are characterized by five key features, namely participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness as they are interactive forums that are not bound by ones location; more precisely, individuals can access information communicated through the various platforms and create and share content as long as they are connected to the internet. Grouping the social media, Obono (2016) catalogue them into the categories to include collaborative projects such as Wikipedia; blogs and microblogs in the likes of Twitter; content communities like Youtube; social networking sites such as Facebook; virtual game worlds in the likes of world of warcraft, and virtual social worlds like soundlife.

According to Targema (2020), others that are geo-specific social media platforms exist and are used in different societies and relating it to Nigeria, social networks such as Palmchat, Imo, 2go, and Meetme are used, although they are not as popular as the ones mentioned above.

Dauda, Abubakar and Lawan (2017) contend that social media thrives in Nigeria primarily owing to the massive importation of digital technologies that facilitate their usage and high internet penetration. Corroborating this stance, Nsude, Ogbodo and Nwamini (2021) noted that that recent internet penetration statistics rank Nigeria at the top of the list of African countries based on the share of internet traffic, specified that internet penetration amounted to 46.6% of the population in 2020 and is projected to reach 62% by 2025, which has boosted the ubiquity of social media in Nigeria, driving their impacts across several dimensions of human endeavor, including mass mobilization and community engagement.

Mass mobilization refers to the process of engineering of civilian population as part of contentious politics, to foster their collective consciousness. It is often used by grassroots-based social movement, not limited to only revolutionizing movements, but can also become a tool of elites and the state itself. According Akpan (2022), the process of galvanizing people to achieve a given course while fostering their collective consciousness.

UNICEF (2015) considers mass mobilization 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. 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. Furthermore, social mobilization seeks to facilitate change through a range of players in interrelated and complementary efforts. Social media and the internet, in this direction, have made mobilization easier to organize and disseminate ideas. Best and Krueger (2005) state that internet has grown in political importance, and has played a significant role in many mass mobilization efforts. Political mobilization deals with mass emotional motivation, psycho-socio and political spurring of people toward the attainment of corporate and communal goals (Akindele 2004). Akindele reviewed scholarly definitions which point to the fact that mobilization denotes the process of stimulating people's consciousness toward attaining certain ends. The Directorate of Social Mobilization (cited in Akindele, 2004) states that "to mobilize people is to increase their level of awareness of certain set objectives with a view to achieving those Objectives" (Akpan, & Targema, 2022.p.100).

Germane to operationalizing the concept of mobilization is that the concept must be approached in terms of engaging the people to participate actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare. Scholars and political analysts contend that mobilization describes endeavors that aim at increasing peoples level of awareness or understanding of political and other issues in order to apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country. Akindele (2004) in his summation of scholarly thoughts on the concept of mobilization, considers it as the process of sensitizing the citizenry and increasing their cognition, political consciousness, and efficacy. He preferred that political mobilization could mean the determined process of emotionally bringing people together and making them internalize the communality of societal values, attitudes, and orientation in order to achieve specified holistic objectives.

Incontrovertibly, technology, without any element of bias, has turned the entire world into a global village. However, technology is like two sides of a coin; it comes along with both negative and positive sides. It assists people to be better enlightened, entertained and further keep them abreast with developments in the world and happenings. It exposes mankind to better ways of doing things (McLuhan 1964).

Consequent upon this wave of technological revolution, social media networking has increasingly gained momentum in the world of information and communication technology. Social networking played a pivotal role in

information and communication in Nigeria over some events that will always be remembered. These events cut across social, religious and especially political where the masses were mobilized through social media platforms.

One of such events was Goodluck Jonathan's presidential declaration on facebook. Records have it that, the first time a massive novel feat was noted was through social media in ways never seen before when Goodluck Jonathan, the elected president of Nigeria, took the extraordinary step of declaring his intention for the highest office on facebook. On Wednesday, 15 September, 2010, he informed his 217,000 and more fans on the world's most popular networking platform of his intent. Twenty four hours later, 4,000 more fans joined his page. By the day of the election, on 16 April 2011, he had over a million followers. Jonathan's online campaign was only one illustration of the social media fever that gripped Africa's most populous country during that era of presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

Another event that witnessed the massive use of social media mobilization was a mass protest movement that began in Nigeria on Monday, 2 January, 2012 in response to the fuel subsidy removal by the Federal Government of President Goodluck Jonathan on Sunday, 1 January 2012. The protest took place across the country, including in the cities of Kano, Ojota, Abuja, and at the Nigerian Embassy in London. About 16 people were killed in Nigeria; all were shot dead by the Nigeria Police Force. The protests were characterized by civil disobedience, civil resistance, strike actions, demonstrations and online activism. The use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Blackberry Messenger has been a prominent feature that made the protest coordinated and a successful through the use of #OccupyNigeria.

