

ASSESSMENT ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR YOUTH POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN THE 2023 NASARAWA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Binta Mohammed Abdullahi, Anthony.I. Igyuve & Tsegyu Santas

Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Nasarawa State University, Keffi
Bintamohammed247@gmail.com; tsegyu@nsuk.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examined the use of social media in mobilising youths during the 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State, with specific focus on three (3) Local Government Areas across the senatorial districts: Keffi (Nasarawa West), Lafia (Nasarawa South), and Akwanga (Nasarawa North). It investigated how several social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, were utilized to engage and mobilise young voters aged 18–35. The study is guided by Technological Determinism Theory and Public Sphere Theory, it employed a triangulation approach, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data from 370 respondents selected via multistage sampling from a population of 309, 245. Quantitative data were analysed with tables and percentages, while qualitative data were thematically interpreted. Findings showed that youths used Facebook (126; 34%), WhatsApp (66; 17.8%), Instagram (66; 17.8%), Twitter (56; 15.2%), and YouTube (56; 15.2%), with Facebook being the most prevalent. Photographs (104; 28%) and text (104; 28%) dominated content as images captured events vividly, while text facilitated discussion. Social media was used mostly to post party-political updates, mobilise campaign activities, induce voting decisions, expose opponents, and share messages about preferred candidates. The platforms also enhanced youth commitment, loyalty, and active participation in political processes. Challenges included limited trust in content, low awareness of social media potential, inadequate support from politicians, financial constraints in acquiring internet-enabled devices, and limited ability to understand online content, with financial limitations being most significant. Suggested solutions involved providing youths with internet-enabled phones and data access to support engagement. The study concluded that effective youth mobilization requires strategic use of Facebook and other popular social media platforms, which can enhance participation, political awareness, and engagement in governance.

Keywords: Technological Determinism Theory, Triangulation approach, Youth mobilisation, Political engagement, Public Sphere Theory, Social Media, Facebook.

Introduction

The function of social media in political mobilisation takes increased important devotion in current ages, particularly with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies that enable more interactive and participatory in online spaces. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have provided political actors

through new ways to engage with the electorate, spread information, and mobilise voters. This shift is specifically relevant in Africa, where a youthful population, encouraged access to mobile phones, and the internet have made digital platforms critical in political processes (Opeibi, 2020).

In this regard, in the Nigerian setting, social media has been increasingly incorporated

into political communication. This has been in consideration of the important role that youth are seen to be playing in the political processes, given that youth form well over 60% of Nigerian demographics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Notwithstanding, it has been seen that youth political participation remains low due to a host of reasons, including disillusionment, unemployment, lack of trust, as well as corruption, as has been found to be consistent in various studies and analyses, including those by Boulianne (2021) and Onyewuchi (2024). Social media, as such, has been seen to offer a means through which these issues can be mitigated with a view to offering a platform where political leaders can communicate with youth directly and without any form of intermediary.

The increasing use of social media in Nigeria, with over 43 million users projected for 2023 (Statista, 2023), has further underscored its political significance. Previous mobilizational activities, including the #EndSARS protests in 2020, for example, proved that youth mobilization, political expression, and opinion shaping were possible through these platforms (Omilana, 2020). Not surprisingly, political leaders are progressively using these platforms to shape voter engagement.

In the 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State, political parties and political candidates used social media extensively for messaging, youth engagement, and mobilization. Platforms like Twitter Spaces, WhatsApp Broadcasts, and Facebook Live were used for sharing political information as well as for youth involvement in political discourse. This is in line with a study by (Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017).

Nevertheless, despite a high rate of political engagement online, data suggests that youth

voter turnout in the state has been low all along. There appears to be a widening gap between political engagement online and actual political participation, especially in those areas where political apathy and lack of trust are rife among youth in Nigeria, as shown in studies done by (Boulianne, 2020; Fasola & Oyadeyi, 2021). This has been particularly true in Nasarawa State, where there has been a high rate of political engagement online.

