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The Impact of Social Media on Political Mobilization in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Obidient Movement

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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates how the social media can be used for political mobilization, using the obidient movement as a case study. The emergence of the Obidient Movement in Nigeria has been intimately associated with the way in which the development of social media platforms has revolutionised political communication. This article looks at how social media affects political mobilisation in Nigeria, with a particular emphasis on the remarkable role that technology-driven communication played in the Obidient Movement's success. The conventional boundaries of political campaigning have been rewritten with the rise of social media, giving non-traditional influencers, grassroots activism, and digital activism a greater chance to shape political discourse and election outcomes. The study employed the Uses and Gratification theory, to deduce how citizens were mobilized via social media to join the obidient movement. To achieve this, the study relied on qualitative research method that examines and synthesizes extant literature on political mobilization and the particular relevant literature on social media and political mobilization. The outcome of the study shows that despite the proliferation of fake news and misinformation on social media, it served as a tool for political mobilization for the obidient movement, as obidients used social media to form alliances, crowdfund, mobilise political support and interact with a wider audience. By exploring the pivotal role of social media in the recent Nigerian election, this article illuminates the transformative potential of these platforms in reshaping political mobilization and generating support for previously underrepresented political forces in the nation.

INTRODUCTION

Studies have demonstrated that social media plays a crucial role in determining the dynamics and results of electioneering in many regions of the world, indicating that social media's growing influence in electoral politics is a worldwide trend (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Globally, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have all contributed significantly to the success of political campaigns (Okoro *et al.*, 2019). The results of the most recent presidential elections in Tanzania and Kenya showed how important social media is to the political process itself (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). According to Nwoye and Okafor (2014), social media and other social networks are becoming more important in Nigerian politics, owing to the fact that social media allows internet users to communicate freely and virtually immediately with members of the political elite, wherever they are and at any time. Social media has caused the world to transition from a global village to a global parlour, where decisions, mobilisation, and destruction with far-reaching effects are made from the corners of a big room with ramifications for both the national and international levels (Mojeed-Sanni, 2015).

Political parties and candidates around the world use a variety of platforms to conduct their political operations within the field of political communication (John & Ibe, 2020). Utilising social media sites on the internet to plan propaganda and campaign strategies has proven essential

(Bello, *et al.*, 2019). Electioneering campaigns and vote-scouting by political office-seekers and political parties are conducted by leveraging the numerous opportunities offered by social media to not only register their political interest and ambition but also persuasively appeal to be voted for, bringing a new dimension to political communication (John & Ibe, 2020).

Friedman (2007), maintain that social media serves as the political stage for the majority of effective electioneering campaigns in the modern world, and social media is now the primary arena for both losing and winning elections. Undeniably, utilising smartphones, computers, and other readily available communication devices, access to social media is easy and could be done anywhere ((Edegoh & Samson, 2014)). Voters could use these devices to access any candidate and get details about them. According to Abdulyakeen and Yusuf (2022), all media platforms and their instruments are valuable assets that support democracy and good governance in the 21st century since they convey the public's voice and opinions on political matters. Additionally, there seems to be a connection between people's political lives and the new media tools that are currently accessible, and this usually prepares the ground for a strong, participatory, and aggressive kind of political communication (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016). While conventional media still remains the primary means of communication, social media has become a major tool in Nigerian politics. The political class have been

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criticized for controlling and owning Nigeria's traditional media, which includes radio, newspapers, and television. Consequently, there has been a push for a change towards more interactive, less stringently controlled media that allows for user-generated content, eliminating the ownership influence that has plagued traditional media (John & Ibe, 2020).