Yet another instance of the use of social media as a tool of mass mobilization was the Bring Back our girls' campaign. This campaign was started as a result of the abduction of 276 school girls from Chibuk on 14th April, 2014 by the Islamic group, Boko haram in Borno state. The social media campaign mobilization swept the entire world of her feet with the twitter harshtag #BBOG. The campaign did not only attracted dissenting voices around the world, but also that of prominent personalities such as the United states president, Barak Obama, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, one time German Chancellor, Angela Merkel among others (bringbackourgirls.ng 2015). The 2015 general election is another example where political actors of various parties saw the social network as a hunting ground, where they could hold grip of their would-be supporters and electorates through their lineup programmes/manifestos. In fact, it was believed that the elections were won and lost right from social network. For instance, President Mohammadu Buhari, while contesting as an opposition, was denied the use of NTA, and AIT on the other side went about campaign of calumny. Having seen this, his party and President Mohammadu Buhari as

candidate opted for the use of social media using hash tag “#Febuhari” when the election was first scheduled to hold on February. Similarly after the shift of the election to March, another has tag was created, “#Marchforbuhari”. (GMB campaign 2015)

Even though some critics have argued that social media does not win election, it shapes and moulds the opinion, help create viral campaigns, checkmating irregularities, as well as lock down results. Donald Trump confirmed the potency of social media when he was confronted with a rhetorical question of whether social media makes presidents, during his presidential campaigns when responded with a yes, it is possible. The man told Fox Business Network in October 2017, during his presidency: “I doubt I would be here if it weren’t for social media, to be honest with you. When somebody says something about me, I am able to go “bing, bing, bing” and I take care of it”. This was established by Nigerians, with particular reference to the youth, on social media as they took on their various social media accounts to post updates of campaigns, elections, and announcement of results even before the official declaration of winners by the INEC.

Another key role played by social media in managing the 2015 elections was the recirculation of the personal concession call of President Goodluck Jonathan to President – elect, Muhammadu Buhari when the call was leaked to the media. This greatly helped to douse the already tensed political atmosphere. President Muhammadu Buhari in his inaugural speech on the 29th May, 2015 acknowledged the vital role played by social media campaigners when he said “I thank those who tirelessly carried the campaign on the social media” (Buhari’s inaugural speech 2015).

In the Nigeria 2023 presidential election, there were three frontrunners – Bola Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi who represents the aspirations of the teeming but marginalised Nigerians. Tinubu, 70, represented Buhari’s ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), the acclaimed political veteran previously served as governor of Lagos State. Popularly known as “Jagaban” by his supporters, promised to enhance security, tackle mounting debts and improve state infrastructure if he was elected president. Abubakar, 76, represented the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He hails from North-eastern Nigeria; the shrewd politician and business tycoon served as the country’s Vice President from 1999 to 2007. With a presidential campaign theme called “My covenant with Nigeria”, he vowed unity, peace and to improve the nation’s economic prospects.

Obi, 61, ran on the ticket for the lesser known Labour Party. The businessman-turned-politician previously served as governor of Anambra state in south-eastern Nigeria, his place of birth. As a relative political neophyte, Obi has amassed tremendous support among Nigerian youth with his campaign promises to unite and rebuild the country by tackling issues such as insecurity and unemployment. The Nigeria’s security situation has

worsened in the recent years and is a top concern for voters, with high levels of violent crime across the nation in the nomenclature of jihadist postures such as Boko Haram and armed gangs terrorising and adopting people for ransom across the country. Amongst the presidential candidates, Obi symbolises the voice of the underprivileged that yearn for a better Nigeria where justice, equity, fairness and respect for human rights would prevail. He typified hope. A look at the development of Obi’s character reveals discipline, responsibility, prudent management of resources, consistence, probity, credibility and positive impact on the society.

As an astute business man, he is known for his “egg principle”: that even one egg meant for sale should be carefully guarded as losing it meant the loss of profit in the venture. Renowned for his prudence and financial discipline, Obi’s performance as a governor of Anambra State was a popular reference in various quarters long before his shot at national politics: commitment to frugal government, building state capital, saving for rainy day, outstanding service delivery (in education and healthcare in particular) and exemplary accountability (no record of corruption case against him while in government) and distinct financial discipline resulting in the now known popular aphorisms: “Doesn’t give ‘shishi, which means he does not bribe anyone, even with a dime and “Go and verify (his facts)” - qualities that endeared him to the hearts of most Nigerians.

The unwillingness of the People’s Democratic Party to cede its presidential ticket to the South-East region, the dubious highest bidder arrangement of the party’s primaries and the acrimonious relationship among the party leaders propelled Obi’s defection to the Labour Party in May 2022. Following his exit from the PDP after the primaries, Peter Obi was adopted as the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, with Kaduna State senator, Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, as his running mate. While the LP was re-established in 2002 (there had been previous Labour Party in earlier republics), it has languished at the electoral margins, having only won one governorship election and a handful of parliamentary seats. With Obi’s antecedents, his emergence as Labour Party’s presidential candidate attracted young people who rallied round the Obi-dient movement. Obi’s candidacy quickly turned the “third force” that was believed could upstage the two dominant political parties - All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). His incursion into the contest on relatively unpopular political party took many Nigerians by surprise as whoever made any meaningful impact in the past were on the two major parties. However, his candidacy was underestimated. A former minister of Information and National Orientation, Labaran Maku, buttressed this fact while on Channels Television, where he asserted that the ruling APC and the opposition PDP under-rated Obi and his supporters as they thought he lacked political structure and as such would not accomplish much, (Maku, 2023).

