

AUDIENCE MOBILIZATION? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS AND PUBLIC SERVANTS' RESPONSE TO POLITICAL FACEBOOK MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

The 2023 Nigerian general elections, was heavily contested. There was an aggressive use of the social media especially Facebook by contestants and supporters to canvass for votes, influence public opinion, among other reasons. This study compared the Students and Civil Servants' response to political Facebook messages. This was aimed at determining whether and how the two groups are mobilized via political Facebook messages and how they use the platforms to mobilize others. The study employed a mix of Survey and Focus Group Discussion. The public sphere theory as espoused by Jurgen Habermas in 2006 was found suitable as the study framework which argues that the public sphere is a notional 'space' that provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. Survey design was employed and the questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The study Population is comprised of both Civil Servants in Anambra State and Undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. While the population of Anambra State Civil Servants comprises of a total of 197, 853 workforce, Undergraduate Regular students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University is made up of an estimated population of over 35,000 students. Hence the overall population of the Study is 232,853 persons from the two separate groups. The study found that all the respondents utilize Facebook and are exposed to political messages therein. It is established in this study that some respondents from the two groups utilize Facebook for political communication, engage in political campaigns, share their views about political activities and also form coalitions to achieve any given political aspirations or goals. Some (40%) find some of the messages persuasive, though a greater number of them find them irritating (80%). It is remarkable that the students engage more on Facebook, but not mainly for aim of sharing political information, while the civil servants who are not always online are the ones mainly spreading political messages on the platform. The two groups are generally active on Facebook and had recognized the platform as an open and unrestricted arena where users obtain, create and share political information.

Keyword: Facebook, political messages, Civil Servants, students, Mobilization

SETTING THE SCENE

During the 2023 Nigerian general elections, contestants vying for various positions and their supporters massively utilize the social media especially the Facebook to communicate, attack, seek support and attempt influencing public opinion and attitudes in their favour. As the campaign for the election gathered momentum, Facebook posts about contestants seeking the office of the presidency (Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP), Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party PDP) as well numerous other contestants went viral. In fact, the popularity of Facebook as an avenue for political communication during this election period can be said to have brought about renewed optimism about its ability to get users mobilised either for or against any given idea or candidate.

Meanwhile, Facebook has been recognized as one of the major social networking sites designed to connect users and allow them create profiles, affiliations, pictures etc with virtually anything else a user or organization wants to post that tend toward 'evaporating' political content (Eliasoph, 1998). The inclusion of social media in politics has brought major transformations in the political culture and narrative building (Ahmed & Azam, 2021). Accordingly, Interest-driven and information-seeking uses of Social Network Sites

(SNS) have been linked to increased exposure to divergent political views (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2010; Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2012). As reported by Dunu & Uzochukwu (2015), the explosion of social media in recent times, has dramatically transformed the way information is created, disseminated and distributed and in an age when information equates to power, a diversity of opinion can actually lead to more creative problem solving and more equitable outcomes in a society.

Studies had shown that Facebook and other SNS can enable incidental exposure to diverse news and political contents (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Brundidge, 2010) but evidence abounds where political parties and individual politicians utilize Facebook platform for political communication in an interactive, and participatory way whereby some kinds of comments are made about the candidates and their supporters which may have some kinds of effects. These raise a fundamental question about the extent to which Facebook users in Anambra State, use the platform to platforms to mobilize others and or are being mobilized by others to achieve a particular intention. In view of these, the study addressed the following research objectives:

1. To compare the students and civil servants level of exposure to political Facebook messages;
2. To determine how they perceive the political Facebook messages;
3. To establish the extent to which they get mobilized through the political Facebook messages;
4. To discover how they utilize the Facebook for mobilizing others for political purposes

LITERATURE REVIEW

Launched in 2004, Facebook has over the years recorded a monumental increase, with the potential to enable users engage in online discussion about social and political issues (Kushin & Kitchener 2009). Evidence pointing to the potential of social network sites to serve in the arena of political discussion continues to surface, For example, the Nigerian 2023 presidential election was heavily debated on the social media where results of the election from various polling units were reported and shared by people online during the election process. Even, in western countries, elections had often been characterized with use of social media in the whole election processes. Survey conducted during Spring 2008 by the Pew Internet and American Life Project had also found that 10 percent of all Americans who use social network sites use them “for some kind of political activity. (Kushin & Kitchener 2009)” Unique aspects of social network sites such as Facebook may serve to bring disagreeing parties together in online political discussion (Quantcast, 2008 in Kushin & Kitchener 2009). Unlike traditional arenas of political discourse where individuals often seek out debate communities, Facebook is a medium where people learn about the activities of others via feeds with embedded links to contents such as profile pages. These feeds provide the user with updates on their friends’ profile changes, thereby enabling immediate access to an array of information upon logging into the site (Baron, 2008 in Kushin & Kitchener 2009).