In Nigeria, social media has developed into an effective instrument for political campaigns, giving parties and candidates the ability to interact with voters, reach a large audience, and influence public opinion (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). Politicians and the public are utilising blogs, websites, and other social media platforms more frequently to address political issues as a result of increased computer and internet literacy, which points to a growing trend in internet use in Nigeria (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). This work attempts to investigate the impact of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria, in order to ascertain the positive and negative effects, as well as proffer recommendations to address the dysfunctions inherent in the use of social media for political mobilization in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Concerns over how and for what social and political purposes young people use media are growing as digital media has become more commonplace (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). According to Howell (2013), there is special interest in learning how civic engagement, knowledge, and involvement are fostered through participation in internet mediated environments. Driven by the necessity for social connections in a mixed economy and the quick transition to a capitalist economic system, social media democratizes and empowers human relations and draws support from people, governments, and businesses (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). Nigerian politics have become even more "mediatized" as a result of politicians using the internet to interact with their constituents (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

There has been a notable rise in online and offline violent extremism all over the world, as the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. have given rise to new problems as it concerns online hate comments (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). Bartlett and Reynolds (2015) contend that violent extremists now effectively further their objectives by using social media platforms. They employ radical messaging in the media to sway young people in order to spread their harmful ideology and attract new members (Van Ginkel, 2015). The importance of social media cannot be overemphasized, as it has become a tool for political mobilization and altering public opinion and sentiments. Realizing the effectiveness of this medium, some Nigerian politicians quickly adopted and exploited it extensively for their political campaigns in the 2015 and 2019 general elections (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022).

Although the media are vital social forces that contribute to the success of democracy, social media is prone to

misuse, limiting its benefit in promoting impartial and fair political campaigns. According to Oyenuga (2015), web-based social networking proved to be an even more potent tool and deadly weapon during the 2015 general elections, as a variety of video releases, voice lines, feature reports, headlines, and broadcasts were used to disparage numerous political parties and individuals. Previous studies have focused on the impact of social media on political participation across the various geopolitical zones in Nigeria, as well as past general elections, however, this article explores the impact of social media on political mobilization, using the obidient movement as a case study.

Objective of the Research

1. To evaluate the positive and negative impacts of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria.
2. To assess the impact of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria, using the obidient movement as a case study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

Social media are "internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of content which is user generated," (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). They stated that the earliest social media platforms were presented in 1979 by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis of Duke University, who built the worldwide discussion system Usenet, and in 1998 by Bruce and Susan Abelson, who started "Open Diary." Social media refers to online resources and applications that let people interact, create, share, and look for information. They provide people a chance to interact and exchange ideas, viewpoints, contacts, information, and experience. They are a part of a new wave of media that centres on social networking, giving users more freedom to express themselves, engage with friends, exchange information, and voice their opinions on the internet (John & Ibe, 2020). These technologies are social because of their collaborative or interactive features (Chatora, 2012).

The advent of the internet and the World Wide Web gave rise to social media, often known as "web 2.0" websites that let users communicate with message senders (John & Ibe, 2020). These media are defined by Mayfield (2008) as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation, and connectedness." Adibe, Odoemelam, and Orji (2012) highlight online content created using accessible and scalable publishing technologies, which promotes interaction and democratization of knowledge, making people both information producers and consumers. Nwabueze (2012) notes that whereas "web 1.0" refers to the status of the web before 2004, "Web 2.0" refers to the condition of the web from 2004 to the present, a period during which interactive websites arose. Webbased communities, social networking sites, video-sharing, sites, Wikis, and blogs, are examples of web 2.0 sites (Allen *et al.*, 2011). Prior to the advent of

“Web 2.0,” the second phase of internet growth, in the late 1990s, users simply browsed with the intention of obtaining information by reading articles from various sources and viewing videos (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Adeyinka, 2016).

As McQuail (2005) notes, the 21st century has seen an unprecedented shift in the technology of information and communication generation, processing, storage, and dissemination, opening up new media platforms that have never been seen before in terms of interconnectedness, interactivity, multiplicity, and accessibility. Gevertz and Greenwood (2010) defined social media as a platform for the dissemination of information using highly accessible publishing tools (web and mobile), which enable individuals to shift from being consumers of content to creators of it. With social media, communication is no longer unidirectional but rather multidirectional, including audience members as active participants rather than passive information consumers (Thackeray & Neiger, 2009). As a result of its design to facilitate all forms of computer-mediated, mass, and interpersonal communication, social media are regarded as the most interactive of communication media (Spurgeon, 2008). When contrasting traditional mass media with digitally networked media, Spurgeon (2008) highlights the significance of interactivity, asserting that more interactive communication systems are more adaptable to accommodate many forms of interaction and communication.

