

Social Media and Voter Mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: An Analysis of Political Campaign Strategies and Citizen Engagement

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Abstract:

The 2023 Nigerian General Elections marked a significant turning point in the country's democratic process, with social media emerging as a central platform for political communication, voter mobilization, and citizen engagement. This paper examines the role of social media in shaping electoral participation during the elections, focusing on how political actors employed digital platforms to disseminate campaign messages, influence public opinion, and mobilize voters. The study further explores the extent to which citizens utilized social media to access political information, participate in political discussions, and engage with electoral processes. The research adopted a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis. Data were gathered from scholarly journal articles, election observation reports, policy documents, publications from electoral and civil society organizations, media reports, and existing studies on digital political communication and electoral participation in Nigeria. The paper contends that while social media enhanced political awareness and participation, it simultaneously created opportunities for the spread of misinformation, disinformation, political polarization, and digital manipulation that influenced electoral discourse. The paper discovered that social media played a critical role in increasing voter engagement, expanding political participation among previously marginalized groups, and strengthening issue-based political conversations during the election period. However, the effectiveness of these platforms in promoting democratic participation was constrained by challenges relating to information credibility, digital inequalities, and the proliferation of false narratives. The study concludes that social media has become an indispensable instrument of electoral mobilization and democratic engagement in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Media, Voter Mobilization, Political Campaigns, Citizen Engagement, Digital Political Communication.

I. Introduction

Since the advent of social media, political actors have increasingly relied on these platforms to garner votes and mobilise support. Political supporters have also embraced social media to promote their chosen candidates. According to Fournier (2022), traditional door-to-door canvassing has largely been supplanted by platforms such as YouTube, Twitch, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, and X(formally Twitter). For instance, in 2008, former President Barack Obama notably leveraged social media to engage with voters (Nwafor et al., 2023). This digital strategy marked a significant transformation in electoral campaigning in the world. Keane-Dawson (2024) highlights that social media has fundamentally altered U.S. politics, enabling incumbents, challengers, and commentators to address voters directly. Since then, platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube have shaped political movements (Ademosu et al., 2025). Gil de Zuniga et al. (2010) suggest that social media networks have significantly enhanced the public's sense of political efficacy and inclination to participate in political processes. These platforms

facilitate the organisation and mobilisation of collective interests, making political figures more accountable and transparent due to the constant scrutiny they face online (Guanah et al., 2026).

In France, Fournieris (2022) asserts that social media networks have effectively enabled presidential election campaigns to reach diverse voter demographics. Tech Policy Press (2022) confirms that these platforms played a crucial role in the French 2022 election. Similarly, the 2024 South African election saw extensive use of social media by politicians to attract voters. Dabula (2024) notes that social networking sites significantly influenced voter perceptions, a sentiment echoed by Gerber and Strachan (2024), who highlight the role of platforms like X, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok in disseminating messages about political candidates during the 2024 South African election.

In Nigeria, the adoption of social media for electoral campaigns first gained substantial momentum during the 2011 general elections. Presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan was one of the pioneering figures to strategically employ platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with voters, signifying a transformative shift in Nigeria's political communication landscape (Aondover & Ademosu, 2025). This was the initial moment when social media emerged as a critical tool in shaping electoral discourse, providing political candidates with direct and interactive channels to engage with the electorate, particularly younger demographics.

Abubakar and Ibraheem (2020) observed that the 2011 general elections “marked the beginning of social media as an influential tool for political mobilisation and campaign strategy, laying the foundation for its expanded use in subsequent elections” (p. 35). The use of these platforms grew in subsequent elections, with political parties, candidates, and news outlets increasingly leveraging them to disseminate information, mobilise voter support, and enhance campaign strategies (Bassey et al., 2024). This integration of digital platforms revolutionised the nature of electoral campaigns, making them more interactive, dynamic, and accessible to a broader audience.