Facebooks’ massive use for political communication had been quite unprecedented as political aspirants, supporters and individuals all over the world, often set up special pages for particular groups and events, to criticize or support other individuals or entities. Ahmed, & Azam, (2021) had argued that the use of Facebook played a significant role in increasing youth participation and their interest in politics, justifying therefore the need to compare the students and public servants’ response to political Facebook messages. The two social groups selected are considered to be heavy users of Facebook and where political messages are usually flooded in. Perhaps, their demographic characteristics could affect the way they internalize the messages or how they could get mobilized for various political activities. While Civil Servants represent the engine of any government in power and influence certain decisions or action, the students considered to be often involved both in students’ politics within the institutions and elsewhere may in the process find Facebook as a platform for political mobilization and may even get mobilized.

Kushin & Kitchener (2009) looked at the use of Facebook for online political discussion and established that Facebook is a legitimate location for discussion of political issues comprised of participants with opposing viewpoints. These appear to have succeeded in overcoming polarization of online discussion that has pervaded online political discussion in the past (Davis, 1999). Kushin & Kitchener (2009) also discovered that representation of viewpoints within the Facebook group was also highly skewed in favor of discussion among likeminded participants with 73 percent of all posters aligning with the group stance and only 17

percent of posters were in opposition to the group's stance. This indicates that Facebook can serve as a forum where likeminded individuals may converge, deliberate and share assorted views on any idea, candidate, manifesto, party and electoral process.

Johnson & Kaye (2014) examined the perceptions of credibility of Social network sites (SNS) as compared to other online sources and whether reliance, political attitudes, and personal characteristics influence these perceptions. This study found that politically interested Internet users in general judged Social Networking Sites quite low in credibility. The study also found Low credibility scores for Social Networking Sites possibly linked to their low levels of use for political information and that SNS groups connect people who share similar views, but do not always provide in-depth information about issues. However, the fact that SNS are perceived as low in credibility for political information may not necessarily be because users judge their political content as questionable but because they are used mainly for social interactions (Kaye, 2010), and such social venues tend to be judged less as credible than informational ones (Johnson & Kaye, 2009).

Ndinojuo, Ihejirika, Mbazie & Eludu (2015) analyzed the Facebook and Twitter coverage of Political Parties in Nigeria using content analysis. The study was aimed at ascertaining the number of Nigeria political parties registered on the social media, their followership, how active they are, and how they use the social media in their communication. The research population consisted of the 25 political parties registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as at 1st January 2013 and 1 January, 2014, covering only the month of January and February in 2013 and 2014 respectively that is made up of 118 days. The authors discovered that all the active political parties on the social media used their accounts to post "news", and that political parties in Nigeria have not fully integrated social media networks in their public communication campaigns. The study somewhat echoes that political parties in Nigeria still rely heavily on traditional media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines etc.) for most of their interactions with their party members, the general public and media organizations.

Chinnasamy & Roslan (2015) looked at Social Media and online Political Campaigning in Malaysia and observed that social media networks have played a vital role in conveying political messages and debates. According to the authors, the social media reported significantly during the 2014's state by-elections on the political unrest issues especially an allegation on the Malaysian famous Opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim. To help understand how the compliance gaining approach works in practice via Facebook, selected political parties' Facebook advertisements were examined within two weeks after nomination day and election observers from diverse backgrounds were interviewed (Chinnasamy & Roslan, 2015). The study concluded that since 2008 political messages have been heavily debated through blogs, Facebook and Twitter are very popular among Malaysian political candidates and voters, showing therefore the widespread use of Social network sites (SNS) for political communication.

