

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA:
EXAMINING THE USE OF TWITTER IN ELECTION
CAMPAIGNING**

Master's Thesis

By

Ikefuama, Akachukwu Elijah

**Roads To Democracy: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Politics
and Culture**

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- 1. Examiner:** Prof. Dr. Sigrid Baringhorst
- 2. Examiner:** Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bergem

CONFIRMATION

I hereby confirm that this Master Thesis is entirely my own work and that I have not used any additional assistance or resources other than indicated. All quotations, paraphrases, information and ideas that have been taken from other sources (including the Internet as well as other electronic sources) and other persons' work have been cited appropriately and provided with the corresponding bibliographical references. The same is true of all drawings, sketches, pictures and other illustrations that appear in the text.

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Name (in capital letters)

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DEDICATION

This master's thesis is dedicated to God for His abiding grace and presence in my life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to begin by acknowledging the divine presence of God Almighty, whose guidance and blessings have been my unwavering source of strength and inspiration throughout this academic journey.

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Abstract

The integration of social media to election campaign is not new in Nigeria. What is new is the degree at which political parties and political aspirants have integrated social media into their election campaign processes in recent times. What is also new is the change in the adoption of social media in election campaigning: from one which was majorly top-to-bottom to bottom-to-top. In the foregoing regard, this study critically examines the various ways Twitter was used during the 2022/23 presidential elections in Nigeria. Employing mixed methods, the study shows that during the presidential elections, Twitter was used by election actors for voters' education and mobilization, campaign trail updates, funds mobilization, reputation management and damage control. Despite the enormous usefulness of Twitter during the campaign, the study observes new challenges facing the integration of technology into politics and political participation in Nigeria. Such challenges include the misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithms in accessing users' data, and amplifying the extant problems of hate speech, fake news, and propaganda during and after election periods. The study opines that, while AI is an amazing innovation and can be rightly employed in enhancing political participation in Nigeria, its misuse could be disastrous for Nigeria's fragile democracy. Consequent upon this, the researcher recommends that non-legal approaches should be employed to addressing the problem. Among other things, the Nigerian government should introduce robust sensitization programmes geared towards creating awareness regarding the issues of fake news and hate speech and how ordinary citizens can contribute to curbing them.

Keywords: *social media, political participation, election, election campaign, 2023 presidential election.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has become a powerful social and political force in society. This has been made possible by contemporary developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which have further propelled a paradigm shift in the manner of information dissemination and social interaction across all institutions of society (Maigari et al., [2018](#); Okolie et al., [2021](#)). Shirky (2011) demonstrates that “social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors — regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organisations, telecommunications firms, software providers, and governments” (p. 28). Importantly, from the primary purpose of engineering and enhancing social interaction, there has been a dramatic shift in the usage of social media for social movement mobilization and, more recently, for both political communication and political participation globally.

Generally, literatures abound that have examined the functions and influence of digital media (or more broadly, the Internet) on protest movements, political communication, political behaviour and voter behaviour (Enjolras & Steen-Johnsen, [2017](#); Shirky, 2011; Zeitzoff, [2017](#); e.g. Okolie et al., [2021](#)). If anything, these studies agree that, “the Internet revolution is radically transforming the political landscape in such a way that Internet tools such as Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr are not only serving as propaganda tools by political parties and candidates but also determining the outcome of elections and protest movements in many climes” (Okolie et al., [2021](#), p. 2). As a practical demonstration of social media’s power, in recent times in modern history, no major social or protest movement of international reputation has been successfully conducted without being aided by social media. This is applicable to the protest movements in Iran and Moldova, as it is to the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States of America (Gross, [2009](#); Maqbool, [2020](#)).

However, while the presence of social media has been politically and socially consolidated in what van Deth ([2016](#), p. 1) refers to as “vibrant democracies” around the world, the use of social media for election campaigning is only a recent phenomenon in ‘unstable’ or

'developing democracies' in the global south. This is true for Nigeria, where the use of social media, not just for political campaigning but also for social movements, is only recent in the country's political history.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, studies abound that have examined the use of social or digital media in advancing socio-political causes in Nigeria (e.g., Abubakar, 2012; Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016; Ibrahim, 2013; Ikefuama, 1996; Onwuegbuchi, 2012; Shadrach & Apuke, [2020](#); Uwalaka & Watkins, 2017; Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). Broadly speaking, the above studies contend that social media provides an increasing level-playing ground for the constituent power (the masses) to lend their voices against social injustice, societal decay, and human rights abuse. On a positive note, Shadrach and Apuke ([2020](#)) noted that politicians in Nigeria "use the media to campaign and create awareness about their activities among citizens rather than interact with the citizens to know their needs and opinions" (p. 14). Broadly speaking, other studies (e.g. Fenton & Barassi, [2011](#); Gladwell, 2011; Putnam, 2000) are rather very sceptical regarding the role of social media in contemporary socio-political activism.