Popular social media platforms in Nigeria include websites such as Facebook, X, Instagram, Tiktok, WhatsApp and YouTube. These new communications and information technologies are beginning to enable advances in e-government, e-democracy and e-participation (Aronson, 2005). According to Olley and Ekhareafor (2013), social media has emerged as the global engine powering social movements. Aronson (2005) thus demonstrated that in addition to well-intentioned social movements, reformers, and activists, social media can also support NGOs, businesses, terrorists, revolutionaries, fundamentalist religious leaders, fanatics of all colours, criminal syndicates, and political subversives. Social media plays a crucial role in grassroots mobilization during election campaigns, enabling political parties and candidates to organize volunteers, coordinate activities, and rally supporters (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023).

Political Mobilization

Political mobilisation in its strictest definition, refers to the process of creating collective actors and identities (Martiniello, 2005). According to Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), mobilization “have multiple meanings and, therefore, might lead to misunderstanding concerning the process we are discussing”. The deliberate process of involving citizens in politics is often referred to as political mobilization, and it manifests itself in member recruiting. A democratic society must prioritise political mobilisation, which is thought to be a critical function best carried out by

political parties (Conway, 1993). Historian Paul Kleppner summed up this viewpoint in a 1982 paper, saying that: “Mobilization of the mass electorate has always been, and still remains, contingent on the existence and vitality of political parties” (Kleppner, 1982). Political mobilization involves influencing individuals to participate in politics through various activities of institutions, organizations, social networks, and individuals (Conway, 1993).

Social media’s advent has given rise to a new kind of political campaign and process that requires politicians to understand social media strategy in order to engage voters and advance their own interests as well as the interests of society at large (Okoro, *et al.*, 2019). Social media platforms such as Twitter have evolved into effective instruments for organising collective activities, distributing information, and shaping public opinion (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). Voter registration drives, door-to-door campaigns, neighbourhood get-togethers, and volunteer recruitment may all be done with its help (Pérez-Martínez, *et al.*, 2017). In addition to the COVID-19 lockdown, which have further increased social media’s appeal as a substitute social interaction and networking medium, Nigerians’ increasing smartphone ownership has expedited the use of social media for electioneering (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023).

Twitter was utilized for promoting obedient movements in Nigeria, providing a wider coverage and facilitating offline group formation for political campaigns, allowing candidates to directly engage with supporters and potential voters (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). They are able to answer questions, address concerns, and give current information. (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016). Through the use of social media, the obedient were able to establish rapport with other followers, thereby promoting loyalty, inclusion, and trust, all of which facilitated the political mobilization process. Twitter’s movements and hashtags influenced narratives, highlighted topics, amplified voices, encouraged debate, and allowed citizens to interact with decision-makers, and mobilize support for various causes (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). The obedient movement utilised the internet so much that its level of mobilization and attacks on the ancient regime was incalculable (Okwelum, 2023).

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratification Theory

There are various accounts on the development of the Uses and Gratification Theory (Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013). However, Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch developed the theory’s fourth stage in 1974. Early research concentrated on the propaganda and persuasive capabilities of the mass media; but, as time went on, attention shifted to the behavioural sciences in an attempt to explain the potential impacts of communications and the media on society (Egede, 2013). On a macro-sociological level, Lasswell (1948) established the concept of a four-functional interpretation of the media, namely the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission for society and people. On the other hand, Wright (1960) adds

the mobilisation function, expanding Lasswell's stance. According to the fundamental principles of the theory, people are drawn to a certain sort of informational media because it is easy to access and because they are satisfied with the particular content that reaches them. Additionally, users at all levels engage in chosen processes of initiative.

