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## **Influence of Facebook and X on the political mobilisation of electorates in Enugu metropolis during the 2023 presidential election**

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**Nwafor, Ozioma Favour; Nnamdi, Nzekwe George**

*Affiliated Institution: Mass Communication, Godfrey Okoye University.*

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the influence of Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) on the political mobilisation of electorates in Enugu Metropolis during the 2023 presidential election. It aims to determine how exposure to political communication on these platforms affects awareness, participation, and voting behaviour. Guided by the Public Sphere Theory and Technological Determinism Theory, the study assumes that social media serves as a digital public sphere that shapes political engagement. The research adopts a survey design, using structured questionnaires administered to a representative sample of residents across Enugu North, Enugu South, and Enugu East local government areas. Findings reveal that most respondents are regularly exposed to political messages on Facebook and X, which significantly increase their political awareness and interest in national issues. However, despite high levels of online participation, physical voter turnout remains low, showing a gap between digital engagement and actual electoral participation. Major challenges identified include misinformation, political apathy, technical failures during elections, and lack of trust in institutions. The study concludes that while Facebook and X enhance awareness and discourse, they do not automatically translate into physical mobilisation. It recommends that political actors, civil society, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) integrate social media campaigns with offline sensitisation programs, strengthen fact-checking mechanisms, and improve electoral transparency to convert online enthusiasm into active participation.

### **Keywords:**

*Facebook, X (Twitter), Political Mobilisation, Social Media, Enugu Metropolis.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Democratic governance thrives on the active participation of citizens in the electoral process, and one of the clearest demonstrations of this participation is voting. Across the world, elections remain the central mechanism through which people confer legitimacy on governments, renew mandates, and demand accountability from those in power. In Nigeria, electoral participation has attracted increasing scholarly and political attention, especially in the Fourth Republic, which began in 1999. While Nigeria has maintained an unbroken cycle of elections since the return to democracy, turnout has remained worryingly low, particularly in urban centers such as Enugu metropolis. This trend has triggered debates on the determinants of voting behaviour, the role of civic engagement, and the influence of new communication technologies like social media on political participation (Daukere et al., 2024).

The growth of social media has transformed political engagement across the globe, and Nigeria is no exception. Platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) have become key tools for politicians, civic groups, and ordinary citizens to exchange political information, mobilize support, and challenge dominant narratives. Unlike traditional media, which is often constrained by ownership structures and gatekeeping, social media allows for interactive, bottom-up communication that empowers marginalized voices (Chinedu, 2024). In the run-up to the 2023 general elections, Nigerian youths deployed hashtags, online town halls, and viral videos to galvanise support for their preferred candidates. The #ObidientMovement, which had particular resonance in Enugu and other South-Eastern cities, exemplified how digital activism could energise political discourse and reframe electoral contestation (Odi et al., 2023).

In Enugu metropolis, where youths constitute more than 60 per cent of registered voters, social media engagement was particularly visible. Political parties, independent candidates, and civic organisations invested heavily in digital campaigns. Facebook live streams of rallies, Twitter Spaces for political debates, and WhatsApp groups for voter education became routine features of the 2023 election season. Scholars have noted that these platforms created new channels of information flow, enhanced political awareness, and fostered a sense of collective identity among urban youth (Njoku & Wilcox, 2025). However, questions remain as to whether this heightened online engagement translated into actual mobilisation at polling stations. Studies of the 2023 governorship elections in Enugu and Abia suggest that while social media amplified political interest, structural barriers such as malfunctioning voter accreditation devices and insecurity discouraged physical turnout (Ugochukwu & Obiukwu, 2024).

This study explores the influence of Facebook and X on political mobilisation of youths during the 2023 presidential elections in Enugu metropolis, Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey method to collect quantitative data. Combining statistical research with in-depth insights, this technique provides a thorough understanding of the impact of social media on political mobilisation in Enugu metropolis during the 2023 presidential elections.

### **Area of study**

The study was conducted in Enugu metropolis, Nigeria. Enugu is a state in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, located on latitude 6°30'N and longitude 7°30'E. It is bordered to the north by the states of Kogi, and Benue, then Ebonyi State to the east and southeast, Anambra State to the west, and Abia State to the south. Enugu is the 29th largest in area among the 36 states and 22nd most populous with an estimated population of over 4.4 million as of 2016 (Population, 2021).