Meanwhile, in his unpublished research, Ikefuama (2022) made remarkable findings regarding the various ways social media (especially Twitter) was utilised during October 2020 EndSARs protest movements in Nigeria. Ikefuama (ibid) argued that, through the use of Twitter hashtags, police brutality in Nigeria received the over-due attention it deserved in the international community. For the first time, international media platforms — CNN, BBC, DW, Al-Jazeera News, New York Times — did a live coverage of the protest, after tweets regarding the protest went viral on Twitter. Many scholars (e.g., Ewepu, [2021](#); Uwazuruike, [2021](#)) have, however, observed that though the protest did not change the status quo of things between the Nigerian Police Force and the Nigerian public, it was very significant in many respects. Above all, the protest helped in setting the foundation for the political awakening and consciousness that preceded the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

On the other hand, quite recently, just like the research on protest movement, the use of social media for election campaigning in Nigeria has also received considerable attention from scholars (e.g., Madueke et al., 2018; Ndinojuo et al., [2015](#); Okolie et al., [2021](#); Opeibi, [2019](#); Udenze, [2021](#)). The study by Opeibi ([2019](#)) appears to be the closest to this current study since it specifically sampled Twitter as a tool for election campaign in Nigeria. However, the study was only limited to the embryonic period (i.e., 2011-2019 election

campaigns) in the use of social media (Twitter) for election campaigning in Nigeria. Consequent upon the foregoing, this current study extensively examines the use of Twitter in the 2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria.

Several factors contribute to the growing research interest on the intersections between social media and election campaign in Nigeria. Firstly, there is an increasing cost of physical campaigning (especially the use of billboards for campaigns) and the upward increment in the cost of airing campaign jingles on radio and television stations across Nigeria. Second is the exponential increase in Internet penetration and social media usage in Nigeria, coupled with a corresponding increase in political awareness among the youths (the demographic which constitutes a great proportion of social media users in Nigeria). In this regard, studies by Kemp ([2015](#) & [2023](#)) revealed that, as of January 2023, Nigeria had the highest number of Internet users in Africa with 122.5million users, corresponding with an Internet penetration of 55.4 percent. Though smaller than the number of Internet users in Morocco and South Africa, the above figures are much higher than Internet penetration in Nigeria in 2015 when Internet penetration stood at 38%, with 70.3 million Internet users and a population 185.5 million (Kemp, [2015](#) & [2023](#)).

Nonetheless the above, compared to advanced democracies around the world, research on the use of social media (specifically Twitter) in election campaign and political participation (in Nigeria) appear to be very minimal. There are three factors that have contributed to the low volume of research discussing the role of social media in Nigeria's democracy. First, the country's electoral democracy is young. As such, the country has not had enough time to come up to speed with recent developments in electoral democracy globally. In fact, it is on record that the country only transited from military rule to democratic leadership after the dramatic death of the military ruler, General Sani Abacha, on June 8, 1998 (Campbell & McCaslin, [2019](#); Egwaikhide & Isumonah, [2001](#); Njoku, [2001](#)). Meanwhile, following the General Elections held on February 27, 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became the president of Nigeria. Fundamentally, "the 1999 transition of Nigeria from military to civilian, democratic government, was a defining moment in Nigerian history, representing the beginning of the longest, uninterrupted government since independence in 1960" (Campbell & McCaslin, [2019](#), para. 1).

Interestingly, almost coinciding with the time of Nigeria's transition to democracy, the Internet was already making waves into Nigeria. According to eShekels Associates' 2001

study (as cited in Adomi, [2005](#)), “The web became available in Nigeria in 1996 with full Internet access by 1998, and by 2001 there were over 150 ISPs licensed by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)” (p. 259).