Election campaigns are fundamentally nothing more than political communication. Communication between the campaign leadership and volunteers, funders, activists, and supporters is necessary if elections are about organization (Aondover & Obasi, 2023). Social media has both positive and negative effects on election campaigns. The risk stems from the possibility that technology could be successfully used to spread propaganda today and contribute to the formation of voter misconceptions. Everyone has a responsibility to utilise social media properly as a tool of oppression and empowerment, including the general population, the media, corporations, candidates, and the government (Moran, 2023; Aondover et al., 2025).

Nigeria's election periods are characterised by heightened political activity, and the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State provide a key opportunity to examine how social media campaigns influence voting behaviour. As social media continues to evolve, its role in shaping political behaviour will become even more critical for scholars seeking to understand its broader implications for democratic participation (Andersen et al, 2020; Chan and Yi, 2024).

1.1 Theoretical Underpinning

The Agenda-Setting Theory, proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that while the media may not dictate our thoughts, it significantly influences what we think about. This theory highlights the media's role in shaping public opinion by determining the prominence of issues. In their 1968 study of the Chapel Hill presidential election, McCombs and Shaw demonstrated that media coverage of issues often aligns with what voters consider important.

According to Chaffee and Berger (1997), the theory is robust due to its explanatory power, predictiveness, simplicity, balanced approach, and ability to generate new research avenues. The theory is pertinent to analysing social media's impact on gubernatorial campaigns in Lagos during the 2023 election. Social media platforms enabled candidates to frame their messages and highlight specific issues, thereby influencing public discourse and voter priorities.

Specifically, the dynamics of interaction between social media users contribute to the formation of opinions based on agenda setting, which posits that mass media, including social networks, can orient people to certain topics and indicate what issues should attract public attention. During the Nigerian election process, social media has played a crucial role. Politicians have used social media as a tool for dialogue, rallying people to vote, and influencing election outcomes. Initially, social media platforms offered opportunities for direct interaction between politicians and citizens (Kolade et al., 2023).

Many Nigerians have accused conventional media of being partial or of concealing important information and opinions from the public sphere. In contrast, social media has become a platform for expression, news sharing, and political commentary, enabling citizens to access information easily. It has given individuals and small groups a voice to contest political discourse and challenge dominant media messages (Michael, 2021). Through these platforms, political campaigns have been able to spread their messages to a wider audience. Political parties and candidates now use social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share their agendas, pass messages, and engage the electorate (Olabanjo et al., 2023; Aondover et al., 2023).

However, the reach of social media tends to favor urban dwellers and the educated, potentially widening the existing gap in political participation caused by socio-economic and educational differences (Okunade et al., 2024). In Nigeria, the spread of fake news and propaganda on social media has also led to ethnic clashes and riots, undermining the credibility of elections. This highlights the importance of media literacy, fact-checking, and online safety campaigns to curb misinformation and ensure responsible use of social media during election periods. Furthermore, voters have used social media to mobilize and encourage political action (Kohnert, 2023). Social media has equally empowered marginalized and oppressed groups, particularly youth and women, to voice their concerns and advocate for their votes. Nonetheless, it is important to note that not all online participation translates into offline political action, meaning the impact of digital mobilization may not always reflect in actual election outcomes.

II. Research Method

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis to examine the role of social media in voter mobilization during Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. Data were sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, election observation reports, policy documents, reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), publications by civil society organizations, media reports, and credible online sources relating to political campaigns, digital communication, and electoral participation in Nigeria. The collected materials were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study objectives and subjected to thematic analysis.

2.1 The Concept of Social Media

The emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate, share information, and interact with others. Social media refers to online platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange content in virtual communities or networks (Joseph & Okunade, 2026). The concept of social media dates back to the early days of the internet, but its evolution gained momentum with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Lewis, 2015). Web 2.0 facilitated user-generated content, interactivity, and collaboration, leading to the birth of platforms like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook. These platforms paved the way for present day social media networks and applications (Maradun & Aondover, 2025).

Since then, social networking sites have experienced rapid growth, with the frequent introduction of new sites. Some of the current and popular social media platforms include Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, LinkedIn, and YouTube, among others. Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have played the role of rallying people, informing the public on social causes, and enabling them to form a common front. Therefore, hashtags and virality campaigns have become effective tools for advocating for social justice and challenging institutional injustices (Michael, 2023; Okunade, 2025).