According to Katz *et al.*, (1974), "Uses and Gratifications theory asserts that people are active users of media and select how they will use it". This theory adopts a functionalistic approach to communications and media, contending that media's primary job is to satisfy audience needs and motives (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). The theory focuses on audience motifs and analyses message and social system, analysing users' media seeker behaviour and satisfaction with its type, content, and method of use (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). Two major questions form the basis of the theory: 1) why are people attracted to certain media? and 2) what kind of satisfaction does media provide for people? (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). The two questions posed in "Use and Gratification" will eventually define the benefits and drawbacks of using particular media opined Balakrishnan and Loo (2012), hence the relevance of this theory to the study. The question in Katz (1959) is not, "What do the media do to people?" but rather "What do people do with the media?" According to the Uses and Gratification theory, the audience is crucial and determines what is desired from the medium in all cases (Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013).

Various criticisms of Uses and Gratification exist, particularly with its excessive presumptions, which Wimmer and Dominick (1994) identified as individual media choices, expectancies resulting from personal traits, social interactions, and environmental influences. Cooper (1997) notes that communication researchers see the individual-level impact of media as a limited effect perspective, meaning that media only reinforces preexisting attitudes and behaviours. This is consistent with Klapper's minimal effects position (Klapper, 1960). Encouragement from supporters may strengthen the political beliefs and activities of the Obidient Movement, strengthening their commitment to the cause and fostering a sense of community (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). The theory explicitly gives users direct authority, which makes it easy to deduce how citizens were mobilized via social media to join the obidient movement. Most of the early researchers made little attempt to investigate the connections between the gratifications detected and the psychological or sociological origins of the needs satisfied (Ruggiero, 2000). By using this theory to analyse the obidient movement, we can comprehend how and why social media aided the obidient movement in political mobilization, as well as to share their opinions with a wider audience, and have an influence on policy deliberations and public discourse. Early in the history of communications research, an approach was developed to study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy

their social and psychological needs (Cantril, 1942). This theory is pertinent to the study because it assisted in analysing how the Obidients used social media to mobilise political support, by framing messages, interacting with the public, forming alliances and coalitions with other civil society organisations that share their goals, and organising men and other resources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at elucidating the impact of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria, using the Obidient Movement as a case study. Secondary data was analysed using thematic analyses to explain the subject matter. The study was strengthened by an extensive review of pertinent literature from diverse sources, including but not limited to scholarly monographs, edited volumes, peer-reviewed journal articles, and credible online repositories, to ensure a comprehensive coverage of the subject matter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Positive Impacts of Social Media on Political Mobilization in Nigeria

Social media's emergence and widespread use as a tool for simultaneous global connection have paved the way for new initiatives to organise citizens around causes, leading experts to surmise that social media use may contribute to a more democratic society (John & Ibe, 2020). Although youth voices and engagement in government have been stifled by Nigeria's "hegemonic" communication system, technological innovations like social media have changed how people interact, changing the status quo and giving them a voice (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). Ezema and Ezema (2023) discovered that social media platforms ranked highest in mobilising the residents of Enugu metropolis during any form of elections than the face-to-face communication. Politicians use social media in their campaigns since Barack Obama broke new ground with his use of it in 2008, resulting in a dramatic change in the way political discourse is done. Nigeria's former president Goodluck Jonathan on Wednesday September 15, 2010, made a bid for the presidency via Facebook. Within 24 hours of his announcement, his followers grew from 217,000 to 221,000, and on election day which was slated for April 16, 2011, he had over half a million followers (Madueke *et al.*, 2017). According to Sumera, Zaeem, and Batool (2020), like, mentioning, tagging, posting, commenting, sharing, and following politicians on Facebook and Twitter are just a few of the ways that people are now often involved in online politics. Similarly, Jha and Kodila-Tedika (2019) assert that social media platforms empower politicians as well as citizens.