### **Source of data collection**

The data for this study were obtained directly from primary sources. A structured questionnaire was designed and administered to respondents within Enugu metropolis, focusing on youths aged 18–49 who participated in the 2023 presidential elections. The questionnaire was divided

into sections that captured demographic information, exposure to social media platforms, the extent of utilization of Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) by political parties, the influence of these platforms on voter mobilisation, and challenges encountered during their use.

### Study population and sample size

The population of this study comprised registered voters within Enugu Metropolis, focusing on youths between the ages of 18 and 49 years, who were eligible to participate in the 2023 Presidential Election. Enugu Metropolis, which serves as the urban hub of Enugu State, consists of Enugu North, Enugu East, and Enugu South Local Government Areas (LGAs). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023) voter statistics, the combined population of registered voters across these three LGAs stood at 570,978. Specifically, Enugu East accounted for 198,017 voters, Enugu North for 198,350 voters, and Enugu South for 174,611 voters. This population figure (570,978) was adopted as the target population for this study because it accurately represents the total number of registered and eligible voters who were exposed to social media political campaigns in Enugu Metropolis. The focus on youths within this voting population is consistent with the study's theoretical foundation, which emphasizes digital engagement and youth participation in political mobilisation.

The sample size for this study was determined using the Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator ([www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html](http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html)). Using the population size ( $N = 570,978$ ), 95% confidence level, and 5% margin of error, the calculator produced a recommended sample size of 384 respondents. The parameters were set as follows:

- Population size (N): 570,978
- Confidence level: 95%
- Margin of error: 5%
- Response distribution: 50% (the most conservative estimate)

The online calculation yielded a sample size of 384, which was considered statistically sufficient to represent the views of the broader population of eligible voters in Enugu Metropolis.

This online computation also aligns with the value derived using Cochran's (1963) formula for large populations:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

$n$  =sample size,

$Z = 1.96$ (for 95% confidence),

$p = 0.5$ (estimated population proportion),

$e = 0.05$ (margin of error).

This validation confirms that a sample size of 384 is both statistically adequate and methodologically sound for this study.

## Sampling techniques

A three-stage multistage sampling technique was adopted to ensure a fair and representative selection of participants within Enugu metropolis. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used to group Enugu metropolis into three clusters corresponding to the three Local Government Areas (LGAs): Enugu North, Enugu East, and Enugu South. In the second stage, proportionate sampling was applied to determine the number of research instruments (questionnaires) to be allocated to each LGA based on the population of registered voters. The proportionate sampling for the sample size of 384 of voter populations of the three LGAs in Enugu State, was performed using the formula:

$$\text{Sample for LGA} = \frac{\text{Population of LGA registered voters}}{\text{Total population of registered voters}} \times \text{sample size}$$

Total number of registered voters in Enugu metropolis is 570,978 with Enugu East 198,017, Enugu North 198,350, and Enugu South 174,611, respectively (NCSSR, 2019). Hence, after application of the formula, the sample size for each cluster was 133 for Enugu East, 133 for Enugu North, and 118 for Enugu South (out of a total sample size of 384). In the third stage, purposive sampling was employed to identify and select respondents within each LGA, with eligibility determined by their participation as voters in the most recent election.

## Data collection

The questionnaire method was employed as the main instrument for data collection. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data relevant to the research objectives. The instrument was divided into five sections, covering demographic characteristics, exposure to Facebook and X, utilization of these platforms by political parties, influence on political participation, and challenges encountered in using social media for mobilisation. A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed across the three Local Government Areas in Enugu Metropolis. Trained research assistants were engaged to administer the instrument physically to ensure accurate responses and full coverage. The assistants were briefed on ethical conduct, clarity of questions, and neutrality in guiding respondents. At the end of the exercise, all 384 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, representing a 100% response rate. This complete retrieval was made possible due to the direct and supervised administration of questionnaires, follow-up visits, and cooperation from the respondents. The high retrieval rate significantly enhanced the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

## Data analysis

The data collected through structured questionnaires were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to ensure a systematic evaluation of responses. Descriptive statistics were conducted to summarise demographic data using tables and charts. Finally, SPSS-generated tables and graphs were interpreted to align with the study's objectives, with key findings presented in narrative and tabular formats.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic characteristics

Table 1 implies that 384 respondents were surveyed. The gender distribution indicates a slight male predominance, with 211 males (54.9%) and 173 females (45.1%). The age distribution shows a relatively even spread across the age brackets, with the highest representation in the 18–29 years age group (28.4%), closely followed by those aged 30–39 years (28.1%) and 40–49 years (25.0%), while respondents aged 50 years and above constituted the smallest group (18.5%). Geographically, respondents were drawn from three LGA in Enugu metropolis, with a slightly higher proportion from Enugu East and Enugu North (35.0%) compared Enugu South (30.0%).