Social media makes it easier for people to communicate with one another online. Social media encompasses a wide range of applications and platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, that let users share content, communicate online, and create communities. More than 4.7 billion individuals, or nearly 60% of the world's population, utilize social media (Maya Dollarhide, 2023). Tuft (2023), Social media refers to methods of communication where individuals produce, share, and/or exchange knowledge and concepts in online groups and networks. The primary accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube are managed by the Office of Communications and Marketing (Michael & Kayode, 2014).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), as cited in Bassey, Kente, Akpede, and Ogande (2024), describe social media as a collection of internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 technologies that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media also encompasses online communities' activities, practices, and behaviours in sharing information, knowledge, and opinions through conversational media. Applications are broadly categorised into forums and message boards, review and opinion sites, social networks, blogging and microblogging, bookmarking, and mediasharing platforms. These tools facilitate communication between organisations and their customers, customers themselves, and customers and organisations.

Each Social Media platform offers unique features and caters to different user needs, resulting in a highly interconnected digital ecosystem (Limsopatham & Collier, 2016). Users of social media platforms can easily share thoughts, ideas, and experiences with a global audience, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange on an unprecedented scale (Udanor et al., 2016). Mass media framing evolved as well, focusing attention on certain events and placing them within a field of meaning (Sanusi et al., 2014; Essien et al., 2022).

Social media has become a crucial source of news and information for millions of people worldwide. Traditional media channels are no longer the sole gatekeepers of information. However, the unchecked spread of misinformation and fake news poses challenges, highlighting the need for media literacy and fact-checking mechanisms (Lewis, 2015). The idea behind social media platforms is to revamp the marketing and business promotion structures.

2.2 Election and Political Campaign

The term “political campaign,” frequently used interchangeably with “election campaign” or simply “campaign,” lacks a singular, comprehensive definition due to its evolving nature over time. Scholars across various disciplines, including media studies and political science, offer differing interpretations of the concept, contributing to the absence of a universally accepted definition (Bassegy et al., 2024). Despite these varied perspectives, the overarching aim of any political campaign is to “maximise the probability of victory” (Nickerson & Rogers, 2014, p. 57). This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on political campaigns by exploring their diverse interpretations and applications (Okunade, 2025).

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2009) describe a campaign message as “a simple statement that will be repeated over and over throughout the campaign to persuade your target voters” (p. 24). Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) describe the campaign message as “an important and potent tool that politicians use to express views and feelings to the public to reshape and redirect the electorate’s opinions to align with theirs” (p. 106). For example, Chief Moshood Abiola’s campaign message in Nigeria’s 1993 presidential election was “Hope, Farewell to Poverty,” while former President Goodluck Jonathan’s 2011 campaign message was “A Breath of Fresh Air.” These examples illustrate how campaign messages can effectively engage and persuade voters. According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2009), effective campaign messages should be concise, truthful, and credible. They must also be persuasive and relevant to voters, highlighting contrasts and being transparent and emotionally resonant.

Additionally, campaign messages should be targeted and conveyed repeatedly. Olisa (2015) defines a political campaign as “An organised effort which seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group” (Olisa, 2015, p. 116). In democratic contexts, this often refers to electoral campaigns where representatives are chosen, or referendums decided. High-profile political campaigns in modern politics typically focus on candidates for head of state or government positions, such as presidents or prime ministers. Olisa emphasises that the term “organised effort” highlights modern campaigns’ systematic, step-by-step nature, contrasting with the less structured campaigns described by Norris (2014). An effectively organised campaign is crucial, as a poor organisation can significantly diminish a candidate’s chances of success.

Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) further define political campaigns as: “The mobilisation of forces by an organisation or individuals to influence others to effect an identified and desired political change” (Ojukwu, 2013, p. 106). This definition underscores the campaign’s role in mobilising support and shaping perceptions to position candidates as viable representatives.

Ginsberg (2009), as cited in Olujide, Adeyemi, and Gbadeyan (2011), characterises a political campaign as “organised efforts by a political party or candidate for public office to attract the support of voters in an election” (p. 180). Ginsberg identifies five essential elements of a political campaign: professional public relations, polling, broadcast media, direct mail, and the internet.