Dunu & Uzochukwu (2015) examined the ways social media technologies can be deployed for transformational mobilization and development. They also addressed the potential role of the social media in promoting social mobilization as a means for sustainable development in Nigeria and the possibilities of using the social media in a way that will benefit the agents of social mobilization. The extent to which the social media is being used and can be adapted to improve the social mobilization process is also part of the central focus of the study. The authors argued that social media can become an effective and alternative tool for social mobilization, within the context of the unique multiple platform of new forms of engagement it offers to the audience.

Odeyemi, & Mosunmola (2015) studied Stakeholders, ICTs Platforms and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. They established that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) platforms is an instrument of political socialisation and means of political education that have galvanised massive citizen awareness and enhanced liberal values of individualism. With focus on the 2015 general elections, they observed that the use of ICTs platforms by the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, the media and accredited election observers who are the major stakeholders in the electoral process. The study contends that innovations in ICTs have telling effects on different aspects of life in Nigeria and one of which is governance. The scholars maintained that candidates and parties found ICTs platforms useful in campaigning, crowdfunding, mobilising, educating and gauging the opinion of prospective voters.

Kalsnes (2016) compared major and minor political parties' interaction strategy during the 2013 national election in Norway and found that all examined parties or party leaders had profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr and YouTube. The study established that Facebook and Twitter were tightly integrated in the campaign "media mix" in 2013 and that close integration of traditional and social media, online, and offline events in Norwegian politics portrays a hybrid political communication environment (Chadwick, 2013). These suggest that there is a clear discrepancy between parties' interaction strategy and actual responsiveness in social media.

Alopka, (2017) examined the positive use of social media by organized youth in the peaceful conduct of the 2015 elections in Nigeria and found that unlike the previous elections in Nigeria where youth were used to perpetrate vices, especially through the social media, the organised youths in the 2015 elections used the same technology to advocate for peace, which is yet another dimension of political messages to achieve certain purposes.

A growing international body of empirical literature confirms that social media's afforded potential for interaction between the electorate and political actors is presently utilized by various politicians across the globe. As also noted by Kalsnes (2016), during the 2013 national election in Norway all the parties, and particularly the liberal and conservative parties, expressed idealistic intentions to interact with Potential voters on Facebook. Three of the Norwegian parties (Liberal, Conservative, Progress) used the term "digital street stall" to describe Facebook's function, a place to meet and talk with voters. The main strategic advantages that were identified for using social media and specifically Facebook for online communication among the parties were (1) dialog with sympathizers and potential voters, (2) feedback on policy and performance, and (3) bypassing mass media. (Kalsnes, 2016) The study demonstrates that online communication in social media is still challenging for political parties, and that lack of control regarding online reputation and negative media attention remain a clear disadvantage of online interaction.

What remained dominant in this literature is that Facebook is a legitimate location for discussion of political issues comprised of participants with opposing viewpoints. This is in view of the fact that nearly all the active political parties Nigeria are active on Facebook which they use to post "news" and other necessary political information. Representation of viewpoints within the Facebook group as found in the literature is also highly skewed in favor of discussion among likeminded participants which suggests that Facebook may play a role in facilitating participants' exposure to disagreeing parties and heterogeneity in online political discussion. It was also found in the literature that Low credibility scores for Social network sites (SNS) is possibly linked to their low level of use for political information and that Social media groups connect people who share similar views. Though the Facebook is widely used for political communication, political parties in Nigeria was said to still rely heavily on traditional media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines etc.) for most of their interactions with their party members, the general public and media organizations. Hence, while Facebook is powerful in galvanizing the support of many electorates and mobilizing them for campaigns, the conventional media is still active for political communication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY

The study subscribes to the public sphere theory as espoused by Jurgen habermas in 2006 which argues that the public sphere is a notional 'space' that provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. This is related to the present study because the Facebook, being an open arena or platform in the digital public sphere, offers users unlimited and unrestricted access to share, edit, crop, repost, comment, like and present instantly both important and provocative materials for public consumption. As noted by McQuails (2010, p. 179), access to the space is free and freedoms of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed; the space lies between the 'basis' and top of the society and mediation takes place between the two. McQuails (2010, p. 181) further revealed that the ways in which the media support the public sphere are as follows:

- Enlarging the space for debate
- Circulating information and ideas as a basis for public opinion
- Interconnecting citizens and government

- Providing mobilizing information
- Challenging the monopoly of government over politics
- Extending freedom and the diversity of publication

As the students and Civil servants find the Facebook as an avenue for political communication, public debates, socialization and so on, likelihood exists for users to get induced, mobilized and take certain actions owing to the political messages received from Facebook. These users may attempt to use the platform to induce others for same purpose. Civil servants and students were studied side by side to help determine between them, the set of people who get influenced or are influenced by others owing to political Facebook messages received.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative designs, encompassing the Survey and Focus Group Discussion (FDG). The study Population is comprised of both Civil Servants in Anambra State and Undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. While the Anambra State Civil Servants are comprised of an estimated population of 20, 212 workforce, Undergraduate Regular students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University is made up of an estimated population of over 35,000 students according to the Personnel records of the school as at the time of this study. Use of mixed design will helped to determine the students and civil servants level of exposure to political Facebook messages, how they perceive the political Facebook messages targeted at them, the extent they get mobilized through the political Facebook messages, and how they utilize the Facebook for mobilizing others. Hence the overall population of the Study is 55,212 persons from the two separate populations. A sample size of 400 was also drawn, looking at different samples prescribed by Meyer (1973) for population that range from 1000 to infinity at 95% confidence level and Taro Yamane’s formula for determining sample size as follows:

**Table 1
Population and Sample Sizes as Determined by Meyer**

S/N	Population size	Sample size
1	Infinity	384
2	500,000	384
3	100,000	383
4	50,000	381
5	10,000	370
6	5,000	357
7	3,000	341
8	2,000	322
8	1,000	278

Drawing from the calculations of Meyer (1973) as shown in table above, the suggestion is that a sample of 383 could do for a population size of 55,212 and above, while using Taro Yamane statistical formulae, a sample size of 397 was realized, with the calculation stated below;

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N [e]^2)}$$

$$\frac{55,212}{(1 + 55,212 [0.05]^2)}$$

$$\frac{232,853}{1 + 55,212 (0.0025)}$$

$$1 + (55,212 \times 0.0025)$$

$$1 + 138.03$$

$$= 139.03$$

$$\frac{55,212}{139.03}$$

$$= 397.122923 \approx 397$$

When n = sample size;

N = population;

E = sampling Error; while

I = constant

Although a sample size of 397 respondents is justified, following the sampling formula from the above specified authors, the number was rounded off to 400 respondents. The total sample size of 400 was altogether divided into two, such that both the students and civil servants are apportioned two hundred (200) respondents each. The sampling technique adopted in each of the two selected populations is the multi stage which involves series of sampling processes at various levels of the population. For instance, Multi-stage Sampling Technique was applied to the Civil Servants in Anambra State, made up of thirty four (34) Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and selection made based on simple random of at least five MDAs in the State Secretariat complex. In each MDA, selection was further made to the core departments (Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments). A total of 40 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each of the Ministries under study, making up the grand total of 200 copies.

Apart from that, out of the fourteen (14) faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, five were randomly selected which includes: Arts, Social Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Biological Sciences and Management Sciences. One department was thereafter chosen to represent each of them. For each of the departments, each class from 1st, 2nd, 3rd and Final Years were allotted 10 questionnaire items as illustrated in the table below:

Table 2:
Sample Frame

FACULTIES	DEPARTMENTS	STUDY LEVELS	MINISTRIES	DEPARTMENTS OF THE MINISTRIES
Arts	English Language	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and final Years by 10 students in each class (10 x 4 Classes =40)	Office of the Head of Service	10 copies each were given to four viz Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments = 40
Social Sciences	Political Science	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and final Years by 10 students in each class (10 x 4 Classes =40)	Governor’s Office	10 copies each were given to four viz Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments = 40
Environmental Sciences	Estate Management	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and final Years by 10 students in each class (10 x 4 Classes =40)	Office of the Deputy Governor	10 copies each were given to four viz Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments = 40
Biological Sciences	Microbiology	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and final Years by 10 students in each class (10 x 4 Classes =40)	Office of the SSG	10 copies each were given to four viz Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments = 40
Management Sciences	Business Administration	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and final Years by 10 students in each class (10 x 4 Classes =40)	Ministry of Justice	10 copies each were given to four viz Administration, Accounts, Planning and Registry Departments = 40
Total	4 departments	200 undergraduate Students	Total	200 Staff

According to Wimmer & Dominick (2003, p. 124), Focus Group or group interviewing as applied in this study is research strategy for understanding audience attitudes and behaviour whereby 6-12 persons are interviewed with the moderator leading the respondents in a relatively unstructured discussion about the focal topic. Here, six (6) persons were engaged in the discussion, comprised of three undergraduate students and three public servants purposely selected because they very active users of Facebook.

