The Youth, Social Media and Self-Mobilisation: The Motivating Factors During the 2023 Presidential Election in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

There had been apathy in previous elections in Nigeria due to disbelief in the process. But it was noticed that the 2023 general elections witnessed a high level of voter registration and subsequent voter participation, especially among the youth. The principal aim of this study was to understand how social media influenced self-mobilisation efforts of the Nigerian youth for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election. This was achieved by examining the nature of social media content about the candidates and other factors that motivated the youth to engage in social action and promoted participation during the elections. This study adopted a mixed methods research design. Thus, a combination of survey and critical discourse analysis was used in this study to investigate the opinions of participants on the one hand and the contents of the social media self-mobilised messages on the other hand. In the end, it was found that the youth were motivated by several factors such as the need to change the political system, the zeal to remove the current ruling class, who are predominantly old people, and the quest to install young generation leaders. It was concluded that social media played the desired roles by enabling the projection of the self-mobilised messages that influenced youth participation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. It is, therefore, recommended that politicians should work hard to individualise their political relevance to earn the solidarity of the citizens.

Keywords: Youth, self-mobilisation, motivating factors, presidential election

1. Introduction

The role of social media, over the past decade has been improved to foster social change, political awareness, and political engagement; especially after Barrack Obama's United States election campaigns in 2008 and 2012 (Breuer, 2012). Communication in the media is central to democracy and democratic processes (Dungse, Mato, Makinde & Chidozie, 2018). Thus, social media have helped to initiate social movements to facilitate and promote democratisation processes, reinforce social change, and enable commitments from the governments (Breuer, 2012; Zaheer, 2016; Bosch & Mastvairo, 2017).

The digital technology affordances of social media enable an average citizen to become active consumers of political communication, and less passive receivers of propagandised messages. As such, it becomes easy to challenge, discuss and share alternative perspectives. Therefore, social media have the ability to empower the user to broadcast messages through ample means of sending and receiving political information, and for mobilisation for action (Bosch & Mustvairo, 2017).

Also, citizen self-mobilisation has been propelled by online media for radioactive waste repository in Denmark (Lyhue, Aaen, Nielsen, Kornov & Larsen, 2018); environmental collective action campaigns in Hong Kong (Lee, 2015); and trade union participation in policy making in Sweden (Uba & Jansson, 2020). However, despite research on self-mobilisation for participation in elections, there is none that focuses on Nigeria political processes. This is the problem that presented a gap that this dissertation aims to fill by assessing the factors that motivated young people to engage in self-mobilisation and subsequent participation in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

Self-mobilisation is an offshoot of collective action through which people participate by taking initiatives to change a system without depending on external support (Lee, 2015). It often leads to social movement that fights a course to birth a new order in the society. The social movement environment is sustained by the social media platforms where messages about a course are shared among people. The flexibility of social media content production and the speed with which social media communities consume, reproduce, and redistribute the messages make is impossible for users to totally avoid exposure to such messages (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012). That is why, people of same ideologies easily congregate within a social media platform, and even, in networks of multiple platforms to pursue set mandates. One important thing to note is that the production of the self-mobilisation contents is also self-sponsored; meaning that the political parties and, or politicians are neither aware of who is involved, nor do they contribute to the message contents.

The messages gave birth to some movements representing the different candidates, not minding their party affiliations. Thus, there was the 'Obedient' movement, which borrowed from one of the candidates, Peter Obi; the 'Atikulated' movement that supported another candidate, Atiku Abubakar; etc (Ibrahim, 2023). These social media-based movements later materialised into physical movements that organised rallies in the major cities of the country before the elections and after the elections, both in Nigeria and overseas. In the end, the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria witnessed more registered youth voters even though total number of cumulative votes was less than in previous elections.

This study is not concerned about the outcome of the elections, or the factors that led to the outcome; but rather, it focuses on the factors germane to active self-mobilisation and the nature of social media content that engendered participation in the election processes by Nigerian youth before, during, and after the general elections.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian youth was noted to shun previous elections in Nigeria. But it was noticed that the 2023 general elections witnessed a high level of voter registration and subsequent voter participation, especially among the youth. It was also observed that social media engagements with regard to the elections recorded ample messages that were sponsored by individuals that were neither party members nor politicians; but were self-mobilised individuals who were fed up with the political system and needed change.