2.3 Political Campaign Strategies in the Digital Age

Political campaign communication has become increasingly hybrid and the ability to create synergies between older and newer media is now a prerequisite for running a successful campaign. In the era defined by the rapid evolution of technology, political campaigns have embraced the digital age, reshaping their strategies to resonate with the rhythms of social media.

Candidates and parties now weave intricate webs of outreach, leveraging the immediacy of platforms to disseminate information and spark discussions. With a simple tap, news articles, videos, and political content surge through the digital veins of society, ensuring citizens remain attuned to the ebb and flow of current events (Aondover et al., 2022).

The relationship between politicians and constituents has transformed as well. The likes of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have birthed a virtual agora where politicians and the public engage in direct discourse. With a few clicks, candidates cast their views, policies, and even personal anecdotes onto the digital stage, fostering a sense of transparency that transcends the barriers of physicality. Yet, it's not only the politicians' voices that reverberate across these digital plains. Citizens wield their creativity to craft content that resonates with their political affiliations. From thought-provoking videos to satirical memes, the digital canvas becomes a mural of perspectives, sparking debates that span continents and cross generations. Online activism thrives, hashtags becoming rallying cries that galvanize communities and draw global attention to pressing issues.

The art of discourse flourishes as social media platforms serve as arenas where voices from diverse corners meet. Users converge to discuss policies, share opinions, and engage in debates. This influx of viewpoints nurtures a more informed and critical citizenry, enriching democratic discourse. Campaigns no longer wait for results to trickle in; social media platforms provide live coverage of elections, allowing citizens to participate in real-time analyses. The once formidable information gap has all but vanished, replaced by a vibrant exchange of ideas that enriches political engagement (Aondover, 2024).

Yet, as with any digital advancement, pitfalls await. The same platforms that facilitate dialogue also serve as conduits for misinformation. But these spaces also give rise to initiatives that counter falsehoods with fact-checking. The delicate balance between the power of information dissemination and the challenge of accuracy continues to shape the digital political landscape (Hile et al., 2023). From the spirited activism of the young to the virtual town hall meetings conducted by candidates, the digital age offers new frontiers for political engagement. Borders blur as citizens connect with global political events, broadening their perspectives and intertwining their narratives with the tapestry of international affairs. In this era, where social media is a bridge to ideas, an amplifier of voices, and a catalyst for political engagement, the strategies of political campaigns have irrevocably injected an element of dynamism, immediacy, and interaction into the political process, forever altering the landscape in which politicians and voters coalesce (Aondover, 2026).

2.4 The Nigerian Electoral System

Elections that took place between 1999 and 2023 remain an important factor in Nigerian democracy. This period was characterised by political liberalisation, whereby Nigeria adopted democracy after a long period of military rule. (Uzedhe & Okhaifoh, 2016). During this period, Nigeria held general elections that featured a complete multiparty system. Different political parties have emerged at various times and have each fulfilled an ideological and regional need. As we speak today, the most influential parties include the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP), and the All-Progressives Congress (APC).

Nigeria is no exception to the worrisome trend of electoral violence and insecurity that reared its ugly head during the 2023 general elections. Various regions of the country experienced unrest due to political rivalry, ethnic tension, and social and economic factors (Udanor et al., 2016). Evidence of violence, including voter intimidation, ballot box snatching,

and confrontations between supporters and hoodlums, undermined the credibility and fairness of the electoral processes. Voter suppression and irregularities were another major issue of concern for a majority of the citizens. Some aspects, such as disqualifications to vote, voting more than once, and alteration of results, were causes for concern regarding the electoral system. Some of these were due to the following reasons: the absence of transparency, poor logistics, and generally poor institutional structures (Lawal, 2015).