**Table 1: social and demographic characteristics of respondents**

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	211	54.9
	Female	173	45.1
	Total	384	100.0
<b>Age (Years)</b>	18 – 29	109	28.4
	30 – 39	108	28.1
	40 – 49	96	25.0
	50 and above	71	18.5
	Total	384	100.0
<b>Urban areas</b>	Enugu North	133	35.0
	Enugu East	133	35.0
	Enugu South	118	30.0
	<b>Total</b>	384	100.0

*Source:* Field Survey (2025)

### Extent of exposure of electorates in Enugu metropolis to political messages on Facebook and X during the 2023 presidential election

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents actively engaged with social media during the 2023 presidential election. Most agreed that they frequently used Facebook (mean = 4.18) and X (mean = 4.08), and that political advertisements and sponsored posts were common on both platforms (Facebook mean = 4.18; X mean = 4.15). Additionally, respondents reported spending considerable time reading or interacting with political content on Facebook and X (mean = 4.11).

**Table 2: Level of Exposure to Facebook and X during the 2023 Presidential Election**

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	Total Score	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remark
I frequently used Facebook during the	176 (880)	142 (568)	35 (105)	21 (42)	10 (10)	<b>1605</b>	<b>4.18</b>	Agree

2023 presidential election period.								
I frequently used X (formerly Twitter) during the 2023 presidential election period.	163 (815)	137 (548)	46 (138)	26 (52)	12 (12)	<b>1565</b>	<b>4.08</b>	Agree
Political advertisements and sponsored posts frequently appeared on my Facebook feed.	189 (945)	127 (508)	30 (90)	25 (50)	13 (13)	<b>1606</b>	<b>4.18</b>	Agree
Political advertisements and sponsored posts frequently appeared on my X feed.	174 (870)	136 (544)	39 (117)	26 (52)	9 (9)	<b>1592</b>	<b>4.15</b>	Agree
I spent a significant amount of time reading or engaging with political content on Facebook and X during the election period.	168 (840)	140 (560)	38 (114)	26 (52)	12 (12)	<b>1578</b>	<b>4.11</b>	Agree

Grand Mean = 4.14 → High Exposure

Source: Field Survey (2025). Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, N= Neutral, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly disagree

### **Influence of political communication on Facebook and X on political awareness of electorates in Enugu metropolis during the 2023 presidential election**

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the influence of political messages on Facebook and X on their political knowledge, awareness, and engagement. Overall, the findings indicate a consistently positive influence of social media political content on respondents' political learning and participation, as all items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 3.00.

Specifically, a majority of respondents agreed that political messages on Facebook and X increased their knowledge about presidential candidates ( $\bar{x} = 4.20$ ). Similarly, respondents affirmed that posts and debates on these platforms improved their understanding of national political issues ( $\bar{x} = 4.16$ ). Furthermore, information obtained from Facebook and X was reported to have increased respondents' interest in political participation ( $\bar{x} = 4.10$ ) and enhanced their awareness of the importance of voting ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ). In addition, respondents agreed that information shared on Facebook and X helped them make informed political

decisions ( $\bar{x} = 4.14$ ). Political messages were also found to motivate engagement in political discussions with others ( $\bar{x} = 4.08$ ).