Previous studies from Nigeria had concentrated on the use of social media for political mobilisations or campaigns to canvass for votes and were usually sponsored by the political parties and, or the candidates vying for elections. In other words, such studies focused on the influence of social media on political participation and electioneering. None, hitherto, focused on self-mobilisation on the social media, that is, the voters sponsoring messages themselves in support of candidates of their choice.

This is a gap that must be filled through research to situate the role of social media in promoting self-willed collective actions. The need to delve into self-mobilisation phenomenon justified the conduct of the present study. It, therefore, became important to ascertain the factors that motivated the youth to engage in self-mobilisation for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. Hence, to what extent did social media influence Abia youth to participate in the 2023 Presidential election?

Objectives of the Study

The principal aim of this study was to understand how social media influenced self-mobilisation efforts of the Nigerian youth for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election. This was achieved by examining the nature of social media contents about the candidates and other factors that motivated the youth to engage in social action and promoted participation during the elections. However, the specific objectives of the study were to:

   i.   determine the factors that motivated the Abia youth to engage in self-mobilisation actions to participate in the 2023 Presidential Election; and
   ii.   ascertain the types of social media contents that were used in self-mobilisation for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election;

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to serve as a guide for the conduct of this research.

   i.   What factors motivated the youth in Abia to engage in self-mobilisation to participate in the 2023 Presidential Election?
   ii.   What types of social media contents were used in self-mobilisation for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election?

2. Literature Review

2.1.1 Social Media and Political Mobilisation

Social media are the Internet-based tools and platforms which allow people to engage with one another, individually generate content, disseminate same, as well as search for information. In other words, they are interactive web-based media platforms that offer individuals the opportunity and means to connect, share ideas, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, etc. (Uba & Jansson, 2021). They are a new genre of media that relies on social networking and gives users the opportunity to express themselves and interact with friends by sharing information with greater freedom. It is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools, according to Chatora (2012), that makes them social. Social media are "consumer-generated media that cover a wide variety of new sources of online information, created and used by consumers intent on sharing information with others regarding any topic of interest" (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2014, p. 1).

Mayfield (2008, p.44) had describe social media as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness." Corroborating, Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji (2012) see social media interactions as online content, created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, sharing meanings among people. The media in this category support democratisation of knowledge and information because the people are both information producers and consumers. According to Spurgeon (2008), social media are seen as the most interactive of all communication media, because they are engineered to support all forms of interpersonal, mass and computer-mediated communication. Here, interactivity is a major criterion of comparison between traditional media and new media based on technology adaptations. The new media (social media inclusive) are digitally networked. Thus, the more interactive a communication system is, the more flexible the system would be in terms of communication exchange and support.

The major of social media platforms in Nigeria include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. However, WhatsApp is the most popular considering its spread (Sasu, 2023). These social media introduced speed and interactivity that were lacking in the traditional mobilisation techniques, which generally included the use of leaflets, posters, and faxes" (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Perhaps one of the most striking features of this social media lies in the ability to bypass the bias of official sources (Ibrahim, 2023) experienced in the mass media which eventually gave the ordinary citizens the opportunity to partake in transforming the political landscape of their country. This is achieved through the free choice of communication patterns through 'comments', 'shares', 'likes', 'reactions', 'tweets', and 're-tweets' in the different social media platforms. Choice in this instance enables people to freely access information through social media, thereby eliminating the gatekeeper role of traditional media. for political mobilisation. Nevertheless, the political mobilisation messages are geared towards persuading people be part of the activities in the political arena.

The report by political bureau (1987) cited in Dungse, et al (2018) notes that "all along human history, there were points where a massive effort was engineered to bring people together to achieve some set objectives." Thus, political mobilisation is an observable increase the level of awareness, of a people, to specific objectives with the intention of achieving such objectives. This informed Kamau (2017) submission that political mobilisation means collective engagement of large masses of people in activities that have a predominantly social or collective objective. Political mobilisation therefore aims at enacting change in the attitudes, values, and expectation of people through literacy, education, increased communication, mass media exposure and urbanisation and more recently through social media (Dungse et al 2018). It would be apt therefore to state that political mobilisation encapsulates the sensitisation of the masses to increase and improve their political consciousness to cause change in a political process. It involves the conscious ability to emotionally organise people, and in the process breed organic solidarity towards a course of action in the polity.

According to Dunu and Uzochukwu (2015) there are different parts to political mobilisation such as:

i. the motivation and mobilization of different groups that results in the successful transformation of development goals into societal action;
ii. involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare; and
iii. a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through face- to-face dialogue.

