The Role of Social Media in Political Mobilization: A Study of APC Gubernatorial Election in Gombe State

Mamud Yero Mohammed[1] & Musa Mohammed Kirfi[2]
[1]Department of Political Science
[2]Department of Public Administration
Federal University of Kashere
Corresponding author: mahmudyero@gmail.com

Abstract

The study seeks to examine the role of social media in political mobilization of APC Gubernatorial Election in Gombe State (2019-2023). Four research objectives were formulated that guides the study which are; the role social media played in political mobilization, the impact social media played in the political mobilization, how political mobilization is enhance via the use of social media and solutions to the challenges faced by use of social media in political mobilization of APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State. Descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population of the study will constitute the entire population of Gombe state of 2,365,040 according to 2006 census. Sample size of 400 social mobilizers of APC Gubernatorial Election in Gombe State was used as sample for the study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science. The results revealed that mobilization through Facebook invites more people to the party, social media posts on a Facebook encourage political mobilization and posting on Facebook motivates people to get interest on the party during APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State. The study also concludes that advertisement of contestant on Instagram through the use of videos, reduce the rate of protest and play major role in political mobilization of APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State. The study recommended that Facebook should be used as effective tool for social media mobilization of political activities.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Mobilization, APC, Gubernatorial Election, Election

Introduction

The use of social media in politics is increasing over time. Political parties are using popular social media to influence their target audience. The role of media continues to be useful in mobilizing and drawing citizens to focus on issues that are perceived as important and in priming public opinion among many people globally get engaged in the political process of governance and democratization (Kalyango, 2020; Montero, 2019 - 2023). The massive boom in the online and wireless digital media augmented traditional media, namely radio, newspapers, television, and magazines (Montero, 2019 - 2023). The social media have emerged as the most common source of information about election campaigns in democracies and societies in transition around the world (Macnamara, 2018). In terms of the sheer volume of information available to citizens via the media on issues - political parties and leaders – electioneering campaigns often represents a high point for political communications. Concerns about political bias in the mass media are at the heart of debates about the roles and responsibilities of the media at election time. Behind these concerns is the assumption that there may be effects, intended or unintended, on public opinion and political behaviour and, ultimately, electoral outcomes (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2019 - 2023).

Generally, the use of social media and politics refers to the use of popular online social media platforms for political campaigns and activities (Kimseng, 2017). There are various popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Linked In, Pinterest, Viber and so on. These

media can be used by political organizations, political parties, political corruption and global politics (Kruse, 2018). In recent time internet and social media are a strong platform that makes strong interactive communication channel to circulate news. Social media has strong power to influence and change not only the message but also values, political corruption and dynamics of political conflict. Social media made the election process, extreme politics, and global political conflict less susceptive and private to the people perception.

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

Yildirim (2020) argued that social media is shaping political campaigns and this has a great impact to change the game plan of politics. The social media platform has provided the option to the newcomers to speak to constituents about political policies. This also changed the communication pattern of political parties than ten your ago. Munir (2018) has researched how social media affect the voting behaviour of youth. From this study, it has been found that your voters search for information about their like-minded political expert on social media. He also argued that politically aware voters are more active to get political information. Political Mobilization may be defined as the development of social and hence political relationship between individuals and political parties. Political mobilization through social networking sites indicates subtle change in the minds of the audiences or voters to change their thought process or to think about any particular political parties as they have been exposed to that political party through different forms of social media. Since social media provides an interactive forum, it also gives an idea to the politicians about the expectations of the people from the government or whether people are happy with the incumbent government or not.

As per Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2018), the status of social media has been particularly highlighted in politics, given the fact that the use of social networking sites like (Facebook) and microblogging sites (Twitter) are believed to have the potential of attracting youth population and positively influencing political involvement. They also laid emphasis on social media becoming a core part of public discourse and effective communication in the modern society. The fast development of social media has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas. to the newcomers to speak to constituents about political policies. This also changed the communication pattern of political parties than ten your ago. Munir (2018) has researched how social media affect the voting behaviour of youth. From this study, it has been found that your voters search for information about their like-minded political expert on social media. He also

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

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i. To examine the role social media played in political mobilization of APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State.

ii. To determine the impact social media played in the political mobilization of APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State.

iii. To find out how political mobilization is enhance via the use of social media in APC 2019 - 2023 gubernatorial election in Gombe State

iv. To proffer solutions to the challenges faced by use of social media in political mobilization of APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State.