This gap, between mass mobilization on a digital platform and low political turnout in a physical setting, represents the overarching challenge that this research seeks to address. While various studies exist in literature that investigate online social platforms and political participation in Nigeria, in general, there has been a lack of concrete data related to how youth mobilizations were facilitated using online platforms in relation to the 2023 governorship election of Nasarawa State. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of social media in youth mobilization in relation to the 2023 election, as well as the platforms that were most utilized in mobilizing this group and determining the impact that this mobilization has on youth participation in elections.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has increasingly become a core tool for political communication and civic mobilisation in Nigeria, the exact level of its effectiveness in translating online engagement into offline political participation among youths is empirically not well concluded. Indeed, existing studies suggest that although Nigerian youths are highly active on social media during election cycles, the heightened political expression online does not result in a corresponding rise in the number of voters. For example, one recent empirical study on social media and youth political participation in Nigeria found

that whereas 88.8% of the young participants actively use social networking sites for political awareness and engagement, only 59.3% ended up voting in the 2015 and 2019 general elections (Olumide, 2022). Similar research into the relationship between online and offline participation among Nigerian youth demonstrates that low-level social media engagement, such as political commenting, liking, or sharing, hardly ever translates into meaningful offline political activities such as voting, participating in protests, or political mobilisation (Olorunnisola & Salman, 2023).

This problem is particularly salient within the context of Nasarawa State. With the heightened partisan activity, campaign messages, and political discourses among youth on social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram during the 2023 governorship election, preliminary reports from the election indicated that youth turnout stood below expectations, again reflecting a persistent disconnection between political behaviour on digital platforms and electoral participation. This immediately raises the question of whether the social media mobilization strategies adopted during the election were effective in surmounting entrenched barriers, such as political apathy, distrust in political institutions, unemployment, and longstanding disillusion with governance-factors persistently identified as major predictors of low youth turnout in Nigerian elections. While these are clearly important issues, there is a near total lack of empirical investigations that specifically focus on how social media was used for youth mobilization in Nasarawa State during the 2023 governorship election, and whether indeed such mobilization translates into meaningful influence on youth voter behaviour. This study thus sets out to fill this gap by examining the extent, nature, and effectiveness of social media in

mobilizing youth voters in the state and identifying the challenges that hindered the translation of online political engagement into actual participation at the polls.

Research Question

The following research questions were formulated:

- i. To analyse how social media platforms were utilised to engage and mobilise youth during the 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State.
- ii. Identify the social media platforms that were most effective in mobilising youth voters.
- iii. Evaluate the impact of social media campaigns on youth voter turnout during the 2023 election.
- iv. Explore the challenges faced in using social media to mobilise youth for active political participation in the election.
- v. Find out how different types of social media content influenced youth engagement and voting behaviour during the election.

Review of Concepts

Concept of Youth Mobilisation

Youth mobilisation refers to the strategic efforts aimed at engaging young people in political and civic activities. It involves harnessing the energy, creativity, and technological adeptness of youth to influence political processes, including elections, policy advocacy, and social movements. Historically, youth mobilisation has been challenged by political apathy and disengagement, often due to disillusionment with political systems or a lack of tangible impact (Boulianne, 2020). However, social media has appeared as a formidable device for overcoming these barriers by providing platforms for information dissemination,

community building, and activism (Opeibi, 2020). Effective youth mobilisation leverages digital platforms to enhance political awareness, encourage voter participation, and foster a perception of political effectiveness among young people.

Youth mobilisation encompasses the strategies and processes involved in engaging young people to take collective action, particularly in political and civic contexts. Youth are critical agents of social change due to their energy, adaptability, and growing access to digital platforms. Mobilisation can take many forms, from grassroots organising to large-scale protests, and in the modern era, youth movements often rely on digital devices plus social media to amplify their voices.

In recent elections across the globe, the role of youth has been pivotal. For instance, during the 2019 Nigerian general elections, youth movements like *Not Too Young To Run* galvanised young voters and pushed for more youth representation in government. Similarly, youth-led protests, such as the #EndSARS campaign in Nigeria, have displayed the power of collective action among young people (McLean, 2020).

Youth mobilisation is not limited to electoral participation but also extends to advocacy on issues like climate change, economic inequality, and human rights (Sloam & Henn, 2019). Young people are increasingly disillusioned with traditional political systems, leading them to seek alternative avenues for expressing their grievances and demanding accountability from their leaders.

Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement involves the connections between users plus content on digital platforms. It incorporates events such as liking, commenting, distribution, and creating content. Engagement system of measurement, such as the amount of likes or

shares, are often used to evaluate the reach and impact of online operations. In party-political contexts, social media engagement serves as a barometer for gauging public interest, sentiment, and activism (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018). High levels of engagement can indicate that content is resonating with users, potentially leading to increased political participation. For youth, social media provides a space to express political views, participate in discussions, and mobilise for causes, thereby influencing their participation in electoral procedures (Omilana, 2020).

Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction between operators and content on several social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. This engagement is often measured through likes, comments, shares, and the usage of trending hashtags, particularly in the framework of party-political or social issues. Social media allows individuals, particularly youth, to become politically active without needing formal political structures.

Engagement on social media has been shown to influence partisan involvement, particularly among young individuals. For example, the usage of hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS have mobilised youth populations globally, fostering discussions around social justice issues and influencing public opinion (Boulianne, 2020). Social media enables youth to connect, form communities, and organise collective action, often without the mediation of traditional media outlets (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2020)

Impact of Social Media Campaigns on Youth Voter Turnout

While social media platforms have expanded the reach of political messaging, there remains a complex relationship between connected engagement and real voter turnout.

Some studies suggest that though social media increases political awareness and interest, it does not always translate into offline political actions such as voting (Boulianne, 2020). This is attributed to factors such as structural barriers, political disillusionment, and mistrust in the electoral process (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018).

In the Nigerian context, this phenomenon has been observed consistently. For instance, during the #EndSARS movement in 2020, young Nigerians exhibited high levels of digital political activism, yet subsequent voter turnout among youth remained low in many regions (Omilana, 2020). In Nasarawa State, despite significant online political activity during the 2023 governorship election, reports indicate that actual youth voter turnout was relatively modest, echoing this trend.

However, there is evidence to support that well-structured social media movements can contribute toward increased voter turnout, particularly when combined with offline mobilisation strategies. For example, Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaigns that use personalised messaging, reminders, and calls to action have shown moderate success in converting online engagement into voter participation (Bond, Fariss, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settle, & Fowler, 2020; Gerber & Green, 2020).

Thus, the effect of social media campaigns on youth turnout in Nasarawa State is likely shaped by the design of the campaign, the reliability of the candidates, plus the extent to which social media messaging resonates with young voters' experiences and aspirations (Okunoye & Musa, 2022; Olorunnisola & Martin, 2020).

Through social media, political communication has become more democratised, allowing for a two-way interaction where citizens not only consume

content but also create and disseminate it. However, social media engagement also has its limitations, such as the formation of echo chambers where people are exposed primarily to facts that supports with their pre-existing views (Tufekci, 2018).

Political communication also plays a vital part in framing political issues, determining civic opinion, and setting the plan for political discourse. Social media has enabled the rise of citizen journalism, where ordinary people report and analyse political events, contributing to a more decentralised flow of information (Bruns, 2020).

Influence of Social Media Content on Youth Political Engagement and Behaviour

The type and nature of content shared on social media significantly impact youth political engagement. Content that is interactive, visually appealing, and relatable tends to perform better in terms of engagement and persuasion (Kruikemeier, Van Noort, Vliegenthart, & De Vreese, 2019). Memes, short videos, infographics, and real-time updates have been shown to be more effective in capturing youth attention than long texts or formal statements.

Narrative-based content, especially personal stories and testimonials, also performs a powerful function in modelling political perceptions. Studies suggest that storytelling humanises political issues and makes them more accessible to young audiences (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). In Nasarawa State, candidates who shared personal experiences, community stories, and responded to constituents' concerns were perceived as more authentic and trustworthy (Dagona, Karick & Abubakar, 2013).

The emotional tone of content also matters. Posts that evoke emotions, such as anger, hope, or solidarity, tend to be shared more widely and elicit stronger reactions (Berger

& Milkman, 2012). Emotional engagement often drives political action, especially among youths who are disillusioned with conventional politics.

However, the overuse of negative content or sensationalism can backfire by increasing cynicism and disengagement (Bossetta, 2018). Therefore, content strategy performances a vital role in determining whether social media serves merely as a space for expression or as a catalyst for action.

Review of Empirical Studies

Alakali (2013) carried out a study titled "An assessment of the utilisation of social media mobilisation of Nigerian youth in 2011 General Elections: A case study of youths in Benue State". The expansive intention of the findings was to investigate and assess significantly the level to which the social media provided the prospect for people to launch, collect and recognise communications linking to politics. The researchers adopted the survey research design for this study with a sample size of four hundred (400) drawn from the three (3) senatorial districts of Benue State. Findings from the study showed that social media performed a main part in the Nigerian political system among the youths and that Nigerian youths voiced their view on the political position and the candidates of their choices easily on Facebook, NaijaPals, Ate-u-Tiv, lonel.com between other social media medium in the 2011 General elections in Nigeria. It also found that most youths in the study area were members of several social media channels especially Facebook among others where they follow political debates. The study concluded that social media provided an sufficient prospect for Nigerians to contribute to social and political interaction/deliberations. The study recommended that politicians are encouraged to use social media as one of the media

attaining the people entitled to vote, additional people will go to social media for political deliberations, considerations and views. It will serve as an avenue for participatory democratic system.