RESULTS

STUDENTS AND CIVIL SERVANTS’ LEVEL OF EXPOSURE TO POLITICAL FACEBOOK MESSAGES

Table 3:
Facebook ownership among respondents

Own a facebook account?	Percentages (%)
Yes	100% N=392
No	-
Total	N=392

As 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and only 392 returned, this table revealed that all the respondents (both students and civil servants) own Facebook accounts which confirms the widespread use of social media and its increasing use among Nigerians. It further implies that Facebook remains one of the predominant social media that attracts a wide audience participation including politicians, educated and high profile personalities as well as the students on campuses.

Table 4:
Frequency of Facebook use

How Regular?	Percentages (%)
Always	70% (N=274)
Occasionally	30% (N=118)
Total	100% (N=392)

This table further presents that respondents consistently log on to Facebook for various reasons. It shows therefore that they are always online for communication purposes and are prey to getting lured by politicians and in the process can engage in political communication. Their more frequent use of Facebook suggests

that they can easily be caught in the web of political dialogue, action and interactions which the platform makes possible. As well, they may find it interesting seeking political interest and attention of others on Facebook.

**Table 5:
Spread of political information**

Spreading political information?	Percentages (%)
Yes	50% (N=196)
No	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=392)

This table presents that apart from the respondents’ wide exposure to Facebook political messages; they still broadcast political information on Facebook. Perhaps, the nature of Facebook technology contributes to the redefinition of the meaning of geographical distance as users are aware of who reads and who get exposed to Facebook contents. Respondents utilize the platform to engage in campaigns to woo support in favour of people, to make their views known about political activities and also form coalitions to achieve any given political aim. This resonates the fact that Facebook is an essential tool for political communication and are being widely utilised for that purpose by both politicians and supporters, further justifying that Facebook users are also prosumers of the content. This is one of the outstanding features of the Facebook. Even though Facebook is quite easy to use and grants access to multiplicity of people at a glance, the central problem remains the credibility of source of the messages spread. The focus group discussion with the participants revealed some salient points as follows:

Civil Servant 1: I use Facebook to share my personal information: birthdays, celebrations, and invite friends during festivities, though I have two Facebook accounts and other social networks.

Civil Servant 2: I receive news updates from various media organizations through my Facebook account. I just like the pages of media organizations and each time I log on, I see the news updates of those media via my account which I take time to read.

Student 1: I have over one thousand friends on Facebook and each time I get connected, I receive a number of messages which I always reply and attend to many notifications and subsequent activities

Civil Servant 3: Sometimes I make my friends catch fun. I ask questions and request for their views on that. I have many group chats which I use to seek peoples interests and attention on issues. I was made to join some of them and I formed some myself.

Student 1: I hardly attend to such questions or read most of the long stories and queries from people, I mainly share and reply to messages sent to me by others and keep in touch with them.

The excerpts above illustrate the active nature of the respondents on Facebook which has been recognized as a powerful tool for political campaigns. The salient point here is that there is a wide use of Facebook among the respondents who find it useful in a variety of ways.

PERCEPTION OF THE POLITICAL FACEBOOK MESSAGES

**Table 6:
Descriptions of Facebook Political Messages**

Descriptions	Percentages (%)
Propaganda	30% (N=118)
Provocative/ Attacking	50% (N=196)
Neutral	20% (N=78)
Total	100% (N=392)

It is understood from this table that Facebook Users convey provocative contents or materials that may be attacking the personality of an individual. Half of the respondents (50%) confirmed it. Apart from that, 30% of the respondents agree that political messages on Facebook convey propaganda, falsehood and adulterated information as users are at liberty to create, post, share, comment and even make some unverifiable claims about political contestants and their manifesto. Even though some of the posts may have been originated from conventional media to aid convergence, likelihood exists for users to edit or reinterpret them.