There is no doubt that money and corruption played roles in the Nigerian elections. Campaign expenses and the allocation of funds to secure political seats generate their own funding. This trend undermines the principles of fair competition and equal representation, limiting the opportunities for citizens to elect leaders based on merit. Despite Nigeria's youthful population, the representation and participation of young people in politics remained relatively low during this period. Limited access to resources, political structures dominated by older politicians, and a lack of youth-oriented policies and platforms hindered meaningful youth engagement (Animashaun, 2010). However, there were growing calls for greater youth involvement, recognizing their potential as agents of change.

To enhance the credibility of Nigeria's general elections, there is a need to strengthen electoral institutions. Building capable and independent bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is crucial. Adequate funding, professional training, and transparent appointment processes are essential to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality. (Michael, 2023)

2.5 Social Media and Political Campaigns

The interference of social networking sites in the political system has dramatically changed the direction of most campaigns in the majority of countries across the globe, including Nigeria. According to Essien (2024), cartoon journalism and comic journalism as part of information dissemination in the media have received much attention, especially in Nigeria. This also applies to the growing popularity of social media journalism. According to Inyang et al. (2021), social media plays a crucial role in political campaigns in Nigeria, where residents use it to express their political activities, including electoral voting. This aligns with the findings of Inyang and Edem (2020), who assert that social media fosters interaction that generates new and evolving ideas, imagery, trends, and distinctiveness, all of which possess potency and are easily mobilized and demobilized. Political parties and candidates have recognised major social networks as valuable assets in recent Nigerian elections. They have used these forums to reach out to the voters, spread campaign information or information about their stands, or even converse on politics (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). However, its disadvantages include the problem of fake news spreading, cases of misinformation, and hate speeches (Udanor et al., 2016).

There are some strategies that political actors in Nigeria have adopted to improve the outcomes of their leveraged social media campaigns. It entails the use of texts, images, videos, memes, and so on in activities such as parties and candidate campaigns. They also use several strategies, such as live streaming of events, the hosting of Twitter chats, and the use of influencers, to help them reach their target group (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). The effectiveness of the social network campaign in influencing voter turnout is noteworthy. Direct communication between the political actors and the voters is possible through social media platforms, where an immediate response is made possible (Okoro, 2017). However, social media also enables citizens to express their opinions, thereby fostering political discussions and encouraging active involvement in society (Aondover et al., 2025).

However, social media campaigns are not without glitches that result from constant and dynamic change. Another issue is fake news, which has adverse effects on the environment since it misinforms the people and is disastrous for democracy (Udanor et al., 2016). Social media filtering, which produces echo chambers and bubbles, only serves to exacerbate political division by providing only certain types of information to individuals with a fixed set of beliefs. Moreover, the role of social media in shaping voters' choices and decisions is ambiguous; therefore, it is challenging to determine how online campaigning corresponds to offline activation, like voting.

2.6 Social Media and Elections in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

The 2011 general election in Nigeria marked a pivotal moment in the country's political landscape. It represented the inaugural utilization of digital media as a political platform during the electoral process and campaigning. According to Dunu (2018), This event signified a fundamental shift in Nigeria's political history, introducing the concept of "Internet elections" or "e-electioneering". In consonance with this viewpoint, Olowokere and Audu-Bako (2019) espoused that during the month-long election process in April 2011, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) shared nearly 4000 tweets, with a significant number addressing inquiries from voters.

Before 2011, Nigerian elections were marred by various irregularities including rigging, violence, ballot box snatching at gunpoint, intimidation of voters, and manipulation of election results, among others (Oni et al., 2013). However, the incorporation of social media during the 2011 elections played a pivotal role in significantly reducing these malpractices. The utilization led to a more transparent electoral process and increased accountability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to the public in conducting elections (Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019).

The 2011 elections marked the beginning of digitalization in Nigerian politics, but the 2015 Nigeria general election, further solidified the integration of digital media in Nigerian political culture (Dunu, 2018). Nwoke et al. (2021) notes that the opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) extensively utilized digital media to reshape the narrative and ultimately seize power from the incumbent government. Explicating further, the scholars articulated that in a bid to remain in power, the incumbent government under the leadership of former President Goodluck Jonathan annexed the power of social media to control narratives and garner support from the Nigerian populace. Despite the incumbent government's efforts to utilize social media for narrative control and garnering support, the bid to secure the reelection of President Goodluck Jonathan ultimately faltered, as the flagbearer of the opposition party, President Muhammadu Buhari emerged victorious in the 2015 Nigeria general election. One can argue that the "change" mantra, popularized across various social media platforms during the election period, played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and contributing to President Muhammadu Buhari's electoral success.