Enhanced Communication and Organization

Orji (2014) asserts that social media in Nigeria has been an important tool for political communication since 2007. Social media facilitates online connection and networking by enabling users to communicate via email

and instant messaging, exchanging ideas, events, activities, and interests within their own networks (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). However, Nigeria's 2011 general elections marked the nation's first real experiment in using social media for political engagement (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). The interactive engagement between citizens and political officials is greatly aided by social media. Through these communication channels, people can engage with their national, state and local officials. Political entities use social media to interact with and push information to the citizen. It should be mentioned that social media is known for its interaction. These internet resources enable communication, encourages teamwork and freely disseminate knowledge, highlighting people's ability and agency to participate in politics. Candidates can share campaign messages, policy positions and engage with voters in real-time on social media due to its viral nature, enhancing their reach and impact (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). Social media platforms offer sophisticated targeting options, allowing candidates to customise their campaign messages to particular demographics, locations, or interests (Stier, *et al.*, 2018). This targeting capacity maximises the effectiveness of campaign activities by facilitating more efficient engagement with important voter groupings (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023).

According to Arthur (2012), social media has the ability to encourage public participation with institutions. Social media has expanded the democratic role of media by facilitating synchronous and asynchronous interactions and acting as a forum for group discussion. Social media provides a two-way channel of communication for political organizations and candidates, enabling them to interact with voters and the participants while receiving immediate or later feedback. According to Zhang *et al.*, (2010), there is a considerable correlation between greater civic participation and reliance on social networking sites. Social media is another tool used by politicians and political parties to engage with the public and ask their support. Voters and civil societies also use social media, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube and WhatsApp to share their polling experiences and results with their constituency before the official winner is announced.

Increased Voters Awareness and Education

Political parties, candidates, and governmental agencies used social media platforms for awareness- raising and campaigning. According to Dunu (2018), many politicians, including those running for governor, the presidency and other offices, used social media platforms to engage with voters and constituents during the 2011 general elections. In addition to enabling voters to make informed decisions about the parties and candidates they will support or vote for, the media helps her in her monitoring role (Nwamara and Etumnu, 2022). X and Facebook seem to be the most popular used social media sites by political figures. Carlos, *et al.*, (2022) averred that twitter can enhance political engagement and voting

turnout by improving voter education and awareness. Twitter enables political candidates, parties, and activists to share information, mobilize support, and engage with a wide audience, thereby, transforming the political agenda; a role that was formerly dominated by television (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023).

Employing social media, politicians and their parties were able to disseminate messages and enlist a large number of volunteers to help with their campaigns. Political campaigns create and utilise campaign-specific hashtags to amplify their messaging, increase interaction, and mobilise supporters (Opeyemi, *et al.*, 2018). Hashtag campaigns increase awareness, create online dialogue, and mobilise support for specific candidates or issues (Hadma, & Anggoro, 2022). The Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) made use of the chance to expand its social media presence and interact with users on Facebook, YouTube and X. With the establishment of INEC's Situation Room, Individuals can now report misbehavior and voice concerns about the poll to the institution directly. The commission saw 25 million visitors on its website in just the first three days of the presidential election, and it received roughly 4,000 tweets during that time. Over 70,000 Nigerians were able to report occurrences directly to the commission by contacting them directly and receive the answers to their queries. Furthermore, social media platforms enable two-way communication between candidates and voters, promoting inclusivity and allowing active participation in the political process through interaction, questions, and feedback. The youths have all combined their skills as journalists, analyst, authors, writers, programmers, photographers, content developers, advertisers, salesmen, and event managers into one profession without much formal training (Okwelum, 2023).

Encouragement of Political Engagement

Citizens are empowered and mobilized by social media to participate in politics and to broaden the arena for political activity. They make it possible for digital citizens to engage in secure, private and interstate political dialogue and interactions. Consequently, it is possible for citizens to encroach on public space with their messages. As a result, social media gives online citizens the ability to express, debate, contest, gather and challenge opinions. Many observers noted how the tech-savvy younger generation effectively used social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, in all of the protests and mass movements to raise awareness and mobilise support (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). The Arab spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; the ENDSARS movement in Nigeria, as well as the anti-monarchical protests in Eswatini are examples of social media movements that were birthed out of the desire to reform respective state governments.

Social media has developed into a powerful tool for political campaigns in Nigeria, providing candidates and parties with new avenues for voter engagement, public opinion influencing, and political mobilization. Through

social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, political parties and candidates may interact directly with a sizable audience (Shadrach and Apuke, 2020). According to Bukarti's study, over 12 million new voters registered nationwide to vote, and over 78 percent of those voters were young people between the ages of 18 and 35. Okwelum (2023) opined that the obidient movement did not only put non-state actors to the verge, they emerged as non-state actors throughout the electioneering period.