**Table 7:
Perception of the Facebook Political Messages**

Are the messages persuasive?	Percentages	Are the messages Irritating?	Percentages	Are the messages Exciting?	Percentages
Yes	40% (N=157)	Yes	80% (N=314)	Yes	50% (N=196)
No	60% (N=235)	No	20% (N=78)	No	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=392)

This table shows that 40% of the respondents find some of the political Facebook messages persuasive, though 60 % of them declined to this view. This is sequel to the fact that some political messages are quite infuriating as unfounded arguments and allegations are carelessly made about personalities. This correlates with the stand of Thorson (2014) that uncertainties about audience reception on Facebook inspire strategies for ‘inventing’ modes of political interaction on the one hand, and, for others, suppress opinion expression by creating the sense that talking politics on the site is a high risk endeavour. That notwithstanding, the respondents still perceive Facebook as an exciting and interesting platform that gives the voiceless a voice and then makes politicians potentially aware of peoples’ feelings and opinion.

FACEBOOK MOBILIZATION

**Table 8:
Mobilized through the political Facebook messages?**

Seek political issues on Facebook?	Percentages	Seek people's support for your political posts on Facebook?	Percentages	Ever accepted any political idea as presented on Facebook?	Percentages	Experience mood Changes owing to the messages?	Percentages
Yes	55% (N=216)	Yes	85% (N=167)	Yes	35% (N=137)	Yes	55% (N=216)
No	45% (N=176)	No	15% (N=29)	No	65% (N=255)	No	45% (N=176)
Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=196)	Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=392)

The table above shows that more than half of the respondents (55%) have political interests they seek which they solicit and follow up on Facebook. It further explains that Facebook helps them update their information on political developments. Interestingly, more than two third (85%) of those who post political messages, seek peoples’ support and attention to evaluate their views and opinion. This resonates the fact that Facebook still remains a participatory and democratic platform. However, the political Facebook messages seem to have effect on users, as some respondents (35%) accept some political ideas posted on Facebook perhaps based on their pre-existing knowledge of such information, their desires and the interests. Besides, more than half of the respondents have their moods change as a result of some provocative political messages on Facebook. In addition to the survey data, the Focus Group further revealed some details as follows:

Civil Servant 3: like I said, I have and belong to many groups chats on Facebook, one of them is the Anambra Youth group which gives me the privilege to discuss the ongoing developments in Nigeria- who wins the presidency as well as other vital positions during the 2023 General elections in Nigeria.

Student 2: I do not belong to such groups but I have my ideas shared among my peers who either agree or disagree to it.

Student 3: What I do is to search for the politicians on Facebook, send them friend requests and read their posts to get myself updated.

Civil Servant 3: I advise you guys to join interesting group chats. It makes one to have the opinion of many persons concerning a candidate or an idea and then helps one have clearer view on an issue. I enjoy the groups because of the arguments members make on contemporary issues, though some members use vulgar and foul language to make their points.

It was discovered that respondents use Facebook for political communication by sharing their views and ideologies. They also utilize Facebook to form interest groups where they make their submissions on issues raised in the group. One of the regrets is the members’ use of vulgar and irritating expressions.

**Table 9:
Actions taken as a result of the political Posts on Facebook**

Taken any action?	Percentages (%)	Nature of Action taken	Percentages (%)
Yes	85% (N=335)	Voted for a Candidate	15% (N=57)
		Decided not to vote for a Candidate	19% (N=76)
No	15% (N=37)	Developed a point of view	30% (N=119)
		No Action taken	36% (N=140)
		Total	100% (N=392)

As presented in this table, this work further revealed how Facebook users react to political messages on Facebook. Many of them (36%) took no action after being exposed to the messages and another significant number (30%) developed divergent viewpoints sequel to their exposure but only a few of them had either voted for (15%) or decided not to vote for a candidate (19%) because of what they have read about them on Facebook.