The momentum gained from the transformative role of social media in the 2015 elections carried over into the 2019 Nigeria general elections. Recognizing the potency of digital platforms, both incumbent and opposition parties strategically leveraged social media to disseminate their messages, engage with the electorate, and influence public opinion. A study by Nwoke et al. (2021) revealed that during the Nigerian 2019 general elections, various political actors extensively and effectively utilized social media (Aondover et al., 2025). This revelation is not farfetched as the digital landscape witnessed the widespread dissemination of political messages, as the "Next Level" slogan championed by the incumbent President Muhammadu

Buhari's campaign gained significant traction across various social media platforms, and the "Atikulate" mantra employed by the opposition, led by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar also popular on various social media platforms. Citizens also embraced social media as a vital tool for information gathering, staying informed about political developments, and participating in discussions surrounding the 2019 general elections.

The landscape of social media usage and adoption in Nigerian elections continued to evolve in the 2023 general elections, with the emergence of new social media platforms such as Tik Tok, introducing a fresh dimension to political communication. Also, the advancements in existing platforms played a pivotal role in enhancing political engagement. An illustrative example is the introduction of "Spaces" on X, formerly Twitter, which provided a unique space for realtime audio conversations. This feature revolutionized political discourse by allowing candidates, political pundits, and citizens to engage in live discussions, debates, and town hall meetings.

The widespread popularity of slogans like "Obedient" "BATified", across various social media platforms during the 2023 elections in Nigeria serves as a testament to the consistent adoption of social media in Nigeria's electoral landscape. As this trend persists, it is likely that the reliance on social media for political communication will further expand, becoming an even more prominent feature in upcoming elections in Nigeria.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Impact of the Social Media on the 2023 Nigerian General Election

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria marked a significant turning point in the role of social media in political campaigns. With the proliferation of social media platforms, political parties and candidates recognized the power of these digital spaces in influencing public opinion, mobilizing voters, and shaping the political landscape (Nabiebu, 2022). In the 2023 elections in Nigeria, the use of social media helped reach out to the masses and influence the voters. With millions of Nigerians using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, candidates and political parties have consistently utilized these sites to connect with potential voters. It facilitated the direct exchange of campaign messages, current information, and participation in political dialogue. Social media platforms provided a common platform for people to share their ideas, worries, and dreams about their nation, thereby creating the kind of participation and interaction that were associated with citizenship (Adebayo et al., 2023).

Furthermore, with the use of social media, political actors could address specific groups of voters using such data tools to entice the audience with their messages. Among the campaigns' unique features, it is possible to highlight the involvement of influencers and popular online figures in promoting campaign slogans. The targeted audience's awareness levels increased, thus making opinion leaders with thousands of followers play crucial roles in the campaign, as their support meant a lot to them. This made it possible for the political players to reach a wider population and gain the required trust and approval by pulling personalities from social media platforms (Nwafor et al., 2023).

As a result, social media democracy contributed to the encouragement of political discussion during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The audience could engage in debates over important socio-political issues, chiefly in real-time. The hashtags were considered crucial for organising discussions within specific topic areas and promoting specific narratives (Kolade et al., 2023). At the same time, it is necessary to emphasise that social media also played a role in

the rise of fake news, scandals, and hate speeches. People could spread fake news and rumours with relative ease, which only amplified the division of political opinions. In a synchronous study, Olabanjo et al. (2023) noted that social media was very essential and active during the 2023 Nigerian election but had some drawbacks and limitations. Moreover, even though the social media influence on the voters' behaviours and decisions is still unclear, the role of social media campaigns in offline activities like voting rates is still questionable (Bello & Kaufhold, 2023).