Methodology

The study adopted ex-post facto research method. Ex post-facto is a typology of descriptive research which the independent variable(s) have already occurred and in which an investigation occurred and investigator starts with the observation of dependent variable(s) and then study the independent variable in retrospect for their possible relationship to an effect on the dependent variable(s). Accordingly, secondary data, is employed the study adopted a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. This study relied heavily on secondary source of data such as journals, newspapers, books and all works analyzed were content based, with a view to ascertaining the support or otherwise of the stated objectives.

Theoretical Framework

The study will be anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory is associated with the works of Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch (1974). It belongs to the limited or indirect effect theories of mass communication. The theory according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) is concerned with what people do with media instead of what media do to people. The assumption is that people influence the effects media have on them. That is to say that uses and gratification theory takes a more humanistic approach to media use and effect. It assumes members of the audience are not passive but play active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory suggests that people use media to fulfill specific gratifications. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) note that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasizes the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning (Akinwumi, 2011).

Applying the uses and gratification theory to this study, users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they as the audience are active and not passive. Similarly, political candidates are also able to select and use media of choice and message content of their choice during electoral campaigns and other electioneering activities. The theory is based on the premise that audience (social media mobilizers) followed certain strategies in political mobilization of members to APC party. The theory also emphasized that people are the cardinal focus of election where each and every person (contestant) must mobilize them for him/her to win the position he/she is pursuing.

Politics and Social Media

The Internet and social media provide an opportunity to the young population for political discussion through various online groups, pages, and accounts. Bimber and Copeland (2011) emphasized on the role of new media for providing the platform for political participation and changing their political effectiveness. Schulz's (2015) study suggested that new media users are active in politics and political discourse. The Internet has developed the interests toward politics of its users and improved political effectiveness of the respondent which create their online and offline political engagements. Jiang (2016) examined the effects of the Internet on online and offline political participation. He also investigated the Internet's role in molding citizens' perceptions of politics. This strong relationship creates political effectiveness and election interest among Internet users and increases their political involvement (Jiang, 2016). The use of the Internet has become the main source of political effectiveness and political participation, enhancing awareness about voting and campaigning. New media also increases the ratio of voters' turnout among users. It develops the approach which helps in voting and donating campaign for politics (Larson, 2004).

Users' effectiveness helps them to understand the political affairs in a better way through the acquisition of political information from new media. Kahne, Middaugh, and Allen (2014) investigated the youth, new media, and the rise of participatory politics and concluded that new media has given a platform to individuals for information and communication with large audiences and a means to participate in political activities. The above-mentioned studies have been conducted in developed countries and shared the similar findings. However, marginalized and rural areas youth have been excluded and neglected in the research domain.

According to Bimber and Copeland (2017) today social media is a very effective place for communication among people.

People can use this platform to share ideas, experiences and other important information. In the case of politics, social media works as a means of practicing democracy and political participation. This all has a direct impact on the political behaviour of politically motivated people. The election of the USA can use as a great example. In the election campaign, political actors have used social media platforms to successfully manage the election campaign and social media also helps them to spread needed information to the voters and engage them in a political campaign (Jiang, 2016).

Social media is also a very effective place for the politician to pursue the opinion of their pair mate to become more effective in a political campaign and adopt ideas to motivate citizens to vote for them. The most popular social media site is Facebook that helps political marketing efforts by giving access to various means to send messages to the target audience (Kahne, 2021). For this reason, politicians have great skills to become more effective to promote politicians and candidates on social media. This also helps them to make a positive image about their candidate and share needed and important information to the citizen to make an effective political change and increase supporters (Bimber and Copeland, 2017). All the popular social media websites help users to share content such as articles, images, videos and documentaries to make a group of people with the same interest. So, most of the researchers in this field concluded that many tools in social media help to target specific audiences to get success in gathering people with the same interests.

Social Media and Political Participation
It is fair claim that social media has its disadvantages too. For instance, Calder's (2015) study argued that "it is necessary to know the disadvantages of new media for political communication and we have to save political participation from this situation rather than to accept it". Mahmud and Amin (2017) focused on the usage of online media in political activities among university students. The findings of the study show the relationship of online and offline political participation; however, compared with Facebook, email plays a small role in political discussion. Similarly, Schmiemann (2015) examined SNS and political participation and concluded that Facebook content shows a positive response regarding political participation. Gibson and McAllister (2014) evaluated online social ties and political engagement and examined how online platforms increase political interaction. In addition, online interaction is enhancing similar bonds among unrelated bridging networks; they found that online social contact fosters offline participation. Following the trend in this research domain, Papagiannidis and Manika (2016) investigated political participation and engagement via different online and offline channels and found that new media and other online channels allow political participants to get involved in politics and express their opinion openly. Individual attitudes vary as do their digital media use and real-life political participation.