This research work is applicable to the contemporary study because it investigated application of social media mobilisation of Nigerian youths in 2011 General elections: providing a good guide for this study to emulate. Both studies seek to evaluate how youths use social media for political mobilisation; the present research work seeks to study social media and political mobilisation during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Benue State and not general elections. This is the loophole the existing work seeks to tackle.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on technological determinism and public sphere theory. In explaining the role of social media in youths' mobilization for the 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State, the two theories form the core of the theoretical framework. Technological Determinism helps to show that by its very nature, digital platforms shape patterns of communication, influence behaviour, and restructure political participation among young people. Public Sphere Theory, in turn, provides a useful lens for understanding how social media works as a contemporary civic space in which youths debate political issues, exchange ideas, challenge dominant narratives, and coordinate collective action.

Put together, these theories have powerful interpretative tools that can assist in examining how social media enhances political engagement through acceleration in the flow of political information and youth mobilization in virtual spaces. The research study points to how active young people become politically and influential within the

online environment through the intersection of digital technology and public discourse.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design to assess the pattern of social media usage for youth mobilization during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Nasarawa State. The descriptive design was appropriate since it allowed for the systematic observation and analysis of patterns, trends, and relationships between social media usage and youth political engagement without manipulating any variable.

A mixed method design thus combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative data came from structured surveys of youth voters, which allowed the measurement of social media exposure and the levels of political

participation. Qualitative data came from the content analysis of election-related social media posts, providing insights into strategies, message, and interaction patterns that have helped in mobilizing youths.

Data Presentation

A total of three hundred and seventy-five (375) copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents. All the 375 copies were collected but five (5) copies were filled wrongly (multiple choices), bringing the total usable copies to 370. The mortality rate was 1.3%. The study therefore relied on three hundred and seventy (370) copies of questionnaire, representing 98.7%, for quantitative data presentation and analysis. Since the mortality rate of 1.3% could not have substantial result on the overall effect of the study. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with nine (9) respondents who were youths' political leaders. These interviews were also presented and analysed.

Table 4.0 Questionnaire Administration, Response Rate, and Usable Copies

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Administered	375	100
Questionnaires Collected	375	100
Questionnaires Rejected (Filled Wrongly / Multiple Choice Errors)	5	1.3
Usable Questionnaires	370	98.7
Mortality Rate	5	1.3
Interviews Conducted with Youth Political Leaders	9	-

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2: Social media platforms respondents were familiar with during 2023 Governorship election in Nasarawa State

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	126	34
WhatsApp	66	17.8
Twitter	56	15.2
Instagram	66	17.8
YouTube	56	15.2
Total	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.3 represents social media platforms respondents were familiar with during 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State. 126 respondents, represented by 34% said it was Facebook they were familiar with; those who were familiar with WhatsApp were 66, represented by 17.8%; Twitter has 56 (15.2%) respondents; respondents that picked Instagram were 66 (17.8%) and those that were familiar with YouTube were 56, representing 15.2%. There is no clear cut among respondents who used WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube but most respondents (34%) used Facebook during the election. This means that youths are more familiar with using Facebook for political activities.

Discussion of Findings

Results depicted that social media channel used in 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State included WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, being the prevalent social media used by youths in Nigeria. Imadu (2016) revealed that the social media network used by Nigerian youths commonly included Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, 2go among others. This finding agrees with the earlier finding by Zaheer (2016) that the time student spends on Facebook influenced his or her usage of it for political purposes. The study also showed that many Nigerian youths believed that social media networking has improved the

level of political participation and as such they employed social media networks to aggregate their opinions in government policies such as environmental matters, security issues among other issues of concern. Users share information by "friending" others and allowing them access to their profiles. The reason for wider use of Facebook was for the fact that it does not need android application before one could use it. Smaller phones have the capability to use Facebook and owners of such phones could easily hook on to other social media friends through Facebook; the social network platform has 2.70 billion monthly active users and 1.79 billion active daily users as at October 2025 (Facebook, 2025).