3.2 Challenges of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Nigeria

As a critical tool in political campaigns, social media offers significant advantages, notably in voter outreach, engagement, and cost-effective communication. However, these benefits come with considerable challenges, many evident during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election. One of the foremost concerns is the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation. False or misleading content can rapidly spread across platforms, often to influence voter perceptions or damage the reputations of political candidates. According to Bradshaw and Howard (2018), misinformation in political campaigns can potentially undermine the integrity of democratic processes, distorting public discourse and influencing election outcomes unfairly.

Another significant challenge is the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers, which limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Social media algorithms typically curate content that reinforces users' beliefs and contributes to political polarisation (Cinelli et al., 2021). During the 2023 elections, this phenomenon was evident in the aggressive, often hostile exchanges between supporters of opposing candidates, exacerbating political divisions and discouraging constructive debate (Bakir & McStay, 2018). Social media manipulation through automated bots and fake accounts further complicates the landscape. Ferrara et al. (2016) highlight how these tactics can artificially inflate the visibility of specific political messages or drown out dissenting voices, thus distorting public sentiment. The presence of bots also raises questions about the authenticity of online political engagement, which could have improved the legitimacy of conversations around electoral issues (Aondover et al., 2025).

Privacy and data security concerns have also arisen due to the heavy reliance on social media for political campaigns. Political candidates frequently gather large amounts of personal data to tailor their messaging and advertisements. This raises ethical questions regarding data privacy and the potential misuse of personal information (Bennett & Lyon, 2019). Such practices may compromise individuals' privacy and breach their rights without adequate regulations. Foreign interference represents another pressing issue. As Howard et al. (2018) highlighted, foreign actors can exploit social media platforms to spread disinformation that attempts to manipulate public opinion and influence the outcomes of elections. The risks are compounded by cybersecurity vulnerabilities, where candidates' social media accounts are susceptible to hacking and manipulation. Crawford et al. (2016) argue that stronger digital protections are essential to safeguard the integrity of political campaigns.

Despite these challenges, Nigerian political candidates have endeavoured to navigate the complex social media landscape (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022). Initiatives such as fact-checking organisations and partnerships with digital influencers came as countermeasures to misinformation and targeted messaging (Basse et al., 2024). However, addressing these issues requires collaboration among stakeholders, including regulatory authorities, to foster responsible social media use and improve digital literacy among voters (Basse et al., 2024). While social media can potentially revolutionise political campaigns in Nigeria, its impact is twofold. The balance between its advantages and drawbacks is delicate, and the role of social media in future

elections will largely depend on how effectively these challenges are addressed. As Bassey et al. (2024) suggest, ensuring that social media enhances rather than undermines the democratic process is paramount for the future of Nigerian elections.

3.3 Social Media and Political Participation

The suggestion that politics relies heavily on the media is grounded in the recognition of its influential role in shaping public perceptions and disseminating information. Authenticating this position, scholars such as Brugger and Milligan (2019), underscores the traditional media's crucial role in setting the public agenda and molding cognitive patterns, while Uwa and Ronke (2023) purports that the emergence of social media has further intensified and expanded this function to an unprecedented degree. Dunu (2018) strengthens the aforementioned stance by highlighting that the inclusivity of social media, coupled with its fusion of mass media and personal media formats, has created an environment where political engagement and discourse can occur with reduced hierarchical barriers among individuals from different social strata. The capability to swiftly and affordably reach vast and diverse audiences has rendered social media platforms highly appealing to political players (Obasi & Msughter, 2023).

The rise of social media has revolutionized political engagement by offering users a platform to actively participate in political discourse both online and offline (Ahmad et al., 2019). Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2020) highlight how this digital transformation has introduced new concepts such as netizenship, cyber-democracy, e-governance, and e-participation. Kellner and Bohman (2013) further elaborate on this shift, suggesting that the internet fosters a democratic postmodern public sphere, allowing citizens to engage in egalitarian discussions on societal matters. Social media platforms now serve as essential mediums for political engagement, where individuals express their viewpoints, share information, and connect with like-minded individuals (Aondover et al., 2025). Additionally, these platforms empower citizens to mobilize around political causes, leading to the emergence of virtual communities capable of influencing public opinion and policy-making processes.