Encouragement of Freedom of Speech

Nigeria has witnessed a vibrant transformation in its political landscape, fuelled in part by the rise of social media. These platforms have transcended communication, powerful tools for civic engagement and political mobilization. According to Tanja (2014), social media encourages more people to deliberate. The lowered hierarchies between information sender and recipient imply that common people can interact with authorities and with one another directly in addition to expressing their opinions. Moog (2000), averred that the internet opens up new possibilities for citizens to engage in interactive debate, unmediated communication between political groups and prospective members and direct access to politically relevant material. Social media emerged as a medium for fostering freedom of speech and communication between political agent and the citizens. The Soro Soke online radio of the ENDSARS movement, as well as the use of the #ENDSARS hashtag across social media platforms gave the movement momentum and broadened their reach. "Obididients" such as Aisha Yusuf (quoted in Akinsuyi, 2022) asserted that the "office of the citizen" is the highest office in the nation and that what they needed was not an emperor but a president who was answerable to the people. Youths have become dominant in the information network and politicians now depend on them to communicate messages to the public, and act as conduits for public feedbacks.

Enhancement of Political Development and Stability

Mahmud and Amin (2017) support the theory that social media plays a major role in political development and stability by giving demonstrators access to effective, quick and reasonably priced instrument for enlisting, obtaining funds, disseminating information, holding group discussions and organizing for group action. Unlike traditional forms of communication and organization, social media offers rapid and relatively inexpensive means for activists to connect with each other and reach a wider audience. This accessibility lowers barrier to entry for political participation, enabling even marginalized voices to be heard and amplified on global scale. Furthermore, social media serves as a potent tool for fundraising, allowing activists to solicit donations and financial support from a wide range of sources. Crowdfunding campaigns, digital wallets and online payment platforms facilitate pooling resources, enabling protesters to sustain their movements

and amplify their impact over the long term. Social media makes it feasible to track public opinion and reactions to political campaigns in real time (Okoro and Santas, 2017). Parties and candidates can modify their strategies in reaction to how the public perceives their rhetoric, policies, and campaign initiatives. Additionally, social media platforms allow for divergent viewpoints. All these joint efforts allow for stability before, during and after elections.

Social Change

Social media can be used by individuals, groups, and independent candidates to change public opinion, contest prevailing narratives, and bring attention to crucial topics (Mamman, 2019). Twitter facilitates easy communication between users and the creation of narratives around political and policy issues (Adam, *et al.*, 2018). Twitter is a social network for microblogging, user interaction, and content generation, allowing political activists and supporters to connect, plan, and coordinate grassroots events using hashtags (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). The development of Obi and the obidient movement as the third political force in the general election of 2023 was largely attributed to the internet's accessibility and the growing importance of smartphones among young people (Okwelum, 2023). In many parts of Nigeria, ICTs have been instrumental in advancing democracy, and they appear to be rekindling hope for the nation's social and political change (Okoro, *et al.*, 2019). Organised by several tiny organisations with the intention of toppling the current systems, Nigerian youths organized peace walks and online campaigns, particularly on Twitter, using Obi as a platform to voice their aspirations and rage (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023).

Negative Impacts of Social Media on Political Mobilization in Nigeria

According to Ademosu and Oyeleye (2019), the proliferation of hate speech and false news in recent years is evidence that social media has caused societies to become even more divided and separated. Hunter (1998), cited by Salawu (2007), came to the conclusion that "the net is often given to inequality, an overabundance of meaningless information, and vitriolic, irrational discourse, contrary to utopian view of an egalitarian online world where information and conversation lead to a new and better democracy."

Loss of Autonomy and Privacy

According to Bradshaw and Howard (2019); Fukuyama (2021), social media's extensive data collecting techniques may make it more difficult for individuals to express their political opinions. Social media sites use an attention-grabbing tactic to increase interaction, but in the process, they compromise user autonomy and try to profit from people.