Maku, however, noted that the two parties were shocked with the massive turnout of Obi and the Labour Party's followership, especially among the youth in the build-up and during the presidential election on 25 February 2023. The support for Mr. Peter Obi traces its root to the "#ENDSARS" protests of October 2020 when young Nigerians flocked to the streets to denounce a police unit notorious for extortion, brutality and extrajudicial killings. Obi voiced his support on Twitter and used the movement to call for better governance in Nigeria. The police unit was disbanded and the movement was eventually quelled by the heavy-handed response of Nigeria's military.

Riding the wave of the "#EndSARS" movement and the Obidient Movement that it birthed, the moment in history outlines how young people have begun to consolidate power using social media but, more importantly, taking their fight off social media to build a grassroots network of supporters and allies alike. The wave of the Obidient movement became a threat to authorities. This he affirmed when he said it in an interview with a traditional media outlet that his "consumption to production" mantra gained traction on social media. In this setting, Obi has worked to create a reputation as the epitome of honesty and wisdom (Sauvage, 2023). He accomplished this by concentrating on young people and social media. After all, youth account for almost 70% of users on social media.

Wehmeyer (2023), who is still thinking about Peter Obi and his social media antics said:

"Regardless of his chances of winning the election, Obi has spiced up the political landscape and ushered Nigeria into a new political era, by moving millions of young Nigerians with the targeted use of social media. It remains to know whether the old way of doing politics and choosing presidential candidates based on ethnicity, religion and connection has been superseded by one based on character, capacity, competence, commitment and individual choice".

The most rapidly expanding and technologically sophisticated grassroots movement on the continent is Peter Obi's campaign (Ozigbo, 2023). Peter Obi is Nigeria's most popular, preferred, and qualified candidate, according to all polls conducted by reputable statistics and data gathering businesses, including NOI/ANAP Polls, We2gether, Nextier, Bloomberg, and others (Ozigbo, 2023). Not long ago, the rise of social media inspired great optimism about its potential for flattening access to economic and political opportunity, enabling collective action, and facilitating new forms of expression. Its increasingly widespread use ushered in a wave of commentary and scholarship seeking to meld well established bodies of knowledge on mass media, economics, and social movements with the affordances of this new communication technology.

The social media has become almost an inseparable part of human life in places where they exist. In recent times, social media have evolved new forms of democracy, government, and have become a clear and more effective voice of many. In fact, social media have influences on all spheres of human life. The impacts of the social media are felt most in the 2015 general elections. It was felt in the electioneering processes-campaign, and eventually the polling procedures. According to Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012), the 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed a remarkable use of the social media as a tool for political communication. It was used for campaigns via personal websites, blogs, all social media applications, and several other media. Aside from this, the social media was equally used as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of other political actors and parties. The influence of the social media in the modern day society is immeasurable. In fact, it has become the most accessible source of information in the present day society. These information on the social media are unregulated and sometimes, they tend to be biased, presumptuous, and might even be tentative. Aside from these, the population of bloggers is uncontrolled as many have the ability to create blogs and channels, where information can be circulated. Unfortunately, the majority of the accessible population to these information are unaware of these maladies.

Arguably, this makes curbing disinformation very challenging in Nigeria. But at the same time, these networks for the flow of information can also promote democracy. Civic awareness of the continuous voters' registration process and the importance of participating has largely been driven by a sustained online campaign in the run-up to 2023, while the platforms can be used to fact check and hold elected and aspiring officials to account. Although studies have shown that social media are essential social forces that lubricate the engine room of democracy in Africa [Borah 2016 & Nagourney, 2008], and are no doubt, revolutionizing the process of political communication and expanding the frontiers of political participation (Suntai & Targema, 2017). Yet, other research has stated that social media are sometimes used inappropriately by political aspirants and their supporters which affect the fairness in political campaigns and processes at large (Apuke & Iyendo 2017).

Whereas, the way such disinformation can permeate into the media more generally, greater access to online information does not necessarily create more informed citizens. In fact, in Nigeria, it has confused the citizenry while entrenching pre-existing divides based on ethnicity and religion, especially as malinformation, a deliberate sharing of genuine information with intent to cause harm. Supporting this view, Suntai and Targema (2017) in retrospect, remarked that although social media provides a medium to facilitate democracy in Nigeria, yet, in the build-up to the 2015 general elections, the platforms were

deployed to perpetuate campaigns of calumny against candidates with opposing views, which almost divided the country into the extremes of the Muslim-North and Christian-South. This implies that electoral crises and squabbles between contestants have taken on new dimensions due to the influence of social media. The increased availability of smartphones has made electorates who are even in the grassroots to disseminate messages during electioneering campaigns, in turn, creating a new implication for democracy.

In the use of Social media as instrument of political mobilization of all stakeholders, key players are focused on glorifying or de-legitimising political candidates and undermining the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), (Ibrahim, 2023). However, they are at the same time online organization that remains largely informal, in part by design, with political parties driving disinformation behind the scenes through unofficial party accounts or hired influencers.