Table 3: Influence of political communication on Facebook and X on political awareness of electorates in Enugu metropolis during the 2023 presidential election

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	Total Score	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remark
Political messages on Facebook and X increased my knowledge about the presidential candidates.	178 (890)	144 (576)	32 (96)	20 (40)	10 (10)	1612	4.20	Agree
Posts and debates on Facebook and X improved my understanding of national political issues.	169 (845)	149 (596)	36 (108)	20 (40)	10 (10)	1599	4.16	Agree
Information from Facebook and X made me more interested in political participation.	158 (790)	152 (608)	39 (117)	23 (46)	12 (12)	1573	4.10	Agree
I became more aware of the importance of voting through messages on Facebook and X.	165 (825)	154 (616)	33 (99)	20 (40)	12 (12)	1592	4.15	Agree
Information shared on Facebook and X helped me make informed political decisions.	171 (855)	140 (560)	41 (123)	20 (40)	12 (12)	1590	4.14	Agree
Political messages on Facebook and X motivated me to engage in political discussions with others.	160 (800)	142 (568)	46 (138)	24 (48)	12 (12)	1566	4.08	Agree

Grand Mean = 4.14 → High Influence

Source: Field Survey (2025). Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, N= Neutral, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly disagree

### Facebook and X influence

The results indicate that respondents generally agree that social media increases political awareness (mean = 3.59) and influences candidate choice (mean = 3.51). However, participation in political discussions (mean = 3.32) and encouragement to vote (mean = 3.17) show more neutral responses, suggesting that while social media informs users, it may not strongly motivate active engagement in political discourse or voter turnout (Table 4)

**Table 4: Level of influence of social media during the 2023 presidential election**

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	Total Score	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remark
Social media increased my political awareness.	134 (670)	92 (368)	63 (189)	57 (114)	38 (38)	<b>1379</b>	<b>3.59</b>	Agree
Facebook/X influenced my choice of candidates.	120 (600)	100 (400)	62 (186)	59 (118)	43 (43)	<b>1347</b>	<b>3.51</b>	Agree
I participated in political discussions through Facebook/X.	102 (510)	86 (344)	79 (237)	68 (136)	49 (49)	<b>1276</b>	<b>3.32</b>	Neutral
Social media encouraged me to vote.	92 (460)	66 (264)	98 (294)	70 (140)	58 (58)	<b>1216</b>	<b>3.17</b>	Neutral

Grand Mean = 3.40 → Moderate Influence

Source: Field Survey (2025). Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, N= Neutral, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly disagree.

### Challenges faced in using Facebook/X during the 2023 presidential election

The findings reveal that respondents agree misinformation and fake news were prevalent during the 2023 elections (mean = 3.45), highlighting concerns about the reliability of online political information. However, other factors such as internet connectivity issues (mean = 3.29), cyberbullying or online harassment (mean = 3.16), network failures affecting Facebook and Twitter use (mean = 3.17), false information in southeast Nigeria (mean = 3.24), and the promotion of hate speech on social media (mean = 3.24) received neutral responses.

**Table 5: Challenges Faced in Using Facebook/X during the 2023 Presidential Election**

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	Total Score	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remark
Internet connectivity issues affected my access to information.	94 (470)	98 (392)	70 (210)	68 (136)	54 (54)	<b>1262</b>	<b>3.29</b>	Neutral
Misinformation and fake news were prevalent.	102 (510)	98 (392)	91 (273)	58 (116)	35 (35)	<b>1326</b>	<b>3.45</b>	Agree
Cyberbullying or online harassment discouraged my participation.	81 (405)	93 (372)	73 (219)	82 (164)	55 (55)	<b>1215</b>	<b>3.16</b>	Neutral
Network failure affected the use of Facebook and Twitter in the 2023 presidential election.	70 (350)	85 (340)	94 (282)	67 (134)	68 (68)	<b>1174</b>	<b>3.17</b>	Neutral
False information was given during the 2023 election in southeast Nigeria.	89 (445)	87 (348)	70 (210)	76 (152)	62 (62)	<b>1217</b>	<b>3.24</b>	Neutral
Facebook/X was used to promote hate speech during the 2023 general election.	91 (455)	83 (332)	72 (216)	78 (156)	60 (60)	<b>1219</b>	<b>3.24</b>	Neutral

Grand Mean = 3.26 → Moderate Challenge

Source: Field Survey (2025). Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, N= Neutral, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly disagree.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that social media platforms, particularly Facebook and X, played a significant role in shaping the political consciousness of electorates in Enugu Metropolis during the 2023 presidential election. The results showed that the majority of respondents were highly exposed to political messages on these platforms, confirming the increasing penetration of digital communication among Nigerian youths. This aligns with the assertions of Njoku and Wilcox (2025), who noted that social media has become a primary channel for political awareness and agenda setting among urban voters.