The use of Internet and all other e-activities improves the knowledge of online users about politics and spurs political engagement and participation. Cantijoch and his colleagues studied the use of Internet, political engagement, and the impact of e-discussion, e-information, and e-political campaigning. Their findings claimed that e-campaigning directly connects and engages Internet users before and after elections (Cantijoch, Cutts, & Gibson, 2012). Marco, Robles, and Antino (2017) also observed this political attitudes and engagement in the case of individuals on digital platforms in Spain. Study findings show significance difference between cognitive and effective components of attitude. Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2012) investigated social media and political engagement and found that 39% of adults in the United States used social media and one out of every eight adults used social media for civic and political purposes. Social media generated new trends for political participation and changed the patterns of political

communication.

Siluveru (2015) endeavored to dig out the facts about social and digital media in political communication and concluded that social media is being used for the purpose of social relations and updating the users about happenings. Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan (2012) analyzed the usage of social media for political communication and found a strong relationship among politicians and social media users. In addition to that, due to SNS, interaction between voters and politicians has improved significantly. Biswas, Ingle, and Roy (2014) examined the influence of social media in India, on voting behavior, their results show that social media unites people within political parties. Storck (2011) revealed that activists used social media for collective action. Hellweg (2011) examined politicians' social media use to influence constituent perceptions and found that voters responded more positively to politicians' personal content rather than to their professional content. Similarly, Kalsnes (2016) discussed Facebook as a unique platform for interaction between political parties and voters; the study provides best practices to link with voters for political engagement. Raoof, Zaman, Ahmad, and Al-Qaraghuli (2013) studied social network systems as a tool for political change. Their findings clearly showed that social media was widely used as a communication network among candidates and voters. By providing information about politics, social media invites participation and mobilization and plays a vital role in political education as well as the mobilization of the public in politics (Doris, 2014).

Facebook and Political Effectiveness
Social media, especially Facebook, plays an important role in political effectiveness. Abdulrauf (2016) examined cognitive engagement and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter among youth in Nigeria and Malaysia and concluded that political knowledge and needs increased the political involvement and trust in young people. Abdu and his colleagues measured the role of Facebook and its use, interactivity, quality information, and political interest among youth. The study concluded that "Facebook use, and political interest positively correlates with online political participation" (Abdu, Mohamad & Muda, 2017). Conroye and his colleagues found that online political groups are mutually connected with offline political participation; however, the relationship between online political groups and political knowledge is limited because of online group discourse, but the connection between online and offline participation is very strong (Conroye, Feezellb, & Guerreroc, 2012).

Heiss and Matthes (2016) studied the effects of politicians' participatory Facebook posts on young people's political efficacy and revealed significant positive effects on those with high external and collective efficacy traits and low cynicism traits. Chan and Guo (2015) investigated Facebook use in political activities and concluded that "social media use among youth can facilitate greater political and civic engagement, particularly for those who perceive that they have limited ability to participate and understand political affairs".

Considerable research over the decade has been produced on the impact of social media and Internet on online and offline political participation. For instance, Facebook has become one of the most significant platforms for online users to discuss politics and participate in politics offline. Njegomir (2016) examined the impact of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on millennials' political behavior and found that Twitter and YouTube were not used for political purposes; however, Facebook was used for political content and may have a negative effect on formal political participation in both developing and developed countries. Westling (2007) examined the expansion of the public sphere and the impact of Facebook on political communication. He interlinked the political communication strategies with public sphere expansion and found that Facebook

was a valid platform for bridging political communication among public. Another study conducted by Marcheva (2008) found that there was a strong correlation between social media platforms and collective movements. Facebook helped in understanding the various impressions of political participation such as discussions of controversial issues.

Researchers have developed multiple scales to study the impact of Internet on campaign and political messages. Due to the monolithic nature of the medium, it is difficult to assess the effects of social media on netizens. Political participation on Facebook is robust during elections. Rustad and Sæbø (2013) found that politicians use Facebook to connect with citizens and keep them updated about their agenda and political activities. Borah (2014) presented his paper at the annual conference in International Communication Association on the use of Facebook amid the presidential campaign and found that posts promoting the candidate increased political participation in individuals whose party affiliation is congruent with the post. Similar to that, Vitak *et al*., (2009) observed the usage of Facebook and political involvement in the 2008 election. They concluded that there are possible effects to change the usage of SNS among applicants and political organizations. Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, and Ponder (2010) revealed that social media usage shows negative predictions for political cynicism.

