

INFLUENCE OF X ON YOUTH POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN NIGERIA DURING 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The emergence of X (formerly Twitter) has significantly transformed political communication and youth political mobilization across democratic societies, particularly in developing democracies such as Nigeria. During Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the platform became a major arena through which young people accessed political information, participated in public debates, coordinated campaign activities, mobilized voters, and interacted with political actors in real time. This paper examines the influence of X on youth political mobilization during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Anchored on the public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and networked publics theory, the study explains how digital conversations, campaign communication, civic education, online activism, and networked interactions shaped political participation among Nigerian youths before, during, and after the elections. The study relies on existing scholarly literature and documented online political activities associated with the 2023 elections, including the digital campaigns of the Obidient Movement, the All Progressives Congress (APC), and other political actors. Findings indicate that X significantly enhanced political awareness, voter education, campaign mobilization, political participation, and public engagement by providing young Nigerians with an accessible platform for political expression and collective action. At the same time, the platform facilitated the rapid circulation of misinformation, political polarization, hate speech, coordinated propaganda, and competing narratives that occasionally undermined informed democratic deliberation. The paper concludes that although X has strengthened youth political mobilization and expanded democratic participation, its long-term democratic contribution depends on improved digital literacy, responsible political communication, stronger institutional engagement, and effective electoral information management by relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: X (Twitter), Youth Political Mobilization, Political Participation, Nigeria, 2023 General Elections, Social Media

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed political participation across the world. Social media platforms have altered political

communication from a one-way process dominated by traditional media institutions into an interactive environment where citizens actively create, distribute, evaluate, and debate political information. Among these platforms, X (formerly Twitter) has emerged as one of the most

influential digital spaces for political communication because of its speed, openness, interactive structure, and ability to connect millions of users in real time. Unlike conventional media, X enables citizens to communicate directly with political leaders, journalists, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, and fellow citizens without relying on institutional gatekeepers. Consequently, the platform has become an important instrument for political campaigns, civic education, citizen journalism, public accountability, and democratic participation, particularly among young people who constitute the largest proportion of active social media users in Nigeria (Castells, 2018). The increasing political relevance of X demonstrates that it has evolved beyond a communication platform into a digital public arena where political interests are negotiated, public opinion is shaped, and citizens increasingly influence governance processes. This establishes the global and conceptual context of the study while introducing the central role of X in contemporary democratic participation. It provides a strong foundation for discussing youth political mobilization in Nigeria.

The presidential election involving Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Peter Obi, Atiku Abubakar, and Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso generated unprecedented online political engagement across Nigeria. The Labour Party's Obidient Movement relied extensively on X to mobilize volunteers, coordinate campaign activities, disseminate campaign messages, encourage voter registration, and sustain nationwide political conversations. Likewise, supporters of other political parties actively employed the platform to promote candidates, challenge opposing narratives, respond to campaign issues, and influence public opinion. Hashtags,

Twitter Spaces, live updates, multimedia content, and influencer-driven discussions transformed X into an active arena for political mobilisation where supporters continuously negotiated competing political ideas. Beyond organised political campaigns, many young Nigerians independently used the platform to express opinions, monitor election-day developments, report electoral incidents, and participate in discussions surrounding election credibility and democratic accountability. These developments illustrate that youth political mobilization during the 2023 elections increasingly extended beyond physical campaign rallies into digitally networked political participation. The empirical focus of the study by linking youth political mobilisation directly to the activities observed during the 2023 general elections.

Against this background, this paper examines the influence of X on youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Specifically, it investigates how the platform contributed to political awareness, civic education, campaign mobilisation, voter participation, public debate, and electoral communication while simultaneously examining the challenges posed by misinformation, political polarisation, digital manipulation, and coordinated online propaganda. Guided by the public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and networked publics theory, the study seeks to explain how digital interactions on X influenced political behaviour and youth participation during the electoral process. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on digital democracy, political communication, and youth participation while providing useful recommendations for policymakers, electoral management bodies, political

parties, civil society organisations, and digital media users seeking to strengthen democratic participation through responsible and inclusive digital engagement in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The literature review provides the intellectual foundation for understanding the influence of X (formerly Twitter) on youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It examines scholarly perspectives on social media, political communication, digital participation, voter mobilization, and youth civic engagement, with particular emphasis on how digital technologies have transformed democratic participation and electoral politics. Existing studies increasingly recognize that social media has altered the relationship between citizens and political institutions by providing alternative channels for political communication, civic interaction, and collective action. The review also provides the conceptual basis for explaining how digital platforms shape political behaviour through communication, agenda formation, and networked interactions among young citizens.