**Table 9:
How the Respondents mobilize others on Facebook**

Respondents' ways of mobilizing others on Facebook	Percentages (%)
Forming of group chats and interacting with members	30% (N=59)
Posting of political messages on walls and as messages to friends	50% (N=98)
Creating of Facebook page and posting therein	20% (N=39)
Total	100% (N=196)

This table also presents how the respondents engage in various approaches to get their Facebook friends politically mobilized. The study revealed that they engage the following approaches (a) formation of group chats and interacting with members (30%); (b) posting of political messages on walls and as messages to friends, calling for comments, reactions (50%); creating Facebook pages and then posting messages therein (20%). These demonstrate the peculiarity of Facebook as a widely recognized platform for political mobilization. This finding corroborates the observations of Ahmed and Azam (2021) in Pakistan that Facebook play a significant role in bringing youth as an active agent into politics. The Focus Group revealed more data which are hereby presented:

Civil servant 3: I have been able to add many users on groups and make them understand why they should accept a particular point of view or candidate. I think some have accepted and share my line of thought.

Student 1: I have not been mobilized on Facebook and do not think I have mobilized people via the platform.

Student 2: Even outside group chats, peoples' ideas can be altered when exposed to certain posts on Facebook. People's views concerning the current IPOB have made me have mixed

feelings about them. People are cajoled, mocked, and ridiculed on Facebook and made to have said what he never said.

Civil Servant 3: what then can you say about the 2023 General elections in Nigeria that is almost a do or die affair whereby contests and supporters use the Facebook to stage war and attack one another. I was once evicted from a group because I made my opinion clear on an issue.

It is interesting to find that Facebook is being utilised to mobilize others for political purposes, as explained by the Civil servant participant who forms chat groups on Facebook and makes members follow his line of idea. He had admitted having his ideas accepted by some members of the group. The implication is that passive members may likely be influenced and made to either support or crusade against an idea or candidate.

RESPONDENTS’ DISPOSITIONS TO POLITICAL FACEBOOK MESSAGES

**Table 11:
How successful the Facebook is as a platform for political mobilization**

Rating People’s Reactions to Your Political Posts	Percentages	Notice friends seeking your interests in their Facebook posts?	Percentages	Replying to Political Facebook Messages?	Percentages
Reactive	85% (N=333)	Yes	59% (N=232)	Yes	69% (N=271)
Not Reactive	15% (N=59)	No	41% (N=160)	No	31% (N=121)
Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=392)	Total	100% (N=392)

The above table shows the respondents’ dispositions to political Facebook messages. It was established in this work that Facebook is very reactive and instantaneous (85%) as users always give their immediate feedback and encourage other users to participate in the dialogue. The position of the Nigerian government and other national positions is also a daily discourse on Facebook involving many social groups. However, the respondents also noticed that other users seek their attention in their posts on Facebook to elicit their viewpoints on any controversial political issue (59%) and that they reply accordingly to Facebook posts and make their stands known.

DRAWING THE COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THE CIVIL SERVANTS

**Table 12:
Comparing the students and Civil Servants’ Regularity of being connected on Facebook: A Crosstabulation**

Respondents’ Occupation	How Regularly connected on Facebook?		Total
	Always	Occasionally	
Student	157	39	50% (N=196)
Civil Servants	117	79	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=274)	100% (N=118)	100% (N=392)

This table shows the comparison of how regularly connected the students and civil servants’ are on Facebook. It was revealed that the students are more regular on the Facebook platform.

**Table 13:
Comparing between the students and civil servants, who are more mobilized on Facebook**

Respondents' Occupation	Taken any action as a result of political posts on Facebook?		Total
	Yes	No	
Student	158	38	50% (N=196)
Civil Servants	177	19	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=335)	100% (N=57)	100% (N=392)

The study has shown also that the students are more mobilized and are the ones are more propelled to take action through political Facebook messages. It shows that students are more affected by the political Facebook messages unlike the civil servants.

**Table 14:
Comparing between the students and civil servants, who utilize the political Facebook messages more to mobilise others: A Crosstabulation**

Respondents' Occupation	Spreading political messages on Facebook?		Total
	Yes	No	
Student	78	118	50% (N=196)
Civil Servants	177	79	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=195)	100% (N=197)	100% (N=392)

As shown in this table, the study also revealed that even though the students are more influenced and mobilized on Facebook, the civil servants are the ones mainly spreading political messages on Facebook and utilizing the platform more to mobilise others. It shows that students engage on Facebook for many reasons and not essentially for political communication. The civil servants who are not always online but are the ones who mainly spread political messages on Facebook unlike the students connected round the clock. This could be because the Civil servants have more interest in politics more than the students.