Andersen and Medaglia (2009) found that the online sphere is popular among voters because they know about their political candidates through various means of party organization. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2014) found that Obama's campaign in 2012 utilized Facebook as a tool for promotion; this online campaign highlighted Obama's personality as a strategy which motivated followers to acts rather than to become empowered. Stumpel (2010) has given insight in his thesis on politics of social media (Facebook) and argues that discursive processes and counter protocological implementations should be

an essential political factor which governs user activities on SNS.

Strategic Election Campaigning on Social Media

Politicians seeking election need to be responsive to the political preferences of their constituencies (Downs, 2015). However, it is an open question if politicians tailor their online messages to the topic priorities of a mass audience or particular social media audiences. In contrast to Druckman *et al*., (2010) who revealed rather traditional strategies on campaign websites, we argue that social media poses a yet again different communication constellation: politicians are embedded in an interactive context which skews their messages to the topic preferences of their immediate communication network (Bode *et al*., 2016). This might be due to strategic reasoning in order to increase the success of messages or an unwitting outcome of the uses and gratifications of politicians themselves. Our empirical study relies on survey and social media generated during the German federal election campaign 2013. Given the German electoral system where party identification is still rather strong (Arzheimer, 2006), district-level topics are of minor importance in election campaigns and public agendas mostly converge to the topics salient at the national level. Therefore, topic salience expressed in politicians' social media messages can reasonably be compared to topic salience in public opinion polls. To the best of our knowledge, no such research has been undertaken so far, which naturally makes our study an exploratory one.

Opinion Poll

Public opinion is those opinions held by ordinary citizen which elected officials take into account when they chooses to act or not to act. Every responsible government in participatory democracy has it as a major concern to ensure that majority of the populace is carried along in their overall decision making. From time to time, government seeks the opinion of the populace on whether to go ahead with a

planned policy or not. The social media (internet) again provides a very nice platform for measuring the opinion of the populace. Through this medium, issues of public importance can be raised by the government for the masses to air their views. At the end of the poling, comments are counted according to the choice of the populace, usually; the outcome of the poll may be represented in a bar chart or pie chart. Sometimes, it can be measured in percentage. The choice of the social media is informed by the fact that it represent the most efficient, credible and reliable means of conducting the poll. Before the final result of the poll is announced, individuals see the result just as people comment. This process is very transparent and reliable.

Again, it is ideal because people can comment from the comfort of their homes, without coming out to stay under the sun. They can comment from wherever they like. It is also important to add that no heavy funds are spent in conducting these polls. The government spends little or nothing. They don't have to worry over the cost of conducting these polls, since more than half of the people and about 75% of those in age of responsibility (age 18 and above) are already on the internet, social media therefore offers the best machinery for opinion poll. The outcome of the polls is known almost as soon as the poll closes. Collating the votes does not take time as everything is already summed up before the collation ends. This process is free and saves time. For instance, the use of social media in the 2023 elections through opinion polls shows below:

Opinion Poll: *Using Social Media to determine supposed prudential elections*

	Total (%)	Distribution across Geo-Political Zones						Poll Ranking
		North Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West	
Peter Obi (LP)	21%	24%	6%	8%	53%	38%	14%	1st
Bola Tinubu (APC)	13%	16%	16%	20%	1%	3%	15%	2nd
Atiku Abubakar (PDP)	10%	4%	17%	20%	3%	5%	3%	3rd
Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP)	3%	1%	4%	8%	0%	1%	0%	4th
Undecided	23%	20%	28%	26%	7%	19%	30%	
Refused	30%	35%	29%	18%	36%	34%	38%	
Total	100%							
Source: NOIPolls – February2023								

The percentage of registered voters and/or voters with their Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) is as follows in each of the zones - 96% in the North East, 93% each in the North West and South East. Slightly lower voter registration percentages were recorded in the North Central with 92%, South West with 89% and the South South with 88%. Accordingly, maximum voter participation across the 6 Geopolitical Zones, now range within a narrow band of 88-96%. This differs significantly from what obtained in 2015 where maximum voter participation was highest in the North West Zone at 80% and lowest in the South South Zone at only 60%.