Social Media and Youth Political Mobilization

Youth political mobilization refers to the various processes, through which young people are encouraged to participate actively in democratic governance, including voter registration, campaign activities, political advocacy, civic education, election monitoring, public debates, policy discussions, community engagement, and peaceful political protests. Traditionally, these activities occurred mainly through political rallies, party meetings, community associations, religious organizations, and student

movements. However, the rapid development of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed these conventional patterns by creating virtual spaces where political engagement occurs continuously without geographical limitations. Among these digital platforms, X has become particularly significant because it facilitates immediate communication, interactive political discussions, hashtag campaigns, digital activism, and direct engagement between political leaders and ordinary citizens. According to Castells (2018), digital communication networks have fundamentally transformed political participation by making civic engagement more accessible, continuous, and interactive. This observation demonstrates that young people increasingly participate in democratic processes not only as consumers of political information but also as active producers, distributors, and interpreters of political content capable of influencing public discourse and political decision-making.

X as a Platform for Political Communication

X (formerly Twitter) has become one of the most influential platforms for political communication in contemporary democracies because it enables the rapid dissemination of political information while promoting direct interaction between political actors and citizens. Unlike traditional media, where political communication largely flows from political elites to the public through newspapers, radio, and television, X provides an interactive environment in which users actively create content, comment on political developments, share opinions, and participate in real-time discussions through hashtags, reposts, mentions, live streams, and Twitter Spaces.

This interactive structure has transformed political communication into a participatory process that allows citizens, particularly young people, to influence public discourse rather than merely receiving political messages. From the perspective of the Public Sphere Theory, X has expanded democratic space by providing citizens with a digital environment where public issues are debated beyond the control of traditional institutional gatekeepers. The platform therefore strengthens political visibility, encourages public engagement, and creates opportunities for continuous interaction between elected officials, political parties, journalists, civil society organisations, and ordinary citizens. X has transformed political communication from a one-way information system into an interactive democratic space, consistent with the assumptions of the Public Sphere Theory.

X and Political Mobilization

Political mobilization refers to the process through which individuals and groups are encouraged to participate actively in political activities such as voter registration, campaign participation, political advocacy, election monitoring, peaceful protests, and electoral decision-making. Traditionally, political mobilization in Nigeria depended heavily on political rallies, party structures, community meetings, radio broadcasts, interpersonal communication, and grassroots campaigns. However, the emergence of digital platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), has significantly transformed this process by creating an interactive environment where political messages spread rapidly across geographical boundaries and citizens participate in collective action through digital networks. Through hashtags, reposts, mentions, live discussions,

multimedia content, and online campaigns, X has become an important instrument for mobilizing young voters before, during, and after elections. According to Castells (2018), digital communication networks empower citizens by facilitating horizontal communication that supports collective political action without relying entirely on traditional political institutions. This demonstrates that political mobilization increasingly occurs through decentralized digital networks that complement conventional forms of political participation.

X and Political Mobilization during the 2023 General Elections

Nigeria's 2023 general elections demonstrated the growing importance of X as a platform for political mobilization among young people. The Labour Party's Obidient Movement emerged largely as a digitally coordinated political community whose activities extended beyond online discussions into grassroots voter mobilization across many states of the federation. According to Aboh and Okoi (2023), the movement illustrated how decentralized digital activism could successfully mobilize citizens without depending exclusively on established political party structures. Through hashtags such as #Obidient, #PeterObi2023, and #NigeriaDecides2023, supporters coordinated campaign activities, encouraged voter registration, promoted civic education, raised campaign funds, and sustained political conversations before and during the elections. These activities demonstrate that political mobilization on X was not limited to expressing political opinions but extended to encouraging tangible political participation. From the perspective of the Networked Publics Theory, digitally connected communities created new forms

of political organization that enabled young Nigerians to participate collectively in electoral activities regardless of geographical location. The platform therefore strengthened horizontal communication, expanded volunteer networks, and increased the visibility of youth-led political participation throughout the election period.