The socio-demographic features of respondents reveal a more youthful, educated, and digitally savvy population, which is consistent with the broader trend of greater social media use among younger and more educated Nigerians (Pew Research Center, 2021). Notably, the dominance of university education (90.1%) and the concentration of respondents within the 18–49 age bracket indicate a cohort particularly inclined to digital media consumption and online political activity (Abdu et al., 2018). This demographic profile probably explains the large levels of X and Facebook account ownership, frequent involvement, and long-term use as described in the research.

The pattern of responses suggests a strong digital media penetration in the political sphere of Enugu Metropolis. The high level of exposure across all items indicates that the electorate relied heavily on social media platforms for election-related updates, candidate information, and political discourse. This is consistent with global trends showing that social media plays a transformative role in increasing political visibility and interaction among voters, particularly the youth demographic. Overall, the result underscores that Facebook and X were effective vehicles of political communication and mobilisation during the 2023 presidential election.

Respondents' high engagement with political content further shows that the visibility and volume of political messages were substantial enough to shape perceptions. The findings align with *Technological Determinism Theory* (McLuhan, 1964), which posits that media technologies shape how audiences interact with information. In this context, Facebook and X have become indispensable in defining how electorates consume political content. Furthermore, the results support Njoku and Wilcox (2025), who found that youths in Enugu metropolis experienced constant exposure to political communication through social media, making them more politically conscious than users of traditional media. In essence, the evidence confirms that Facebook and X served as primary information gateways and dominant mobilisation tools for electorates during the 2023 presidential election.

The influence of political communication on Facebook and X on the political awareness of electorates in Enugu Metropolis was examined. All items recorded mean scores between 4.08 and 4.20, indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents. The highest mean value (4.20) corresponds to the item *“Political messages on Facebook and X increased my knowledge about the presidential candidates.”* This implies that exposure to political communication on these platforms played a vital role in enhancing respondents' knowledge of candidates' profiles, manifestos, and political ideologies.

The results further show that *“Posts and debates on Facebook and X improved my understanding of national political issues”* (mean = 4.16) and *“I became more aware of the importance of voting through messages on Facebook and X”* (mean = 4.15) also received high levels of agreement. These responses suggest that beyond exposure, interaction with political discussions and debates on social media helped deepen civic awareness and understanding of key political processes. Social media, therefore, functioned as an informal civic education platform during the 2023 election.

Similarly, items such as *“Information shared on Facebook and X helped me make informed political decisions”* and *“Political messages on Facebook and X motivated me to engage in political discussions with others”* with means of 4.14 and 4.08, respectively, highlight the platforms' role in influencing voters' critical engagement. The findings demonstrate that

respondents did not merely consume information passively but also interacted with and shared political content, suggesting a participatory communication environment. Overall, the table confirms that Facebook and X had a significant positive impact on political awareness, knowledge acquisition, and engagement among voters in Enugu Metropolis.

This confirms *Public Sphere Theory* (Habermas, 1989), which explains that open digital spaces promote deliberation, knowledge sharing, and participatory discourse. In this context, Facebook and X have become Nigeria's virtual public forums, enabling citizens to learn, discuss, and question political narratives.

Moreover, the results align with Okoli et al., (2023), who discovered that online debates and citizen journalism increased voters' political understanding during elections. Similarly, Ugochukwu & Obiukwu (2024) observed that political content shared through social media directly influenced the political awareness of young voters in southeastern Nigeria.

From a broader view, these findings underscore the transformative impact of digital media on civic education. While traditional mass media once dominated voter enlightenment, platforms like Facebook and X now perform this role interactively, giving users access to immediate feedback, debates, and fact-checking. Therefore, it can be concluded that political communication through Facebook and X served as a strong catalyst for political enlightenment and participation awareness among electorates in Enugu metropolis during the 2023 presidential election.

The extent of which social media influenced respondents' political participation during the 2023 presidential election was analyzed. The mean scores, ranging from 2.98 to 3.43, reveal a moderate level of influence, generally interpreted as *Neutral*. The highest mean (3.43) for "*Social media increased my political awareness*" indicates that while respondents acknowledged an informative function of social media, its direct influence on behavioural outcomes such as candidate selection and voting was limited.