Furthermore, social media platforms have facilitated greater accessibility to political information for citizens and heightened their capacity to interact with political figures. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have evolved into crucial channels for accessing news and updates, enabling individuals to stay abreast of political developments (Kim & Lee, 2019). Notably, Lilleker (2012), an expert in political communication, observes that social media fosters direct interaction between citizens and political leaders, providing politicians with a means to engage with constituents and address their issues. Social media facilitates two-way communication, allowing political figures and candidates to interact with voters and receive immediate feedback. Consequently, it has become standard practice for political candidates to maintain active profiles on these platforms (Yar'Adua et al., 2023).

However, there are about 32.9 active social media users in Nigeria (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024), a Lagos-based Digital Marketer said the just concluded election was a complete testament of what social media can do and how it can keep everyone involved. Social media has become a more comfortable platform for campaigns and the best medium to engage Nigerians especially the youths. People were more enlightened on the new electoral act even before the election. Even people that don't vote and haven't been voting got motivated through speculations from social media. It gave room for sensitization on PVC, it opened a public space for election monitoring and sharing of information while opening a wider view for users' opinion both those in Nigeria and diaspora (Vitalis et al., 2025).

Onyejelem and Aondover (2024) also state that social media also led to the emergence of more online political groups and pages which are regarded as Structure, making it possible for online meetings from any location thereby giving opportunities for people's opinion and involvement in politics. He said: "The just concluded election was an eye opener on Social Media power. A lot of information was possible to get and made public both positive and negative. Many attitudes were seen and reported by individuals. Election results were captured and reported boot by boot from individuals willingly through social media. We were able to follow the trends as it was all reported by individuals for public notice.

According to Mojaye and Aondover (2022) social media platforms offer a platform for people to voice their perspectives and interact with others, yet they also foster echo chambers and filter bubbles that expose users predominantly to content that aligns with and also social media limit the information that users encounter or consume online. This selective exposure reinforces ideological divides and obstructs constructive discourse among individuals holding contrasting viewpoints. The algorithms driving social media prioritize content that evokes intense emotional reactions or engagement, thereby propagating sensationalist or extremist opinions. Consequently, this amplification of the most extreme voices accentuates polarization, deepening divisions within a particular political spectrum (Yar'Adua et al., 2021).

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Moreover, the anonymity and virtual disconnect granted by social media can dehumanize those with differing opinions, leading to a propensity for hostile and uncivil exchanges. The consequence is a digital milieu characterized by animosity, impeding genuine comprehension and collaborative resolution. While social media's potential to unite individuals and facilitate political involvement is evident, it confronts the formidable challenge of nurturing polarization and impeding substantive dialogues between individuals harboring distinct political convictions and also offers a direct connection to people and thus allows for the spread of fragmented ideas.

IV. Conclusion

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria demonstrated the growing significance of social media as a powerful tool for political communication, voter mobilization, and citizen engagement. The study established that digital platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp played a crucial role in transforming campaign strategies by enabling political actors to communicate directly with voters, disseminate campaign messages rapidly, and foster interactive political discussions. Social media also expanded opportunities for political participation, particularly among young people, by increasing access to electoral information and encouraging civic engagement.

The analysis further revealed that social media facilitated the emergence of issue-based political conversations, grassroots mobilization, and citizen-led advocacy efforts that influenced public discourse during the election period. However, the benefits of these platforms were accompanied by significant challenges, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation, political polarization, online harassment, and the circulation of unverified

electoral content. These challenges underscored the complex and dual nature of social media as both a democratic enabler and a potential source of electoral distortion.

The paper concludes that social media has become an indispensable component of contemporary electoral politics in Nigeria, reshaping how political campaigns are conducted and how citizens engage with democratic processes. While its influence on voter mobilization and political participation was largely positive, maximizing its democratic potential requires sustained efforts to promote digital literacy, strengthen fact-checking initiatives, and encourage responsible online political communication. As digital technologies continue to evolve, social media will remain a critical arena for political engagement and electoral participation in Nigeria's democratic development.

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