Conversely, the use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, TikTok, with its predominantly video content can bridge educational divides as well as Twitter Spaces, which are recorded and then shared, as podcasts, across social media platforms in ways that increase listenership. The dominant features in the in previous elections were text messages and pictures but in 2023 there was a radical innovations wherein emphasis shifted more on the real time livestreaming of audio and video content on social media platforms. One of the innovations in the 2023 presidential election is the production of political song challenges, such as the one coordinated by Dauda Rara, a prominent northern political musician, and it is called 'Jagaban Shine Gaba'. The challenge encouraged citizens to mime a song with creative videos and upload it on TikTok. . Other political actors have also been promoting challenges that favour their candidate by offering gifts or rewards to those who generate the most viral contents. Coupled with the TikTok's fairly lax community guidelines and limited enforcement, these challenges can be used to push disinformation "without those responsible being penalized in the view of one user. TikTok content also reaches individuals without an account through cross-posting, meaning that it can reach Nigerians with limited literacy, when it comes to written text. It is much cheaper to send out jingles on TikTok, which previously had to be placed on radio and TV channels and with phone sharing and cross-platform posting that make impactful effect on the audience.

For all social media platforms, the line between the online and offline remains blurred. For example, during this election campaign cycle, a letter on the official INEC letterhead, and purportedly signed by the INEC spokesperson, was released claiming to commence the investigation of the APC presidential candidate on drug related charges. However, this letter was a forgery that

originated on WhatsApp, moved quickly across social media. WhatsApp remains utilized to coordinate the organisation of elections, to circulate audio and visuals, and it has the largest reach in terms of the direct number of users. Voice notes remains critical, especially in local languages, with content regularly played and replayed to an audience that has no direct online access. Other closed network platforms like Telegram are also becoming increasingly influential. These closed spaces are also used to help organize campaign rallies and other large gatherings, both online and offline. The latter is a concern, given that separatist groups, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have Telegram channels through which they talk directly to supporters, spread disinformation, recruit adherents and plan offline activities. For all social media platforms, the line between the online and offline remains blurred. For example, during this election campaign cycle, a letter on the official INEC letterhead, and purportedly signed by the INEC spokesperson, was released claiming to commence the investigation of the APC presidential candidate on drug related charges.

Disinformation took centre stage in the use of social media to entrench pre-existing social cleavages around ethnicity and religion in the 2023 election campaign. This is accentuated by the fact that the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are fielding presidential candidates Peter Obi (Igbo), Bola Tinubu (Yoruba) and Atiku Abubakar (Fulani/Hausa). Often, in the buildup of activities to the election and during the election, photoshopped scenes or old images are being re-circulated or utilised to cast one ethnicity against the other and delegitimize opposition. An example was a picture of the APC vice-presidential candidate, Kashim Shettima, showing him with what was claimed to be members of the Islamist militant group, Boko Haram. The image was circulated widely on Twitter, WhatsApp and was even referred to by a television morning show producer. A fact-check eventually revealed that while Shettima was indeed sitting and having a meal with people, they were not Boko Haram members but nomadic Fulani parents whose children he had enrolled in secular schools in 2017. With the APC running a controversial Muslim-Muslim ticket, this falsehood appears to have been designed to appeal to, and prey on the fears of, Christian voters. This is not surprising as Oyenuga (2015) indicated that in political campaigns, social networking sites can turn out to be an intense and deadly weapon in the hands of political candidates, in which various video releases, voice lines, feature reports, headlines, and broadcasts are made to tarnish other political candidates and individuals. Clearly, we must all be careful about what we see and hear on the social media.

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within the Technological Determinism

Theory. Technological determinism theory presents a picture in its most extreme form, where the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology; new technologies transforming society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017, p.298). According to Burnett and Marshall, as cited in Paragas & Lin, (2014) the theory is a framework for understanding the relationship between information and communication technology and the key features of society at any given period.

The theory propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1962, believed to have been developed by an American Sociologist and economist, Thorstein Veblen (18-1929), is a reductionist idea that says a society's technological progress is what ultimately shapes its social composition and cultural norms. The implication therefore is that, media technology shapes how we, as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how society operates, as we move from one technology age to another.

Nwanwene (2010) contends that changes in technologies have affected almost all facets of human life. Corroborating this opinion, Marx cited in Asemah et al (2017) contends that the theory revolve around the preposition that technology in any given society defines its nature; technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course. Karl Marx believed that technological progress leads to newer ways of production in a a society and this ultimately influences the cultural, political and economic aspects of a society, thereby inevitably changing society itself.

The role of technology in the overall development of society is best appreciated within the context of use, implying that societies have varying capacities to use technologies, which in turn, leads to variations in the overall impact of such technology in different socio-economic or cultural contexts. Paragas and Lin (2014) explained this further by introducing two dimensions, the hard and soft determinisms, to the conceptualization of technological determinism theory. Specifically, hard determinism ascribes technology with omnipotence in shaping society, whereas soft determinism locates the power of technology in regard to other social and cultural factors present in society.