In all these efforts, mobilisation seeks to facilitate change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts (Lee et al, 2015). In fact, political mobilisation aims at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country (Dungse et al, 2018). Presently. political mobilisation in Nigeria occurs most frequently through three main social media; WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (Ibrahim, 2023). From the above explanations, political mobilisation lays emphasis on inspiring people to act and engage in social cum political activities with the hope of instituting change.

Social media allow the highly motivated people to create a context to influence others effectively without making them to become activists themselves and creates an environment perfect for citizens and politicians to utilise. Thus, social media users have begun to transform the political process and campaign tactics through contents that target mass appeal. (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). Political mobilisation has been a key concept in political and social discourse which is quite central to political participation and social engineering.

Social media have been viewed both as technology and space for expanding and sustaining the networks upon which social movements depend. The Arab springs is an example of how social networks engendered contemporary populist movements. Arab spring represents the wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. Social media are not simply neutral tools to be used or adopted by social movements, but rather they influence how activists sprout to shape social movements (Lim, 2012). Social media have been used to bolster democracies around the world, especially in mobilising people for political actions. For example, US President Barack Obama ran a widely popular election campaign in 2008 that employed social media to good effect. Obama campaign served as an outstanding demonstration of how

to use available tools for political mobilization (Michael & Ajakaiye, 2012). It is, therefore, not surprising that politicians in Nigeria made use of social media during the 2023 General Elections. In the same vein, private citizens who are not party members also usurped the social media affordances to influence other citizens to self-mobilise and participate in the elections.

2.1.2 Social Media and Social Movement

Social media are redistributing power to control what happens in society, especially among the citizens who do not participate in policy making and execution. With the development of social networking, the power of changing the world is not only upon the leaders, but according to Wihbey (2015), upon the people, empowered by social media" (p.33). Social media affect the political sphere by shifting who controls the information, how to distribute that information, and how society is changed through such information (Yan, 2021).

Since people can easily access information, they have the chance to become political actors. As Wihbey (2015) puts it: "people who consume more social media content have a greater probability of being civically and politically engaged across a variety of measures" (p.2).

Those who initially felt their voices were lost have evidently discovered their voices through social media. That explains why all the stakeholders in the Nigerian elections employed social media in several ways to attract followership. This development resulted in changes that were noticed in the political arena regarding the way people participated in the electioneering activities.

Furthermore, social media have given people more power to project and play important roles in promoting social movements, because they can use social media to initiate and control the information sphere. That is why Morozov (2011) submits that "the revolutionary potential of grassroots movements and the long-term power of politicisation of social media should never be ignored" (p.46). There are many examples in the history of social media-initiated social movements. One of them is the famous "Twitter revolution" in Iran in 2009, the major Iranian cities, particularly Tehran and Isfahan, witnessed street protests to complain about the "allegedly fraudulent" presidential elections after the incumbent candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, beat opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Social media played an important role in this revolution because of the Iranian government's information blackout, which made the traditional media controlled and messages could not be sent. Thus, the citizens used the Internet and social media to communicate with the outside and report all the events, which eventually attracted the world's attention (Kamalipour, 2010).

Similarly, social movements erupted through social media in Nigeria because the people, especially the youth, became fed up with the political system and looked forward to causing change through the mobilisation of the masses (Ibrahim 2023). Since then, social media have succeeded in causing social movements, especially because of political reasons, to change the status quo. It is believed that the above cases motivated the Nigerian youth to engage in self-mobilisation through social media to cause change in the political/electoral system.

These social movements have satisfied the frame of this subheading. For instance, Arab Spring happened under the institutional factor, the accumulation of social contradictions, triggered by the self-burning event in Tunisia, mobilised by the

Internet and social media boosted the event. When the control of the government on society declines, social movement could happen (Yan, 2021). Therefore, the political power of social media mainly lies in the influence of mobilising for social action, in the circumstance of the Nigerian elections, mobilising for participation in the elections. That supports those efforts that led to rallies both online and offline.

There are two aspects of social media's effect on social action. First, it shapes public opinion by stimulating public mood, forming psychological resonance, and thereafter, enhancing the understanding of collective action. Second, informal organisation networks are formed to provide the organised foundation for collective action and coordinating mechanisms (Yan, 2021). Social media helped to spread awareness for people to express their general opinion online so they can acquire common knowledge of the happenings in the system and the needed action to ameliorate situations.

Then, through self-mobilisation, the movement leaders appeal to the citizens for large group of supporters to partake in the social movement to change the system. In this vein, social media facilitated the "online organisation of non-institutionalised" groups of people, making this easier, quicker, and cheaper than it could have been done without the social media platforms (Yan, 2021).