Challenges of X (Twitter) in Youth Political Mobilization

Although X has significantly expanded opportunities for youth political mobilization in Nigeria, its increasing influence has also generated several challenges that threaten the quality of democratic participation. The platform's openness, speed, and unrestricted flow of information make it an effective medium for political communication, but these same characteristics also facilitate the rapid circulation of misinformation, fake news, manipulated images, hate speech, coordinated propaganda, and politically motivated disinformation. During the 2023 general elections, political actors and supporters frequently circulated conflicting electoral information, some of which lacked verification and contributed to public uncertainty regarding electoral processes and outcomes. Obono and Diyo (2021) found that misinformation disseminated through social media significantly influenced political attitudes and voting decisions by exposing citizens to false campaign narratives and manipulated political content. This finding suggests that while X enhances political mobilization by making information readily available, the credibility of such information largely determines whether digital participation strengthens or weakens democratic governance. Consequently, promoting media literacy and fact-checking mechanisms remains

essential for ensuring that political mobilization on X contributes positively to democratic development. This has demonstrated that the democratic benefits of X are closely linked to the credibility of information shared on the platform, making digital literacy an essential component of meaningful youth political mobilization.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theories. They are public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and networked publics theory. Collectively, these theories are employed to provide a comprehensive framework for explaining how X (formerly Twitter) influenced youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. While the public sphere theory explains how X created an open digital environment for political dialogue and civic participation, the agenda-setting theory demonstrates how issues discussed on the platform shaped political priorities among young Nigerians. The networked publics theory further explains how digitally connected communities organized political activities, exchanged information, and mobilized collective action throughout the electoral process. Individually, each theory explains a distinct dimension of digital political participation; however, none sufficiently captures the complexity of contemporary online political mobilization. Their combined application therefore provides a broader understanding of how X simultaneously informed, connected, mobilized, and empowered Nigerian youths before, during, and after the 2023 general elections. The integration of these theories also reflects the findings of the reviewed literature, which shows that youth political mobilization on X resulted from the interaction between digital

communication, political messaging, and networked civic participation rather than from any single factor. The combination of the three theories provides a multidimensional framework for explaining digital political mobilization by linking political communication, issue formation, and collective online participation within Nigeria's 2023 electoral context.

Public Sphere Theory

The public sphere theory was developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989), explains that democratic governance depends on the existence of open spaces where citizens freely discuss issues affecting society and collectively influence public opinion. According to Habermas, democratic legitimacy is strengthened when citizens are able to exchange ideas, question public policies, and scrutinize government actions without undue interference from political or economic elites. Although the original conception of the public sphere focused on newspapers, coffee houses, public meetings, and other physical spaces for discussion, contemporary scholars increasingly argue that digital communication technologies have expanded these spaces into the online environment. Among these technologies, X (formerly Twitter) has emerged as an important digital public sphere because it enables direct interaction among citizens, political leaders, journalists, electoral institutions, and civil society organizations without depending entirely on traditional media gatekeepers. The platform therefore facilitates continuous political discussion, immediate public feedback, and wider citizen participation in democratic processes. The Public Sphere Theory effectively explains how X expanded democratic participation by creating an accessible digital space for political

discussion while also highlighting the limitations of online deliberation identified in the reviewed literature.

Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory which was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), argues that the media influence public opinion not by telling citizens what to think but by determining the issues they consider most important. Traditional agenda setting was largely controlled by newspapers, radio, and television organizations that selected which political events received extensive coverage. However, the emergence of digital communication technologies has fundamentally altered this process. On platforms such as X, agenda setting increasingly results from interactions among political parties, journalists, influencers, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens who collectively determine which issues dominate public discussion through hashtags, reposts, trending topics, and continuous online engagement. Consequently, political communication has become more decentralized, allowing citizens themselves to participate actively in shaping national political priorities. Agenda-Setting Theory demonstrates that X has influenced youth political mobilization not only by disseminating political information but also by shaping the issues that dominated public attention throughout the 2023 elections.

Networked Publics Theory

The networked publics theory, developed by Danah Boyd (2010), explains how digital technologies transform public participation by enabling individuals and groups to connect, organize, communicate, and mobilize through online networks. The theory identifies important characteristics

of digital communication, including persistence, visibility, scalability, and searchability, which enables information to remain accessible, spread rapidly, reaches large audiences, and connects individuals across geographical boundaries. Unlike traditional political organizations that depend heavily on centralized leadership and physical meetings, networked publics allow citizens to coordinate political activities through decentralized digital interactions. This makes social media platforms such as X particularly effective for political mobilization because they facilitate continuous communication, collaborative participation, and rapid dissemination of political information among connected users. Networked Publics Theory provides a strong explanation for the emergence of digitally coordinated youth political mobilization during the 2023 elections while acknowledging that the same networks can also amplify democratic challenges identified in the reviewed literature.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on secondary data to examine the influence of X (formerly Twitter) on youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Data were obtained from relevant scholarly journal articles, books, conference papers, institutional publications, election-related reports, and documented accounts of political activities on X. The sources were selected based on their relevance to social media, youth political participation, electoral communication, political mobilisation, and the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

The data were analysed thematically by identifying recurring issues and patterns relating to political awareness, campaign mobilisation, voter education, electoral

participation, political communication, public debate, democratic accountability, misinformation, political polarisation, and digital propaganda. Evidence from different sources was compared to identify common patterns and differing perspectives concerning the role of X in youth political mobilisation.