This idea of the concept of the media as extensions of man by McLuhan, more precisely, is the idea that media literally extend sight, hearing, and touch through time and space. The advent of the electronic media and their influence on the process of communication supported McLuhan's powerful predictions that formed the basis of technological determinism theory, such as the popular global village concept (Baran & Davis, 2010). Technological determinism theory drives historical and political changes that are influenced by advances in technological innovations and diffusion, and shaped by realities in the media space, and the emergence of the

internet and in turn the social media. Political mobilization messages or campaigns can reach the target audience with speed and ease through the use of social networking sites which transcend both space and time without delay. This theory is therefore considered appropriate for this work, given that, the new technology of social media offers politicians and political actors several windows of opportunity to mobilize and drive voters and stakeholders to be fully integrated and make their contributions towards their course.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study is descriptive survey method. This design is found relevant because it deals with large population in order to examine the distribution, incidence and interaction of educational activities, like sociological and psychological variables from which samples are drawn (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareifo, & Okpanachi, 2017). The population of this study is from Delta and Edo states which has a total population of (3,221,697) and (2,501,081) respectively. The major targets of the population in this investigation are active participants and eligible registered voters in the two states. The population of the study therefore is 5,722,778 (Five Million, Seven Hundred and Twenty Two Thousand, Seven Hundred and Seventy Eight) active Nigerians, being the summation of the 2024 projected census figure of the two states. The sample size was derived by using the Taro Yamane's sampling sizes determination table (Yamane, 1967). The sample size for this study therefore is 400 respondents. Validated self-structured questionnaire was utilized as data collection instrument that was administered on respondents in the two states comprising Delta and Edo states. In order to obtain quantitative data, the researchers obtained data from 400 respondents, adopting proportional distribution of the copies of the questionnaire such that two hundred and twenty two (225) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents in Delta state and one hundred and seventy eight (175) to respondents in Edo state based on their population. The face and construct validity was used, while reliability was achieved at an index of 0.83 tested on the Cronbach Alpha (α). The data gathered over a period of two months was analyzed using percentile statistics. The sampling technique adopted was the multi-stage sampling techniques deploying purposive sampling in picking the three senatorial districts of each state of Delta and Edo and the adoption of random selection of two local government areas from each of the senatorial districts. The second stage involved the use of purposive sampling to pick communities on the basis of one urban area and one rural community from the selected local government areas in the senatorial districts. This is to ensure the even representation of the Obidients across the states. The quota system was adopted to assign sample

Table 1: Distribution of Samples According to States, Senatorial Districts LGAs and Communities.

Delta (225) 3,221,697	Delta North (90) 1,293,074	Oshimili North (51) 162,500 Ndokwa West(39) 104,754 Uvwie (41) Isoko South (35)	Ogwashi-Uku (Ur) (30) & Okpanam (R) (21) Utagba Ogbe (Ur) (21) & Ogume (R) (18) Warri City (Ur) (22) & Udu (R) (19) Oleh (Ur) (20) & Olomoro (R) (15)
	Delta South (76) 1,229,282	Ughelli South (32) 136,374 Ethiope West (27) 14,374 Egor (55) 203,996	Otujeremi (Ur) (20) & Ekakprame (R) (12) Oghara (Ur) (16) & Jesse (R) (11) Uwelu (Ur) (35) & Okhoro (R) (20)
	Delta Central (59) 1,575,738	Edo South (102) 1,451,206	Ovia North East (47) 148,809 Ekiadolor (Ur) (28) & Iguoshodin (R) (19)
	Edo (175) 2,501,081	Edo Central (28) 396,097	Esan North East (18) 106,280 Igueben (10) 99,926 Owan East (26) 106,252 Etsako Central (19) 59,430
	Edo North (45) 636,778		Uromi (Ur) (12) & Eguare-Uromi (R) (6) Igueben Town (Eguare) (Ur) (6) & Amahor (R) (4) Afuze (Ur) (15) & Uzebba (R) (11) Fugar (Urban) (13) & Okpekepe (R) (6)

size to each of the community and purposively selected only the Obidients of the local government within the urban area and rural areas of the states (Table 1).

Description of Abbreviation: Ur – Urban Area: R – Rural Area

Since the study is not particularly targeted at urban/rural dichotomy nor viewed from particular demographic or class variables of the voter, the random sampling technique will be adopted to select respondents that will be accessible to the researchers for administration of questionnaire.

RESULTS

A total number of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed, 332 copies were returned and found usable for the analysis. This high mortality is as a result of emergent or impromptu crisis that erupted in the selected communities which made the researcher to abandon distribution (Table 2). Table 3 shows that 328 respondents representing 98.8% agree that they make use of social media while 4 respondents representing 1.2% did not accept making use of the social media. The overwhelming preference of Facebook (30.7%) and WhatsApp (37.0%) by the respondents is an indication of vast youthful population who presumably are digital natives, and an attestation to the significant growth of the platforms. Surprisingly, though, is the 10.8% that preferred TikTok which is regarded as a more acceptable and preferred platform than Facebook and WhatsApp (Table 4).

In (Table 5), where 33.7% of the respondents alluded to not following any candidate on social media platforms, is a testament to the fact that the Obidient movement is a non-political but driven by the need to institute electoral and political change.

The (Table 5) showing a low 7.2% of the respondents' claim of non-awareness of the campaigns is a possible pointer to the fact that social media played a crucial role in awareness creation of the 'Obi-dients's Movement during the 2023 presidential election.