The role of online social networks for social movements mobilisation was the rationale for a study conducted by Schwarz (2011) cited in Yan (2021). This was because revolutions in the Middle East had played a vital role in showcasing the power of online social networks, especially for mobilisations. The study, which was a comparison of the level of mobilisation from online social networks with mobilisation from face-to-face and mediated channels, tried to see if online social networks would translate to offline protests and diversity of organisational membership. The findings revealed that online social network mobilisation increased attendance of offline protest activities and a slightly significant change in the diversity of members. The author concludes by recommending the use of such online social networks by all and sundry for effective mobilisation.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the framework of three theories. They are the Social Exchange Theory, the Strong and Weak Ties Theory and the Mediatisation Theory.

The Social Exchange Theory suggests how social interaction manifests in exchange of ideas to enhance achievement of collective will (understood as *collective actions, situations, or feelings that involve or are shared by every member of* a group or community). The notion of "social behaviour as exchange" was first identified by American sociologist George C. Homans in 1958. Social exchange theory is a concept based on the idea that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process (Homans, 1958).

To this study, the groups that engaged in self-mobilisation considered their relationship with the polity and aimed at making the best out of being members of the society. To maximise the benefits of being members of the Nigerian state, they had to get involved in activities that they believed would enthrone good governance; which would eventually minimise the costs of bad governance (corruption, high costs of living, poor education standard, etc.)

The Strong and Weak Ties Theory suggests how the weak and the strong in society are connected through the reciprocity of roles and shared characteristics to re-live a course in society. It was first introduced by Mark Granovetter in 1973 when he argued that, while strong ties (i.e., close relationships with friends and family) are important for emotional support, weak ties (i.e., more distant, or casual relationships) are more valuable in terms of providing access to new information and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973).

An individual's strong ties are typically composed of people who are similar to them in terms of demographics, values and interests. In contrast, weak ties are typically composed of people who are less like us and who have access to different social circles and networks. As a result, they are more likely to be sources of novel and diverse information, which can be especially valuable for individuals looking to pursue new opportunities (Hannan & Wigmore, 2022).

Concerning this study, social media brought the different groups of people together in such a way that the information supply of each augmented the information need of the other.

The Mediatisation Theory captures how the media, especially the digital media, are permeating society and consequently shaping behaviours through the availability of technology. The first academic work on mediatisation emerged in the political research field when, in the late 1990s, politics mediatisation was discussed by Gianpietro and Winfried (1999). As people's basic subsistence needs were met in advanced industrial societies, material values receded into the background. Political issues linked to economic growth, crime prevention, and national defence became less salient. Instead, people placed higher priority on post-material values such as individual freedom, self-expression, and participation.

Thus, social media through mobile devices influence social movement to enhance social change because all political issues are brought to the media platforms and communicated to each actor according to the features of the medium used. In this case, the social media affordances enable people to become part of the system and, as such, always desire to be part of the political debate. As the people engage in a self-mobilisation campaign on social media, the messages take the outlook of influencing political decisions. And in this case, the youth is only interested in changing the system and with worded messages in circulation on social media (Ibrahim, 2023), the frame of the messages impact on the decision to join the change band.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods research design. Thus, a combination of survey (conducted ex post facto) and critical discourse analysis was used in this study to investigate the opinions of participants on the one hand and contents of the social media self-mobilised messages on the other hand. Creswell and Clark (2007) assert that to get a holistic picture of the problem under investigation, research can combine different research designs.

The ex post facto survey method was considered appropriate for this study because the study was not conducted during the election period but rather during a period when the elections had come and gone. It aimed at eliciting information from participants concerning their opinions on their self-mobilisation engagements. Basically, surveys are used to establish trends of events through opinions of participants who experienced the events (Blaxter, Hughs & Tight, 2009).

The descriptive survey helped to ascertain the attitude of the youths to the self-mobilisation messages on social media, in addition to the factors that motivated the youth to engage in self-mobilisation.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used because it is a form of textual analysis that goes beyond the examination of texts themselves. It widens the scope of textual analysis in which critical linguistics is the defining theory, to a practice in which each of three different forms of analysis is mapped onto one another to integrate statements that link social and cultural practices to properties of the text (Fairclough, 2005). Thus, the social media self-mobilised messages were analysed to identify the link between the nature of the messages and the socio-political inklings of the Nigerian state.