Distortion of Political Inclinations and Viewpoints

The propagation of false information on social media may impede citizen's ability to form and express political

viewpoints. It is difficult to assess the true impact of political misinformation on people's beliefs and inclinations, despite growing evidence that individuals are frequently exposed to it online (Buchi *et al.*, 2020 and Fukuyama, 2021). There is evidence that misinformation has negative effects on certain populations and in specific context, even though it seems that its influence and reach have been exaggerated. Voters can be misled or persuaded by disinformation and to encourage or discourage people from casting ballots, which in certain cases could affect the outcome of elections.

Dissemination of Wrong Information

Even though social media has many benefits for promoting democracy, good governance and politics, it can also be a very unstable place for political trends. Social media, unlike traditional mass media, is democratic and unrestricted, therefore politicians may use it to spread false information about actual or hypothetical opponents in an effort to win people's favour (Alegu, *et al.*, 2020). A politically motivated campaign or career might be fatally affected by a viral video of immoral behaviour or graphic sexual image (Ajayi & Adesote, N.D). One such instance was the widely disseminated false report that Atiku Abubakar, the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) presidential nominee, was gay (Ajebo, 2018).

Furthermore, social media platforms often lack effective mechanisms for verifying the authenticity and accuracy of content, making them vulnerable to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Politically motivated actors may exploit this vulnerability to disseminate false or misleading information with the intent of undermining opponents or shaping public opinion. In such cases, even baseless allegations can inflict significant damage on a politician's reputation or political movement, eroding trust in democratic processes and institutions. Social media platforms were utilised throughout the 2019 election campaign to manufacture, disseminate, and propagate hate speech, fake news, extortion, and misleading information, all of which heated up the political atmosphere (Nebeife *et al.*, 2021).

The Obidient Movement as a Case Study

Dollarhide (2021) underscored that social media is a computer-mediated technology that enables the exchange of ideas, concepts, and data by constructing virtual communities and networks. In Nigeria, social media culture has already taken hold and been ingrained in many aspects of the country's existence, as seen by the overwhelming amount of social media involvement during the 2023 election campaign (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Social media platforms offer channels for democratic engagement (Nebeife *et al.*, 2021). These technological advancements have enabled political education, communication, and mobilisation, even as they have also limited civic engagement among the illiterate and less technologically savvy populace (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). In terms of party politics, they

give politicians and political parties legitimate venues to advertise their agendas and goals in an effort to garner voters' patronage (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Additionally, they provide voters a chance to question candidates and parties about their manifestoes and action plans (Omotayo and Folorunso 2020). Although social media is still a relatively new tool in Nigeria for electioneering, it has had a tremendous influence over time (Omotayo and Folorunso 2020). In Nigeria, digital campaigning had a major role in the general elections of 2011 and by the 2019 elections, it has established itself as a dominating tradition in the electoral scene of the nation (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Social media was utilised in that setting for party contestations, voter activism, and voter education in addition to being employed as a tool for voter canvassing (Apuke and Tunca 2018).

The term "Obidient" is a neologism used to characterise supporters and adherents of the "Obidient Movement" in Nigeria. The Obidient movement is a social media awareness campaign on various media platforms for the political aspiration of Peter Obi, the Labour Party Presidential candidate in the 2023 Nigeria election (Agbim, *et al.*, 2023). The movement is made up of young pro-democracy activists who mobilized support for Peter Obi, the Labour Party's (LP) presidential candidate in the 2023 general election. In the first quarter of 2022, the "Obidient Movement" was established on mainstream social media, with majority of its ardent supporters being urban youngsters and intellectuals who appear to be anxious for a new, democratic Nigeria (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Moving away from conventional means of influence based on ethnicity, religion, and geographical zoning, the movement sought democracy and voter engagement. As Obi and Datti toured the nation, the campaign emphasised values like character, competence, youthfulness, integrity, and frugality (Okwelum, 2023). The 'Obidient' movement, made up of urban youth with access to internet literacy, sought to transform Nigerian politics by endorsing a younger, more progressive candidate for president and using the 2022/2023 election cycle to force a significant change (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Their unifying goal is to establish a new Nigeria where candidates for public office must meet the requirements of competence, character, and competency rather than other primitive factors (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). The term "obidients" refers to their discovery of these attributes in Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra State and Labour Party presidential candidate (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023).