The analysis was guided by the Public Sphere Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Networked Publics Theory. These theories were used to explain how X provided opportunities for political discussion, influenced issues receiving public attention, and enabled young people and political supporters to connect and coordinate political activities through digital networks. Since the study relied entirely on secondary sources, no questionnaire, interview, sample size, or statistical test was used. The findings therefore represent a thematic interpretation and synthesis of existing evidence on the role of X in youth political mobilisation during the 2023 general elections.

Data Analysis

The influence of X (formerly Twitter) on youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections can be understood from the perspectives of political awareness, political mobilization, voter education, electoral participation, democratic accountability, and public discourse. Unlike previous elections where traditional media largely determined the flow of political information, the 2023 elections witnessed an unprecedented level of digital participation, with X emerging as one of the principal platforms through which political parties, candidates, journalists, election observers, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens interacted throughout the electoral process. The reviewed literature shows that the

platform enabled young Nigerians to access political information more quickly, participate in policy discussions, monitor electoral developments, and engage directly with political actors (Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024). For many young people across Nigeria, particularly those residing in urban centres, X became a readily accessible platform for following campaigns, expressing political opinions, and participating in national conversations before, during, and after the elections. This finding supports Castells' (2018) argument that digital communication networks have transformed democratic participation by empowering citizens to become active contributors rather than passive recipients of political information. It also reflects the assumptions of the public sphere theory, which explains that democratic participation expands when citizens have open spaces to exchange ideas and debate issues of public concern. The analysis therefore suggests that X significantly lowered barriers to youth political mobilization by making political engagement more immediate, interactive, and accessible than in previous electoral cycles. X has strengthened youth political mobilization by expanding access to political information and creating an inclusive digital environment that encouraged continuous democratic participation throughout the electoral process.

One of the most significant political developments during the 2023 general elections was the emergence of the Labour Party's Obidient Movement, which relied extensively on X for political mobilization and grassroots coordination. Unlike conventional campaign structures that depended primarily on party offices, physical rallies, and established political networks, the movement successfully organized volunteers, coordinated

fundraising activities, promoted voter education, encouraged voter registration, and sustained campaign visibility through digitally connected communities. Hashtags such as #Obidient, #PeterObi2023, #TakeBackNigeria, #NigeriaDecides 2023 amongst others consistently ranked among the most discussed political topics throughout the campaign period, enabling supporters to coordinate activities across different parts of the country. Many young Nigerians voluntarily designed campaign graphics, produced short videos, developed policy explainers, and shared voter education materials that circulated widely on X. Similarly, supporters of Bola Ahmed Tinubu maintained a strong digital presence by promoting campaign messages centred on continuity, infrastructure development, economic reforms, experience, and the Renewed Hope Agenda through hashtags such as #BAT2023, #RenewedHope, #TinubuShetti ma2023, and #CityBoyMovement. These observations correspond with Aboh and Okoi (2023), who argue that digital communities increasingly function as important instruments for political mobilization beyond conventional party structures. The findings also support the networked publics theory, which explains how digitally connected communities organize collective political action through decentralized communication networks. Rather than replacing traditional political campaigns, X complemented offline mobilization by extending campaign visibility and encouraging greater youth participation across Nigeria. X transformed political mobilization by enabling both major political actors and ordinary citizens to coordinate campaign activities through decentralized digital networks, consistent with the assumptions of the networked publics theory.

The analysis further reveals that X significantly influenced political communication by shaping the issues that dominated public discussion during the election period. Throughout the campaigns, conversations surrounding electoral transparency, fuel subsidy, unemployment, insecurity, corruption, youth inclusion, and the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) consistently attracted widespread public attention on the platform. The sustained visibility of these issues reflects the central proposition of the Agenda-Setting Theory, which argues that media platforms influence political priorities by determining the issues that receive continuous public attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The reviewed literature equally supports this observation, as Adeyinka and Ijaiya (2024) note that X played an important role in directing political discussions and encouraging civic engagement among Nigerian youths during the 2023 elections. Rather than merely transmitting campaign information, the platform enabled users to influence national political conversations through hashtags, reposts, live discussions, and multimedia content. Consequently, young Nigerians did not simply consume political messages but actively contributed to defining the issues that shaped electoral discourse. This demonstrates that political mobilization on X extended beyond campaign support to include civic education, issue-based advocacy, and democratic participation.