For instance, the messages were compared with the general notions about the political space and the players. As such, the reasons projected by the messages for the anticipated increase in the level of participation emanated from social space and were constructed around shared interests or geographical proximity. The significant prominence in both online and offline contexts provided an environment in which CDA becomes appropriate. In social media platforms, communication is multi-modal, textual, and visual, and therefore exerts a significant impact on both social, political, and cultural practices (Weiss & Wodak, 2007).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Federal Ministry of Youth Development (FMYD) (2012), the youth population of Abia State is 1,096,828. With a 2.8% estimated population increase per annum, as of 2023, the population increased by an additional 337,821. Therefore, the population of this study was estimated to be 1,434,649. This number comprises the entire youth in Abia State and is made up of citizens and inhabitants who are between the ages of 18 and 34 years.

For the critical discourse analysis, the population of the study included all the textual contents (audio, text, video) that focused on the "Obidient" movement and that were trending on social media before, during, and after the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. However, the population of the contents was non-finite.

The sample size for this study was 384. This was computed with the online sample size calculator at surveysystem.com. This study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique, which involved the use of various techniques at different levels before finally selecting the sample units. First, the population was grouped as clusters of three senatorial districts of Abia State, namely: Abia South, Abia Central, and Abia North. Further, the random sampling (through balloting) was used to select two LGAs from each senatorial district. At this stage, two busy locations (communities) were purposively selected from each local government area. The sample units were equally shared among the LGAs. The outcome of the stages of sampling is as summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 1: Summary of the Distribution of the Sample

Districts	Sampled LGAs	Sampled Locations	Sample Units
	Bende	Item	32

Abia North	Isuikwuato	Bende	32
		Uturu	32
		Mbalano	32
Abia South	Ukwa East	Akwete	32
		Obohia	32
	Aba North	Eziukwu	32
		Ogbor	32
Abia Central	Isiala Ngwa South	Omoba	32
		Mbutu	32
	Umuahia North	Umuda Isingwu	32
		Umuawa Alaocha	32
Total	**6**	**12**	**384**

Finally, the available sampling technique was used to select the sample units along the major streets in the sampled locations /communities.

For critical discourse analysis, popular content that trended on social media about the elections and the contestants that were sponsored by individuals who were not partisan politicians were purposively documented and analysed. Therefore, the analysis focused on texts from videos, musicals, fliers, posters, etc, which were not sponsored by political parties and the contestants, but rather sponsored, distributed, and re-distributed by citizens and which aimed to sensitise the electorate about the need to participate in and protect the votes during the elections.

The questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents for this study. The questionnaire was constructed to include a rating scale that followed the Likert format on a 5-point scale. The respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with statements (measurement indices) that captured the variables in the objectives and research questions. Thus, the ratings had the following scores: Strongly agreed = 5, Agreed = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagreed = 2, Strongly disagreed = 1

The data were coded and assigned numeric values, after which descriptive analysis was carried out using percentages and averages to get the distributions represented in tables. Thus, the data from the rating scale were analysed by determining the mean scores. Thus, mean scores of 3.0 and above were deemed significant and were accepted for generalisation; while scores below 3.0 were taken as insignificant and were rejected (Wanjohi & Syokau, 2021).

Further, the explanation building technique was used to analyse the contents of the messages that were sponsored by non-partisan individuals through online social movements. The critical discourse analysis was engaged to interpret meanings of texts by ascertaining the ingredients of the contents that influenced participants' opinions and actions and factoring the conditions that led to the development of the texts (Jensen, 2003).

Survey Data Presentation and Analysis

The data were presented and analysed in line with the data generated for the RQs, one after the other. The following formula for mean score calculation, adapted from Ihechu (2018) was applied. Thus:

$$xi = \sum fx / \sum f$$

Where xi = mean (average) score; f = frequency; x =scores on the rating scale; and $\sum$ = summation symbol.

RQ1: **What factors motivated the youth in Abia to engage in self-mobilisation to participate in the 2023 Presidential Election?**

Research question one identified factors that motivated respondents to engage in self-mobilisation for participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The factors included (1) the need to change the political system; (2) the zeal to remove the current ruling class who are predominantly old people; and (3) the quest to install young generation leaders. The distribution of responses were as tabulated below (Table 1).