It is suggestive from the (Table 5) that respondents level of participation in the movement was somewhat ambivalent as indicated by the responses ratio of 198 respondents representing 59.6% who accepts they participated in the 'Obi-dients' Movement as against 134 respondents representing 40.4% state that they did not participate in the movement during the 2023 presidential election.

In table 6, it is glaring that the most influential social media platforms in political campaign message, especially in political mobilisation through Facebook and WhatsApp can no longer be taken for granted. A majority of respondents have answered in support of (52.4%) of Facebook in the propagation of messages about Obi-dients Movement while WhatsApp trailed behind with (15.1%).

From the views of respondents in table 7 above who Agreed (48.2%) and Strongly Agreed (39.2%) respectively that they make use of social media to express their opinion is an indication that the usage of social media in political mobilization was phenomenal amongst the Obidients, most of whom leveraged on the social media not only to participate in politics, but also to influence the outcome of elections.

Table 2: Distribution of Questionnaire

Number of questionnaires distributed	400
Number of questionnaire returned	332
Difference	68
Percentage difference	20.5%

Table 3: Respondents usage social media.

	Yes	No	Total
Respondents usage of social media	328 (98.8)	4 (1.2)	332 (100)

Field Survey 2024

Table 4: Social Media platform and number of users.

Social Media platform most preferred	Frequency
Twitter	27 (8.1)
YouTube	16 (4.8)
Facebook	102 (30.7)
WhatsApp	123 (37.0)
Instagram	22 (6.6)
TikTok	36 (10.8)
Others	6 (1.8)
Total	332 (100)

Field Survey 2024

Table 5: respondent user behavior on social media.

	Yes	No	Total
Respondents' followership of candidates on social media	220 (66.3)	112 (33.7)	332 (100)
Respondents' awareness of the 'Obi-dients' Movement during the during the 2023 presidential election	308 (92.8)	24 (7.2)	332 (100)
Respondents responses on participation in the 'Obi-dients' Movement	198 (59.6)	134 (40.4)	332 (100)

Field Survey 2024

Table 6: Choice of social media platforms Use for Political Messages by Respondents about 'Obi-dients' Movement.

Social media platforms	Frequency
Twitter	20 (6.0)
YouTube	44 (13.3)
Facebook	174 (52.4)
WhatsApp	50 (15.1)
Instagram	22 (6.6)
TikTok	18 (5.4)
Others	4 (1.2)
Total	332 (100)

Field Survey 2024

Table 7 reflecting the combination of overwhelming Agreement and Strong Agreement (92.4%) that social media was a force in awareness creation and mobilization for 'Obi-dients' Movement by the respondents is an indication of high reliance of Obidients and a strong recognition of social media as a versatile purveyor of information and mobilization.

From the perception of respondents in table 7 above, who agreed (53.6%) and (36.7%) respondents Strongly Agreed respectively that social media platform is a good platform to generate support for a cause respectively;

suggests that the deployment and usage of social in mobilizing support in political engineering could not be underscored as it was deployed massively, lending credence to it being a veritable tool in voter mobilization. From the views of respondents in the table 7 above showing 154 (46.4%) and 152 (45.8%) respondents who Agreed and Strongly Agreed respectively suggests that the use of social media in political mobilization has not only enormous influence on respondents to participate in politics but also could influence voters to leverage upon it by voters to exert impact on the outcome of elections.

Table 7: Respondents' level of use of social media to express opinion.

Respondents' level of use of social media to express opinion.	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	10 (3.0)
Disagree	18 (5.4)
Not Sure	14 (4.2)
Agree	160 (48.2)
Strongly Agree	130 (39.2)
Total	332 (100)
Respondents' agreement on Social Media Platforms that played significant role in the spread of awareness and mobilization for Obi-dients Movement	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	8 (2.4)
Disagree	6 (1.8)
Not Sure	10 (3.0)
Agree	124 (37.3)
Strongly Agree	184 (55.4)
Total	332 (100)
Respondents' determination of whether Social Media is a good Platform to generate support for a cause	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	4 (1.2)
Disagree	16 (4.8)
Not Sure	12 (3.6)
Agree	178 (53.6)
Strongly Agree	122 (36.7)
Total	332 (100)
Determination of whether Peter Obi's 'Obi-dients' Movement had influence on increased political participation in the 2023 Presidential election	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	2 (0.6)
Disagree	4 (1.2)
Not Sure	20 (6.0)
Agree	154 (46.4)
Strongly Agree	152 (45.8)
Total	332 (100)
Determination of whether political campaign messages of the Peter Obi's Obi-dients' Movement influenced the voters' preference of candidates	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	4 (1.2)
Disagree	4 (1.2)
Not Sure	40 (12.0)
Agree	176 (53.0)
Strongly Agree	108 (32.5)
Total	332 (100)
Determination of whether social media is an instrument of political mudslinging and campaign of calumny	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	6 (1.8)
Disagree	8 (2.4)
Not Sure	48 (14.5)
Agree	180 (54.2)
Strongly Agree	90 (27.1)
Total	332 (100)

Source: Field Survey 2024

The overwhelming agreement (53%) and strong agreement (32.5%) by the respondents as shown in table 7, is an indication of the messages and slogans like 'We No Dey Give Shishi' that promoted anti-corruption and good governance themes resonated among voters and created emotional connections and boosted voters engagement, especially the youths. This could have swayed voters who may be disillusioned by traditional parties, to mobilize turnout and shifted support towards Obi as an emergent third force status. The table 7 with 180

(54.2%) and 90 (27.1%) respondents' high level of agreement respectively are not unconnected with the fact that social media is an instrument of political mudslinging and campaign of calumny in an electioneering process.