Other items, such as "*Facebook/X influenced my choice of candidates*" (mean = 3.31) and "*I participated in political discussions through Facebook/X*" (mean = 3.14), received moderate agreement, suggesting that although social media contributed to political dialogue, it did not necessarily translate into heightened political participation or candidate support. This finding aligns with the assumption that awareness does not always guarantee active involvement, as many social media users remain passive consumers of political information.

The lowest mean (2.98) recorded for "*Social media encouraged me to vote*" further reinforces the notion that online exposure may not directly motivate offline participation. Structural and contextual factors such as political apathy, distrust in electoral systems, and socio-economic limitations could have moderated the extent to which online engagement resulted in physical voter turnout. Thus, while social media significantly informed and sensitized users, its influence on actual political behaviour was only moderate.

These findings corroborate the Digital Democracy Framework (Chadwick, 2013), which emphasizes the ability of digital platforms to foster civic learning and stimulate political participation. Participation in political discussions also highlights the dialogic potential of social media, enabling two-way communication that traditional media often lacks. However, the comparatively lower influence on voter turnout (41.6%) suggests that while social media

can inform and persuade, structural and motivational factors such as trust in electoral integrity and perceived efficacy may still limit its ability to convert engagement into action (Norris, 2014).

In summary, the findings affirm that social media platforms such as Facebook and X were influential tools for increasing political awareness, shaping candidate preferences, and facilitating political discourse during the 2023 presidential elections in Enugu.

Lastly, the opinions on challenges encountered while using Facebook and X during the 2023 presidential election was evaluated. The mean values range between 2.96 and 3.23, indicating that respondents were generally neutral but tended toward agreement that several issues hindered effective use of social media for political communication. The highest mean (3.23) for *“Misinformation and fake news were prevalent”* reveals that false and misleading information was the most significant challenge faced by users. This reflects the persistent issue of information disorder that has characterized online political discourse globally.

Additionally, *“Internet connectivity issues affected my access to information”* (mean = 3.15) and *“Network failure affected my use of Facebook and Twitter”* (mean = 2.96) point to infrastructural challenges that limited consistent access to political content. Respondents also agreed that *“Cyberbullying or online harassment discouraged my participation”* (mean = 3.03) and *“Facebook/X was used to promote hate speech during the 2023 general election”* (mean = 3.17), indicating that toxic communication climates undermined constructive dialogue and civic participation.

The findings suggest that both technical and ethical barriers constrained the effective use of social media during the election. Problems of poor internet access, misinformation, and the spread of hate speech collectively weakened the platforms’ potential as tools of political mobilisation. Consequently, while social media enhanced information flow and awareness, its overall efficiency was undermined by reliability, regulation, and credibility challenges.

These findings underscores the need for digital literacy programs, stronger regulatory oversight, and infrastructural investment to mitigate these challenges. Addressing these constraints would ensure that social media serves as a more reliable and democratic space for political communication in future elections.

Still, some structural and informational issues significantly compromised the power of social media. Almost half of those polled said network failure and internet access were the main barriers, highlighting the continuing digital gap in Nigeria's infrastructure (World Bank, 2022). Moreover, over 45% of those polled confirmed the notable prevalence of hate speech, false information, and cyberbullying, which underlines concerns about the weaponization of digital platforms in political settings all around (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Testimonies from respondents about verbal abuse, altered images, and false information reveal the ugly side of social media, which might aggravate political polarization and threaten democratic debate if allowed uncontrolled.

These problems draw attention to the need of more strong digital literacy initiatives, more rigorous platform control, and inclusive regulatory systems in order to lower the dangers linked with online political involvement. Overcoming the dual challenges of information and

infrastructural limitations, as suggested by scholars including Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2020), would help Nigeria to fully use the democratic potential of social media.

In summary, the findings suggest that while Facebook and X served as a platform for political communication during the 2023 presidential election, its effectiveness was undermined by considerable challenges including connectivity issues, misinformation, hate speech, and cyberbullying.

## Conclusion

In general, the findings reaffirm that social media platforms are catalysts of political consciousness rather than determinants of electoral behaviour. Their role lies in shaping attitudes, stimulating debate, and connecting citizens to political processes. To fully harness their democratic potential, there must be deliberate investment in digital infrastructure, civic education, and fact-checking mechanisms that promote responsible online engagement. Political actors, civil society, and policymakers must therefore integrate social media campaigns with ground-level mobilisation strategies to strengthen participatory democracy and build lasting trust between citizens and political institutions in Nigeria.

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