Table 4.1: Factors that Motivate self-mobilisation for Participation in Elections

Indices	Rating		SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	*xi*
	x		5	4	3	2	1		
I was motivated by the need to change the political system	*f*		21	10	5	10	4	50	3.68 >3.0
I supported the move to retire the old set of politicians	*f*		20	13	7	6	4	50	3.78 > 3.0
I worked for the younger generation to take over leadership of the country	*f*		30	10	3	5	2	350	4.34 > 3.0

The respondents demonstrated a consensus that the political system required to be changed (Index 1; xi = 3.68). This result is signified that the youth were desirous to cause change in the political space through election by which people-oriented leaders would be voted in. Thus, individuals were motivated to sensitise the electorate to participate in the electoral process. The respondents were inspired by the zest to retire old generation politicians (Index 2: xi = 3.78). This result indicated that the crop of rulers in Nigeria and what they do compelled the youth to want to replace them. The desire to retire the old politicians made the third index germane. Thus, there was a need for the younger and active politicians to take over leadership. This factor motivated the youth to engage in activities that would make the young people come on board (Index 3: xi = 4.34).

The average scores arrived at through analysis of data generated for the measurement indices showed that the Nigerian youth were highly motivated to sensitise the populace for participation in the elections. These motivational factors gave rise to self-mobilisation efforts aimed at influencing participation in the 2023 general elections.

RQ2: **What types of social media contents were used in self-mobilisation for participation in the 2023 Presidential Election?**

Research question two identified the types of social media contents that were used in self-mobilisation messages that aimed to influence the electorate's participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The data are presented in Table 2 below and showed that the messages captured (1) Corrupt practices of the ruling class; (2) qualities of the candidates; and (3) key areas of improvement and hope for change.

Table 4.2: Social Media Contents used in Self-Mobilisation Messages

Indices	Rating		SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	xi
	x		5	4	3	2	1		
Messages exposed corruption of the ruling class and emphasised the need for change	f		22	12	9	5	2	50	3.94 >3.0
Messages highlighted the qualities of the candidates to establish the suitability to bring the desired change	f		17	11	13	3	6	50	3.60 >3.0
Messages hinted on key area and ways of improving the economy and social wellbeing and expressed hope for the common man	f		23	13	8	2	4	50	3.98 >3.0

The youth agreed that the self-mobilisation messages exposed perennial corruption practices of the ruling class and emphasised on the need to change them (Index 1: xi = 3.94). The messages also projected the need for change by highlighting the qualities of the candidates (Index 2: xi = 3.60). Through this, the messages sensitised the populace on the characters, past and present actions and inactions of the candidates; but with greater emphasis on the qualities that would bring the desired change. Further, the messages hinted on the possible key areas in the economic and social life that demand change (Index 3: xi = 3.98). The highlights also captured ways of improving situations and enshrining hope for the citizens.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Select texts (including posters, fliers, audio, songs and videos) that focused on the "Obedient Movement" were puosively selected considering those that identify with the "Obidient" slogans. They were critically analysed to buttress the extent individuals engaged in self-mobilisation for participation in the election and extent such self-mobilisation was sustained even beyond the elections. The messages disseminated by the "Obidients" contributed to the popularity of the Labour party candidate, Peter Obi.

RQ1: **Factors that Motivated self-mobilisation for Participation**

The first text (Fig. 1) compared the old politicians to slave masters and urged the youth not to support them because doing so would mean eternal slavery – "their enslavement is divine."

Figure 1: Texts on Need to Vote Out Old Politicians

The message by former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, was reproduced and used to warn the youth take part in the elections and vote the bad eggs out (Fig. 2). The excerpt, "youth of Nigeria, … your time is now… awo lokan" was used to counter the position of the APC candidate's claim that it was his turn ("e mi lokan") so that would start think collectively and see Peter Obi as representing the masses because he had no selfish interest. For Nigerians, compared to Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu, Peter Obi is a breath of fresh air (Onebunne, 2021).

RQ2:   Nature of Social Media Contents used in Self-Mobilisation Messages

Most self-mobilised contents on social media highlighted the qualities of the contestants in relation to character, integrity, trust, capacity, emotional stability, and physical ability. Top among the qualities highlighted was that of integrity as adapted from Peter Obi's statement during an interview with Brekete Family Television Show, where he was asked why politicians did not like him when he was the governor of Anambra State, in which he said "I no dey give shishi," the Pidgin English version for "I don't give a dime for bribe." The statement became a slogan and trended in all social media platforms: *#wenodegiveshishi*