**Table 15:
A Crosstabulation of the Students and Students' Acceptance of Facebook Political Messages**

Respondents' Occupation	Ever accepted any political idea as presented on Facebook?		Total
	Yes	No	
Student	119	77	50% (N=196)
Civil Servants	136	60	50% (N=196)
Total	100% (N=255)	100% (N=137)	100% (N=392)

This table presents that the political Facebook messages are accepted more by the students than the civil servants. This could be related to their more frequent use of the platform unlike the civil servants. It has also

been established earlier in this work that the students and civil servants in the sample own Facebook accounts. They are exposed to political Facebook messages and also participate in the process of information exchange and dialogue, even though the students are more engaged in the platform and always connected to the network. The two groups are therefore active on political Facebook messages. What remains salient among the two groups is their recognition that Facebook is an open and unreliable source of information that supports creative participation and exchange where any political information can be created, edited and shared.

DISCUSSION

Apart from the respondents wide exposure to Facebook political messages, they broadcast political information on Facebook, which contributes to the redefinition of the meaning of geographical distance as users are aware of who reads and who get exposed to Facebook contents. It was established that the respondents utilize the platform to engage in campaigns to woo support in favour of people, to make their views known about political activities and also form coalitions to achieve any given political aim.

These resonates the fact that Facebook is an essential tool for political communication and are being widely utilized for that purpose by both politicians and supporters, justifying also that users are also consumers of the content. The study established that Facebook users convey provocative and irritating materials (50%) as well as propaganda, falsehood and adulterated information (30%). This is because users are at liberty to post, share, comment and even make some unverifiable claims.

However, only 40% of them find some of the messages persuasive, though majority of them share the view that some political messages are irritating, as unfounded arguments and allegations are carelessly made about personalities. This work also discovered that half of the respondents (55%) have political interests they solicit and follow up on Facebook which further explains that facebook helps them update their information on political developments. More than two third (85%) of those who post political messages, seek peoples' support and attention to evaluate their views and opinion. This resonates the fact that Facebook still remains a participatory and democratic platform. There are also trends in the findings as some respondents (35%) accept some political ideas posted on Facebook perhaps based on their preexisting knowledge of such information, their desires and the interests and more than half of the respondents have their moods change as a result of some provocative messages received from Facebook.

It was also established that the respondents engage in various approaches to get their Facebook friends politically mobilized. They include: (a) formation of group chats and interacting with members (30%); (b) posting of political messages on walls and as messages to friends, calling for comments and reactions (50%); creating Facebook pages and then posting messages therein (20%). These demonstrate the peculiarity of Facebook as a widely recognized platform for political mobilization.

In terms of how successful or otherwise the platform is adjudged for political mobilization, the study found that Facebook is very reactive and instantaneous (85%) as some users always give their immediate feedback and encourage other users to participate in political dialogue. However, the respondents also noticed that other users seek their attention in their posts on Facebook, to elicit their viewpoints on any controversial political issue (59%) and they reply accordingly.

While comparing the group of persons more connected on Facebook, the study found that the students are more regular online, sequel to the fact that they are more conversant with technological facilities. It was also found that the students are more mobilized and are the ones are more propelled to take offline action as a result of Facebook political posts unlike the civil servants. It was revealed that while students engage on Facebook for many reasons and not mainly for political communication, the civil servants who are not always online are the ones mainly spreading political messages online unlike the students who are connected round the clock. This is probably because the Civil servants have interest in politics more than the students. The study also discovered that the political Facebook messages are accepted more by the students than civil servants. Generally, the two groups are active on Facebook. They recognize the platform as an open and unreliable source of information that supports creative participation.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Facebook is a recognized platform for political mobilization. This work also concludes that Facebook users hardly accept some political Facebook messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends as follows:

1. Facebook and social media ethics should be made a course of study in Schools;
2. Users need to be cautious in making disclosures about political contestants;
3. Users need to always confirm and crosscheck facts and issues before sharing them on Facebook platform;

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