DISCUSSION

The focus of this work was anchored on the fact that social media platforms were deployed to execute a course by the Obidients and how they redefined strategies of political

engagements and mobilization by candidates to maintain presence in the various social media platforms. In this direction, the data as gleaned from the analysis indicated that majority of the respondents were on the consensus that social media platforms were deployed substantially for voters mobilization by the Obidients during the 2023 presidential election in Delta and Edo states with a high proportion of voters exposure to political messages.

Research Objective 1: To assess Nigerian voters' level of exposure to the 'Obi-dient' movement in the 2023 Presidential elections political campaign messages on social media

One of the findings in this study is that the level of social media usage among respondents in Edo and Delta States, South-South Nigeria is high. This finding supports the findings of earlier studies which report that citizens of both Edo and Delta States use social media networks (Dauda et al, 2017). This study reveals that WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others such as, Blog, etc with 123 (37.0%), 102 (30.7%), 36 (10.8%), 27 (8.1%), 22 (6.6%), 16 (4.8%) and 6 (1.8%) respectively were among the prominently used social media platforms by respondents in Edo and Delta States, South-South Nigeria. On the exposure of voters to the Obidient Movement during the 2023 Presidential election, a high number of respondents - 308 (92.8%) affirmed their awareness of the 'Obi-dients' Movement, as against a low number of respondents - 24 (7.2%) who claimed not to be aware of the 'Obi-dients' Movement during the 2023 presidential election. Arguing in the same direction, Arthur (2012) asserts that social media have great potential for encouraging collaborative political participation. According to him, accessible social media platforms offer ordinary citizens the opportunity to interact more directly and actively with their political systems.

On awareness, it suffices to state that awareness does not connote participation. However, The findings of this study affirmed that 198 respondents representing 59.6% accepts they participated in the 'Obi-dients' Movement during the 2023 presidential election while 134 respondents representing 40.4% state that they did not participate, a possible pointer to the fact that social media played a crucial role in awareness creation of the 'Obi-dients's Movement during the 2023 presidential election. On participation, quite a number of respondents (59.6) participated in the movement, an indication of the upsurge in awareness created by social media that feathered huge involvement in the 'Obi-dients' Movement. This suggested that respondents were active in the electioneering process during the 2023 presidential election.

On whether Social Media Platforms that played significant role in the spread of awareness and mobilization for Obi-dients Movement, majority of the respondents Agreed and Strong Agreed (92.4%) that

social media played a significant role in the Obi-dients' Movement. The Obi-dients' involvement in social media awareness creation and mobilization caused frenzy in the political narratives among voters as social media became a hotly contested space during the 2023 Presidential election. On whether Peter Obi's 'Obi-dients' Movement had influence on increased political participation in the 2023 Presidential election, respondents responses, a combination of (92.2%) indicated a consensus that the 'Obi-dients' Movement influenced political participation during the 2023 Presidential election, a strong suggestion that there is a correlation and nexus between increased participation and voters involvement and exposure to the 'Obi-dients' Movement, a kind of a precursor to the influence on respondents to participate in politics through the 'Obi-dients' Movement political campaign messages. On whether political campaign messages of the Peter Obi's Obi-dients' Movement influenced the voters' preference of candidates, respondents were in agreement (53%) and strong agreement (32.5%), an indication that messages of Peter Obi's Obi-dients' Movement impacted the voters' preference of candidates during the 2023 Presidential election. This possibly be attributed to the deployment of slogans like 'We No Dey Give Shishi' aroused emotions that resonated among voters and created emotional connections and boosted voters engagement. the kind of passion attached to the 2023 election, engendered that participatory observation by voters, elicited attention and engagement which could have swayed voters who may be disillusioned by traditional parties, to mobilise turnout and shifted support towards Obi as an emergent third force status.

Research Question 2: What were the social media platforms used most by the 'Obi-dient' movement in the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria?

This research question is intended to measure the order of frequent usage, the social media platforms used the most during the during the 2023 Presidential election. It is relevant to state that they were offered the leverage to choose from the options most preferred. Below are the responsesThe number of WhatsApp users (37%) in table 3 above indicated that respondents seem to prefer it over Facebook (30.7%) as the most used by the 'Obi-dient' movement in the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria. Perhaps, the high preponderance of the WhatsApp usage may not be unconnected to the fact that the platform is highly personalised, protective and restricted to persons and groups known to the respondents in order to ease of identification of sources of information in avoiding the issues of misinformation, disinformation and political mudsling. From the table 7 above, it is glaring that even though WhatsApp, under (Table 3): Social Media platform most preferred, was the most respondents' choice, Facebook (52.4%) got an overwhelming acceptance a

platform used for political messages. Perhaps, the platform being more open, flexible and user friendly, may have informed the reason for its usage by the respondents.