The implication was that obi would not be extravagant as the president of Nigeria. The slogan also emphasised on accountability and prudence, which was why musician amd church leaders promoted the character of Obi. In that vein, musicians like Psquare, Tuface, Falz, Timi Dakolo, Waje teamed up to sensitise Nigerians ahead of 2023 elections through their song, *No Shishi for Bribe* (https://web.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v= 4944797325649928&external_log_id=1420dbbb-2f13-4423-96f3c5d81cb591fb&q= i%20no%20dey%20give%20shishi)

The implication was that the mobilisers tried to sell all the good qualities of Peter obi as an administrator who could manage Nigeria's economy for the well-being of the citizenry. Thus, most of the self-mobilised messages centered on character as "Obidients" also circulated messages of the characters of the other parties to show people that Obi is capable while they are not. For instance, while Peter Obi was encouraging people to shun violence, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC candidate and current president of Nigeria commissioned his followers to violently ensure he won (https://web.facebook.com/search/top/?q=tinubu%20grab%20it). This prompted the support groups to use Obi's quotes to sell his integrity. For instance, he once emphasised on the sanctity of the appendage, His excellency to presidents, and the support groups anchored their mobilisation on that statement as shown below (Fig. 2); indicating that a new Nigeria is possible with Peter Obi.

Figure 2: Texts on Possible New Nigeria
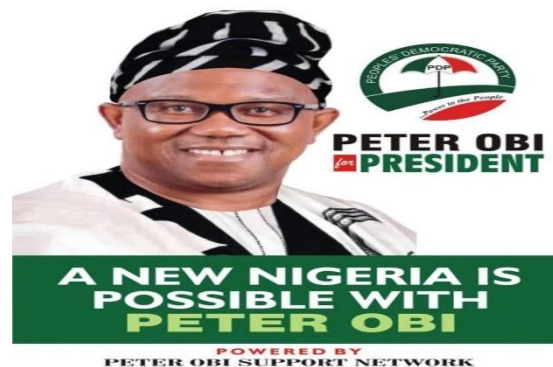
Such messages also highlighted the feebleness of the APC candidate through some of his uncoordinated speeches and statements that tilted towards the wrong direction and placed the "Obidients" at advantage. Such statements by Tinubu that upped the solidarity for Peter Obi and the 'Obidients' included: '*Town hall differenct, bala blu, bu laba*" (an incoherent statement made by APC's candidate depicting his lack of coordination which the "Obidients" used to to show his feebleness and advised people to vote him out. (https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=677147077148908); "Is it for garri, is it for eba, Is it for agbado" showing Tinubu's lack of knowledge of Nigeria's problem which he likened to the consumption of local food items. (https://web.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=735629354390563&external_log_id=e2c1225c-a3ed-476d-8ef8-94bcb00862df&q=is%20it%20for%20eba%20t).

These melodramatic renditions by Tinubu hit the Obidients' abode and aggravated the inadequacies and incompetencies of Tinubu to the advantage of the 'Obidients.' So, as Obi's messages were being promoted, Tinubu's utterances were as well trending albeit being negatively caricaturised to show incompetence.

4. Discussion of Findings

In this section, the findings of this study are discussed by commenting on the results in relation to literature and theory. This was done in consideration of the themes of the research questions which were presented as sub-headings. However, both the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated in the discussions.

RQ1:   Factors that Motivate self-mobilisation for Participation in Elections

This study found that mass appeal led to self-mobilisation effort by individuals, especially the youth who were motivated by several factors including:

  i.   the need to change the political system;
  ii.   the zeal to remove the current ruling class who are predominantly old people; and
  iii.   the quest to install young generation leaders.

This implied that the political space in Nigeria is occupied by old men who should have retired from active politics. It took money bags and their connections in high places to win elections. This is in line with the position that times slots were outrightly bought by the highest bidders which eventually bring people with questionable characters to become presidents, governors, and law makers (Ibrahim, 2023). By the time they occupied offices, they engaged in all manner of actions to recoup what they spent, thereby ignoring governance that should yield dividends to the citizens.

Their dominance of political power relegated the young people behind to the extent that the youth who should be innovative thinkers and nation builders contribute little or nothing to the development of the nation (Okibe, 2022).

This corroborated the position of Oser and Boulianne (2020), that community groups and citizens' self-mobilisation are organised minor groups who are highly concerned about community matters Thus, during the 2023 pre-election campaigns, the social media platforms went on fire with message aimed at motivating the populace to participate in the elections to start a process to cause change in the system.

Therefore, to cause change, there was need to remove the old generation politicians who, the youth believed did not have anything to offer and replace them with new generation minds who the masses could entrust their future in their hands. These motivational factors pushed the youth to create contents of different formats (texts, images, audio, video) and distributed to others.