As events transpired, Obi and the Obidient movement emerged as the dominant political force in Nigeria, announcing their presence on the country's highest voting corridor, Lagos-Ibadan, demystifying, for the first time since independence and following the Azikiwe-Awolowo feuds, ethnicity and tribe in determining voting patterns in southern Nigeria (Okwelum, 2023). Additionally, in the north Datti Ahmed's bright qualities resonated and also de-shinned the renegade duo of Tinubu-Shettima

(Okonkwo, 2023). The Obidient movement comprised of professionals and intellectuals who are fed up with corrupt politicians driving Nigeria towards collapse, well-known celebrities with a sizable social media following, ethnic racists who view Obi as the Igbo president come to life, activists who refuse to forgive the political class for their part in the disastrous #ENDSARS Movement, and Nigerians living abroad who want a credible leader to replicate the political climate in which they live (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023).

During the early stages of the Movement, many old-time politicians ridiculed Obi and questioned how he would win an election in Nigeria using a social media group, as the Movement was perceived as a social media frenzy with no physical presence (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). When the “social media mob” started to organise and mobilise massive crowds for awareness marches and demonstrations around the nation, they were afraid (Soludo, 2022). According to Mokuye *et al.*, (2023), Obaseki and Fani-Kayode were the first group of politicians to see the Movement’s rising popularity and impact as well as its potential to drive the old brigade out of politics. Local chapters of the movement were formed around the nation and even in the diaspora, all the while maintaining their online operations (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). They began a well-organized member mobilisation campaign and urged Nigerians who hadn’t obtained or registered for their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) prior to the end of the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) to do so, with the extension of the registration exercise following agitation and pressure from Nigerians who would have been disenfranchised, to enable them install their candidate, Mr. Obi during the presidential election (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). Twitter was used to provide explanations on voter rights, voter registration, voter accreditation, and the electoral process. Members of the obidient movement also posted election dates, polling units, and other documentation requirements via social media. The Labour Party, which had no political relevance since its formation, except a brief period of Mimiko’s administration in Ondo State, suddenly became a potent opposition group and a serious candidate for the presidency of Nigeria because of Mr. Obi and the Obidient Movement (Mokuye *et al.*, 2023). The Obidient Movement contributed to the Labour Party’s third-place finish in the presidential race. Previously without any elected members of the National Assembly, the Labour Party currently boasts six senators, thirty-four members of the House of Representatives, a governor (Abia State), and several members of the House of Assembly.

CONCLUSION

Social media is utilised legitimately, but it is also egregiously exploited and misappropriated. Prior to the 2023 general elections, narratives and unsubstantiated materials that might violate public order were disseminated in a way that inflamed resentment and animosity among the political community. The narratives

surrounding the campaigning, conduct, and outcome of elections were drastically altered by the general election of 2023 (Okwelum, 2023). What started as a four-man tweet was to become a Tsunami and before the wicked and unproductive politicians could know what was afoot, a nightmare of a movement on the doorway in Nigeria (Maduka, 2023). The movement, which comprised of young people who are dissatisfied with politics, leveraged social media and popular culture to transform the face of national leadership by rallying support for the Labour Party’s presidential candidate in 2023 (Okoli & Agantiem, 2023). Young, media savvy supporters mobilized funds for the obidient campaign and elevated Obi into a cult personality if not a saint (Okwelum, 2023). The use of incendiary words like “Labouring in vain”, “Obidiots”, and “Obituary” to disparage and mock the supporters of the obidient movement was common across social media platforms. Their opponents were not spared, as the supporters of the All Progressive Party were accused of promoting Islamic agenda, by presenting candidates of same religion in the presidential election. Although much havoc may have been done through fake news and cloning of information, social media have proven beneficial in the political process exposing the very recesses of information in the travel of lightening (Okwelum, 2023).

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