Overall, the analysis indicates that X functioned simultaneously as a democratic opportunity and a democratic challenge during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. On one hand, the platform enhanced political awareness, campaign mobilization, voter education, civic participation, and democratic

accountability by providing young Nigerians with an accessible space for political engagement. On the other hand, it intensified misinformation, political polarization, ideological conflict, and unequal digital participation, thereby limiting the quality of democratic deliberation in some instances. These findings collectively reflect the reviewed literature and validate the complementary application of the public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and networked publics theory. The public sphere theory explains how X expanded opportunities for political discussion and citizen participation; the agenda-setting theory demonstrates how online discussions influenced political priorities during the elections; while the networked publics theory explains how digitally connected communities coordinated collective political action throughout the campaign period. Although X expanded opportunities for political mobilization, its influence remained more pronounced among urban youths than among many young people in rural communities where internet access and digital infrastructure remain limited (Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024). Consequently, digital political participation should complement rather than replace conventional forms of civic engagement. Bridging Nigeria's digital divide, strengthening digital literacy, and improving institutional communication will remain essential if X is to continue serving as an effective instrument for inclusive youth political mobilization and democratic consolidation. The analysis demonstrates that the influence of X on youth political mobilization is multidimensional, combining significant democratic opportunities with important communication challenges that require institutional, technological, and civic responses.

This paper examined the influence of X (formerly Twitter) on youth political mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study established that X fundamentally transformed political mobilization by providing young Nigerians with an interactive platform for political communication, voter education, campaign coordination, civic engagement, issue advocacy, election monitoring, and democratic participation. Unlike traditional media, which largely functions through one-way communication, X enabled young citizens to participate directly in political conversations through tweets, reposts, hashtags, comment threads, polls, and Twitter Spaces. This interactive environment encouraged youths to become active contributors to democratic discourse rather than passive recipients of political information. The reviewed literature demonstrated that digital platforms increasingly complement conventional forms of political participation by creating opportunities for continuous engagement before, during, and after elections (Aboh & Okoi, 2023; Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024). Similarly, the analysis showed that the platform enabled supporters of different political parties to mobilize volunteers, coordinate campaign activities, disseminate political messages, monitor electoral developments, and engage in issue-based discussions. These findings also validate the Public Sphere Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Networked Publics Theory, all of which explain different dimensions of how X influenced youth political mobilization during the 2023 elections. Overall, the study demonstrates that digital political participation has become an indispensable component of contemporary democratic engagement in Nigeria. The summary also effectively synthesizes the major findings of the study by linking the empirical

evidence with the reviewed literature and theoretical framework while maintaining a clear focus on youth political mobilization.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that X has become one of the most influential digital platforms shaping youth political mobilization in Nigeria's contemporary democratic process. During the 2023 general elections, the platform provided young Nigerians with unprecedented opportunities to access political information, participate in policy debates, coordinate campaign activities, mobilize supporters, engage political leaders, and monitor electoral processes in real time. The analysis revealed that X strengthened political awareness, encouraged civic participation, expanded voter education, and facilitated collective political action through digitally connected communities. At the same time, the study established that the platform also amplified misinformation, political polarization, hate speech, and ideological divisions that occasionally undermined the quality of democratic deliberation. These findings are consistent with the reviewed literature, which recognizes social media as both a democratic opportunity and a potential source of communication challenges. Furthermore, the complementary application of the public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and networked publics theory provides a comprehensive explanation of how X simultaneously created spaces for democratic dialogue, influenced political priorities, and facilitated youth political mobilization through networked communication. The study therefore concludes that X should neither be viewed as a threat to democracy nor regarded as a complete solution to Nigeria's democratic challenges. Rather, it should be understood as a powerful digital

communication platform whose democratic contribution depends on responsible use by citizens, political actors, electoral institutions, and technology companies. Sustaining its positive contribution will require stronger digital literacy, credible political communication, institutional transparency, and inclusive access to digital technologies across Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should strengthen its presence on X by providing timely election updates, voter education materials, electoral guidelines, and rapid responses to misinformation throughout election periods.

Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should adopt ethical standards for digital campaigning by discouraging the use of fake accounts, coordinated misinformation campaigns, hate speech, online harassment, and inflammatory political messaging.

X should strengthen collaboration with Nigerian fact-checking organizations, electoral stakeholders, and civil society organizations to detect, verify, label, and limit the spread of false political information during election periods while safeguarding legitimate freedom of expression.

Government agencies and educational institutions should intensify digital literacy and civic education programmes that equip young Nigerians with the skills required to identify misinformation, verify political information, engage responsibly online, and participate constructively in democratic processes.

Future researchers should extend similar studies to other geopolitical zones of Nigeria using mixed-method, comparative, or longitudinal research.

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