In relation to the social exchange theory, the masses valued of the benefits and costs of the social association (Cherry, 2023) and thereafter endeavoured to continue to mobilise for participation in the election which was the observable relationship they had with political actors within the period under review. They saw the benefits that would come with change in the system as against continued suffering if the old gang should continue to rule. Thus, the ideas surrounding the motivational factors served as the bases of engagement in the relationship with others; thereby enhancing the dissemination and re-dissemination of information that would convince people to participate in the elections (Yan, 2021).

In this vein, the weak ties (acquaintances, those that barely know themselves, heterogenous groups, etc) and strong ties (families, friends, associates, companions, colleagues, homogenous groups, etc) in the society came together to pursue a common goal that would benefit all thereby fulfilling the provision of the weak and strong ties theory (Granovetter, 1973; Hannan & Wigmore, 2022). Thus they united in purpose to enshrine change in the political system.

To achieve this, digital media (social media) influenced the social movement to enhance social change by bringing political issues to the media platforms through which the motivational factors were communicated to each actor according to the features of the medium used (Gianpietro & Winfried, 1999). This was evidence for the implication of the mediatisation theory from the findings (Zaheer, 2016).

RQ2: Social Media Contents Used in Self-Mobilisation Messages

Self-mobilisation in this study focused on energising the citizenry to become active participants in the political cum electoral processes. The essence is to entrench a political system that guarantees the wellbeing of the people. Thus, the nature of messages were such that captured the essence and result of participation in the elections. Therefore, the messages as found in this study were used to:

i.   expose corrupt practices of the ruling class;
ii. highlight the qualities of the candidates; and
iii. pinpoint key areas of improvement and the hope for change.

By highlighting the corrupt practices of the ruling class and the ruling party, the electorate was made to understand the need to have fresh air. That was why to show that Peter Obi was not corrupt like others, the messages said more about his good qualities as well as highlighted the corruption tendencies of the other contestants. Thus, Peter Obi's "I no de give shishi" slogan helped to market his inclination to be prudent with public fund. Also, his "go and verify" slogan was used to market his accountability trait. Then, the pictures and videos showing him carrying his luggage as well as having few aides stood him out as a servant leader.

The nature of messages used by the youth to self-mobilise showcased the issues that tallied with expectations of the masses which is in line with the position of Knoll et al (2020) that collective interest led to understanding what drove citizens to engage in community groups and self-mobilisation activities. The finding corroborates the submission that appropriate messages expresses great hopes regarding young adults' democratic engagement (Oser & Boulianne, 2020) which the social media and their features have helped to promote ((Binder et al, 2021).

Through these messages, the youth showed their interest in changing the system and with worded messages in circulation on social media, the frame of the messages impacted on the decision by others to join the change band. Social media was used to manipulate the issues of concern to carry users; while the features of the media harnessed the messages to generate desired impact – mediatisation (Gianpietro & Winfried, 1999). Also, the interpersonal relationships between different, disparate groups of people held different sections of society together and were anchored on the ties between the strong and the weak. In the end, these relationships were multiplexed to help achieve set goals of giving the masses hope for a better Nigeria (Hannan & Wigmore, 2022). The youth tried to maximise the benefits of the system and got involved in activities that they believed would enthrone good governance, which they believed would eventually minimise the costs of bad governance (corruption, high costs of living, poor education standard, etc.) by socially exchanging the issues using the media (Cherry, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study examined the role of social media in citizens' self-mobilisation for participation in Nigeria's 2023 general election. It was delimited to the presidential election vis-à-vis the activities of an identified social group – "The Obidient Movement" – that was a product of the self-mobilisation efforts of individuals and non-partisan organisations on social media. The major research question hinged on ascertaining how the youth were motivated to engage in self-mobilisation activities for participation in the elections.

These findings have shown that social media have created the environment for sustained social movement (Yan, 2021); while social media's affordances created room for collective action through exchange of ideas concerning the political terrain and the way out of the quagmire, thereby supporting the postulations of the social exchange theory. It is therefore concluded that the nature of social media content about the presidential candidates and other factors, including the need to change the political system, motivated the youth to engage in social action on social media, and eventually promoted participation during the elections.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that

    i.   Politicians should work hard to individualise their political relevance to earn the solidarity of the citizens.

    ii.   The government should look at the reasons that projected self-mobilisation by the citizens and provide leadership that the citizens could be proud of.

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