The table above captures the overall position of the four (4) leading Presidential candidates by aggregating and weighing their scores in proportion to population totals across Nigeria based on the findings of our September 2022, December 2022 and February 2023 polls. In comparison to previous polls, the percentage of undecided

and refused voters increased significantly from 38% in 2019 to 53% as at the time of this poll showing that a host of voters are either still seated on the fence, barely 14 days to the general elections or are refusing to disclose their preferences. Our agreed methodology does NOT allow NOIPolls staff to attempt to cajole unresponsive voters into making a choice on the phone because we believe that violates the rights of a voter.

Freedom of Speech

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the social media is the fact that it provides for the citizens the much sort opportunity to express their thoughts, to criticize or praise any government without fear of arrest. This is particularly so in democratic states as Nigeria claim to practice. Politicians/ Government Officials that are been misled by praise singers and political sycophants can get to know what people really feel about them and their policies first hand through social media. The fact that most internet accounts do not have genuine address or real names makes it very difficult for the individuals to be dictated. Issues prevailing in our contemporary society suggest that on several occasions, such criticisms have been received by those in question, and in most cases, it ends up influencing their action in favour of the public. People feel free to contribute over the internet, since they know no visible power will come after them. This is particularly healthy for every democracy.

An overview of Social Media in Political Mobilization in Gombe

Social media has continued to play a significant role in political campaigns, including elections in Gombe State in 2023. Candidates and political parties have recognized the power of social media platforms for reaching and engaging with voters on a large scale.

1. **Platform Usage:** Candidates and political parties have utilized various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to connect with voters.

Each platform offers unique features and advantages for political communication.

2. **Campaign Announcements:** Social media has been a primary medium for candidates to announce their candidacy, share their vision, and communicate their campaign promises. They use visually appealing graphics, videos, and text to engage with potential voters.

3. **Voter Engagement:** Social media platforms have been instrumental in engaging with voters through interactive content, including polls, surveys, and live videos. Candidates have used these features to gauge public opinion, answer questions, and address concerns.

4. **Content Sharing:** Supporters of political parties and candidates actively share campaign-related content on social media. This includes campaign posters, speeches, rallies, and endorsements, which have the potential to reach a wider audience beyond traditional campaign methods.

5. **Real-Time Updates:** Social media platforms enable candidates to share real-time updates about their campaign activities, such as rallies, town hall meetings, and debates. This allows voters to stay informed about campaign events and engage in discussions.

6. **Influencer Engagement:** Candidates have collaborated with social media influencers and bloggers to increase their reach and credibility among specific voter segments. Influencers with large followings share their endorsement and campaign-related content to influence their audience.

7. **Voter Education:** Social media has been utilized to educate voters on various issues, including voter registration, polling station locations, and voting procedures. Infographics, videos, and articles have been shared to increase voter awareness and turnout.

8. **Feedback and Support:** Candidates and parties actively seek feedback and support from the public through social media channels. They encourage voters to share their opinions, suggestions, and concerns, creating a two-way communication channel.

It's important to note that the actual use of social media in the 2023 election in Gombe State may vary, and specific details would depend on the individual campaigns and candidates involved.

Conclusion

The role of social media in political mobilization and participation in Nigeria. The objective was to see, considering the 2023 elections, the nature of political discourse online using Nigerian twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, what as a study. With the aid of a qualitative technique, tweets were extracted and analyzed. From the data harvested, themes identified relating to key discussions were discussed, the findings among others, reveal that majority of the discussions online are steered by citizens various calls through the deployment of hashtags for mobilisation, information, advocacy and call for actions. Also, the sentiment analysis made it clear that citizen sentiments were mostly negative suggesting displeasure with the current administration; this is, therefore, a factor that influenced the various calls for action online. The paper concludes that while the role of the social media cannot be ignored in political processes, it is not the only factor influencing political outcomes as politics is a more complex process. It, therefore, recommends that citizens must harness the power of social media as it a viable medium due to its complementary role in influencing political participation and mobilisation in all ramification.

Recommendations

From the findings, we recommend:

1. Periodic public enlightenment on the use of social media platforms for political purpose especially among the youths. The government should be at the vanguard of this campaign, using such instruments like the ministries of information at both state and federal levels, the National Orientation Agency, the mass media, among others.

2. Politicians and political parties, as well as their supporters should be cautioned on using social media to post/twit dysfunctional messages. Government or INEC may consider enacting laws that make such acts punishable offence.

3. Efforts should be made towards monitoring, moderating or regulating the various social media platforms in order to minimize the observed weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of the technology in the electoral process.

4. To achieve the above, it is imperative that the various media laws are urgently reviewed to address the technicalities involved in the new media technologies; this we believe would go a long way in making the technology more useful in the electoral process and more beneficial to the society at large.

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