Facebook enables communication via photographs, text, audio and video thereby making the communication to be understood by all classes of people. Ever since Facebook was introduced, there has been immense attention from particularly the youths in Africa to use the medium for several purposes, this thought has been echoed by Namilaa and Charles (2010) that Facebook has the most visited website by internet users on the African continent.

This finding re-echoes the Technological Determinism Theory (TDT). Chandler (cited in Asemah et al., 2016) posits that TDT is an approach that identifies technological development as the principal causal element in the process of social change. The theory

seeks to clarify to whom or what main authority in humanitarian affairs may belong, questioning the extent to which human thought or action is influenced by high-tech issues. In the context of this study, youths have increasingly resorted to using Facebook and other social media platforms to access political information, which has consequently shaped their political participation and engagement.

The research revealed that photographs and text dominated the content types that electorates used during the election. The choice of content type was informed by the need to communicate more vividly, as confirmed by 104 respondents. Respondents indicated that photographs were used because they portrayed the reality of events, while text complemented images and allowed for flexible discussions. This finding aligns with the nature of Nolitics, which Ifukor (2010) states reflects the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice. The process of political empowerment can be textually illustrated through the choice of vocabulary and sentiments expressed in blogs or discussion fora. Posts or journals on Nolitics are like blogs, frequently updated and arranged in reverse chronological order. It was further revealed that youths used social media platforms for various political activities, including posting updates about political parties, calling for meetings, mobilising youths for party campaigns, exposing political opponents, and influencing the voting decisions of electorates. Among these activities, posting updates about political parties appeared to be the most prominent. Youths also used social media to express messages about their preferred candidates and parties, often through advertisements, music, and photographs designed to convince electorates to vote for their chosen contenders.

The study also found that social media engagement encouraged youth commitment

to party causes, discussions about party candidates, satisfaction, and loyalty to the candidates, which in turn led to increased support for the party among youths. Consequently, social media has facilitated wider access to party-political participation among young people. These findings corroborate Okoliri's (2015) observation that social networks, specifically Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, enable both the electorate and political aspirants to maintain critical connections with people around the world. Similarly, Imadu (2016) revealed that many Nigerian youths believe social media networking improves political participation, allowing them to aggregate their views on government policies such as environmental and security issues, among others.

Overall, social media has created political interest among youths, who are heavily influenced by content shared online due to their widespread use of these platforms as information sources. In this context, youths can be viewed as a distinct "youth media" audience. Marcus (2021) argues that, because of the liberalised nature of social media, it was expected in Western democracies to stop the democratic shortfalls inherent in corporate-dominated media systems influenced by consumer culture and tangled with influential elites.

This finding reinforces public sphere theory because the modern setting of the theory is more pronounced in communication. According to Chadwick (2018), the period added new prominence with the blow-out of innovative communication technologies in the 1990s. The Internet in specific is considered to give unparalleled prospects for exchanging information and for discussion among many individuals of diverse upbringings. Access for smaller voices and party-political outsiders is deemed to be vital to a well-operative public sphere.

Conclusion

The research has recognised that youths used social media platforms for the 2023 governorship election in Nasarawa State the most profound of these platforms was Facebook:

Facebook was prevalent because of its all-inclusiveness. Many youths preferred social media as a basis of information to conventional mass media for any political candidate to succeed in persuading youths, he or she must resort to using social media heavily where youths are found.

Social media has been very effective in youth mobilisation, and this is so because it's the community where youths meet mostly for information and interaction. Arising from this study, social media is reframed as youths' media. This is so as it is mostly and largely used by youths. Social media could be used to advertise candidates vying for political offices and its effectiveness is in its capacity to influence people especially youths. Social media usage goes with numerous challenges especially inability to understand the contents very well as a consequent of illiteracy and lack of fund to purchase data to browse social networking sites.

But in all, its advantages supersede the disadvantages.

Recommendations

Based on the finding arising from this research, it is hereby commended that:

- i. To reach out to an all-inclusive youths, Facebook should be adopted by politicians for political campaigns and to create awareness on related governance activities This Recommendation is necessary because majority of youths used Facebook for the 2023 governorship election and they testified to its effective communication.
- ii. In terms of content that should be adopted on the social media, it is necessary for text and photographs to be adopted always as they gave room for vividness. These

contents should focus more on posting political updates this recommendation stems from the finding that youths posted pictures of governorship candidates accompanied with captions to campaign for the candidates.

- iii. It has been found that social media was a potent device to mobilise youths for election any politician who knows his/her onions should endeavor to apply it largely for political campaigns.

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