Research Question 3: To determine if political social media campaign messages of the 'Obi-dient' movement influenced Nigerian electorates' choice of presidential candidates in the election?

The Agreement (53%) and Strong Agreement (32.5%) by the respondents is an indication of the messages of Peter Obi's Obi-dients' Movement impacted the voters' preference of candidates during the 2023 Presidential election. This possibly could be attributed to the deployment of slogans like 'We No Dey Give Shishi' aroused emotions that resonated among voters and created emotional connections and boosted voters engagement. The kind of passion attached to the 2023 election, engendered that participatory observation by voters, elicited attention and engagement which could have swayed voters who may have been disillusioned by traditional parties, to mobilize turnout and shifted support towards Obi as an emergent third force status.

The study further reveal that social media were used by citizens to express their political opinion, create awareness and mobilization of citizens and generation of grassroots support for Obi-dients' movement. The finding is in tandem with Best and Krueger (2005) who found that social media have grown in political importance, and has played a significant role in many mass mobilization efforts. The above findings underscores that social media were of great influence in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria by increasing political participation which in the long run influenced the voters' preference of candidates and brought voice to the political landscape of Nigeria. The findings support Ozigbo (2023) who contended that the most rapidly expanding and technologically sophisticated grassroots movement on the continent is Peter Obi's campaign, the Nigeria's most popular, preferred, and qualified candidate, according to all polls conducted by reputable statistics and data gathering businesses, including NOI/ANAP Polls, We2gether, Nextier, Bloomberg, and others.

In table 4, respondents, 112 (33.7% alluded to the fact they did not follow any candidate on social media platforms. This is a testament to the fact that the Obidient movement is a non-political but driven by the need to institute electoral and political change. Inversely, findings indicate that 220 respondents representing 66.3% accept followed their favorite candidate during 2023 presidential elections arguing in the same direction, Arthur (2012) asserts that social media have great potential for encouraging collaborative political participation. According to him, accessible social media platforms offer ordinary citizens the opportunity to interact more directly and

actively with their political systems.

Conclusion

This study focused on evaluating the usage of social media platforms in promoting political candidates, parties and supporters, particularly, for the mobilization of the Obidients during the 2023 Presidential Election in Delta and Edo states, Nigeria, a trend that is becoming more predominant and prevalent than they were ever before. Political stakeholders have increased exponentially and up-scaled the bar in terms of the level of use they display especially for differing purposes, especially deepening conversations and amplifying the narratives to the extent that such potentials at mobilization are restrictive to certain categories of users. For the Obidients, who are majorly individuals that are digitally comfortably with the social media usage and users learning to adapt to the new technology, it seems right to assume that social media use was effective at mobilizing them. There exists no empirical finding to support this. Therefore, this study assured the leveling exposure, choice and frequency of social media used, message types and direction that were deployed to engaged and mobilized Obidients in the 2023 elections

The findings of the study suggest significant usage of social media in Edo and Delta States, the pattern showing that WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are the top six most social media platforms where citizens of Edo and Delta States received messages of Obi-dients' movement which are used for political opinion, create awareness and mobilization of citizens and generation of grassroots support for Obi-dients' movement. This further suggest that high usage of social media engendered high participation in the political activities, a crucial role played in awareness creation of the 'Obi-dients's Movement during the 2023 presidential election. The above findings underscores the indications that social media was of great influence in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria by increasing political participation which in the long run influenced the voters' preference of candidates and brought voice to the political landscape of Nigeria.

The upsurge in awareness created through social media by the 'Obi-dients' Movement feathered huge involvement of voters, suggesting that respondents were active in the electioneering process during the 2023 presidential election, a high transformation in Nigeria's political communication space, primarily attributed to the widespread use of social media in electoral processes. This social media movement was geared towards awareness creation and mobilization that caused frenzy in the political narratives among voters and social media became a hotly contested space during the 2023 Presidential election.

It has become a new normal presently, where political

stakeholders use social media platforms to solicit votes from the electorate. Conversely, voters perceive social media as crucial channels to connect with their representatives, providing them with unrestricted access to political developments. The findings of the study also suggest that social media usage helped citizens ventilate their political opinion, create awareness and mobilization of citizens, make an informed choice and generation of grassroots support for the Obi-dients' movement. Consequently, it can be deduced that the utilization of social media influenced electioneering campaigns and mobilization of voters in Delta and Edo states and has the potential to extend beyond the two states while it may encourage more of its deployment in future.

Recommendations

Arising from the conclusion of this study, the researchers recommends as follows:

1. Political parties and candidates should leverage on social media platforms for their wide reach and to ensure preparedness as there will be improved voters participation in subsequent elections to create awareness and mobilise support during electioneering campaigns.
2. Election regulatory bodies should put in place well articulated guidelines on how political actors should use the social media networks for campaigns; and stakeholders should use social media platforms as veritable tools for voters' education and other forms of mass mobilization.
3. In addition, it is imperative to conduct more incisive research on the role of social media in shaping political communication as these platforms often have direct and influential connection and impact on voters' behaviour.

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