Essentially, the introduction of the Internet into Nigeria, without any doubt, set the foundation for what would transform the Nigerian electoral space a decade later: 2011. In this regard, some researchers have argued that 2011 was the year of great experience for the use of social media for election campaigns in Nigeria (Okoro & Nwafor, [2013](#); Okoro & Santas, [2017](#); Olubunmi & Folorunso, [2020](#)). In this context, Udejinta (2011) observed that “one remarkable thing about the 2011 general elections was the adoption of social media especially the Facebook by the politicians, the political parties and the electorates as a platform for political participation.” Consequently, it is safe to conclude that that President Goodluck Jonathan was to Nigeria what Barack Obama was to the United States of America, because of the former’s pivotal use of social media to drive his election campaigns in 2011. In this regard, Okoro and Santas ([2017](#), p. 116) support that:

It is on record that since President Barrack Obama of the United State of America efficient use of the social media, there has been a growing use of new media technologies in facilitating political communication in contemporary times. Obama’s victory is largely attributed to the massive deployment of social media by his campaign organization which provided inspiration to other world leaders. For instance, President Goodluck Jonathan and other political candidates equally used the social media to execute their political campaign during the 2011 presidential election.

Since Goodluck Jonathan heralded the first (massive) experiment in the use of Facebook in election campaign in Nigeria, other platforms (such as Twitter) have continued to play an increasing role in Nigeria’s elections. This has made scholars to believe that while political aspirants in Nigeria now use new media to interface with voters during election campaigns, the Nigerian electorates find the new media “tools very effective to connect with their political representatives or candidates as it is the only medium that gives them free and unlimited access to stay connected with happenings in the political space” (Okoro & Santas, [2017](#), p. 132). To provide more insights in the foregoing, this current study is focused on the various ways Twitter was utilised by politicians and voters during the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria.

There are two schools of thought regarding the use of Twitter in election campaigning in Nigeria. One school of thought – mostly supported by older politicians in Nigeria – argue

that the popularity of a political candidate on Twitter has no significant impact on electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Put differently, proponents of this school of thought argue that voters' choice of political candidates in general elections in Nigeria is not influenced by political communication on social media (Okoro & Santas, [2017](#)). This school of thought is premised on the impact of vote buying, ballot box snatching, and other forms of electoral frauds intrinsic to elections in Nigeria (Aluaigba, [2016](#); Nwangwu et al., [2018](#)).

The second school of thought argues that, though the impact of social media on the electoral outcomes of elections in Nigeria remains under contention, platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, offer cost effective alternatives to or supplement traditional media and physical methods in election campaigning in Nigeria (Dzisah, [2020](#)). The argument of this latter school of thought is hinged on two core factors. First, the foregoing partly explains why politicians open social media accounts, and a major reason for hiring social media influencers to attack political opponents and push narratives on social media that favour them (Nwonwu, et al., [2023](#)). Second, the usefulness of Twitter in election campaigns also explains one of the major reasons why the ban on Twitter in Nigeria was “temporarily lifted” in January 20, 2022, some months before the official commencement of 2022/23 election campaigns in Nigeria (Adeyimi, [2022](#); Akinwotu, [2022](#); Obiezu, [2022](#)). Despite the ban, people still operated their Twitter handles without restrictions through the use of the Virtual Private Network (Adedeji, [2021](#)). If anything, the ban was a self-inflicting sabotage on the government, which never envisioned the possibility of people utilising VPN to evade the ban and spreading their agitations beyond the Nigerian digital space. The result was that the Nigerian government realised the trans-national importance of Twitter for political and social participation in Nigeria (Anyanwu et al., [2022](#)).

Figure 1: showing a screencast of a Twitter user explaining why the Ban on Twitter in Nigeria was lifted.



Source: Twitter.

The purpose of the research is not to contend whether social media (or in specific terms, Twitter) is very impactful on elections in Nigeria. The focus here is to investigate the various ways Twitter was used in the 2022/23 presidential elections campaigning in Nigeria. Essentially, the specific focus on the use of Twitter for presidential elections campaigns as sampled in this research is not only for time-convenience. The choice also reflects how important Twitter has become in socio-political discourse and for mass mobilisation in Nigeria. Its importance in promoting the virality of the October 20, 2020 EndSARS protests in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised, too (Akerere-Popoola et al., [2022](#); Amaize, [2021](#)).

Studies abound that examine the uniqueness of Twitter for political communication unlike other microblogging platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn). For instance, Rossi and Orefice (2016) examined the contributions of both Twitter and Facebook in the Italian General Elections in 2013. Similarly, other studies (e.g., Cataldi et al., [2010](#); Opeibi, [2019](#)) have observed that, on Twitter, people write and share texts that have to do with current and relevant news stories or information. Another study further observed that, “Twitter has quickly become an important online space for political communication practice because it successfully connects ordinary people to the popular and influential” (Graham et al., 2016, as cited in Opeibi, [2019](#), p. 6).

In their study, Stier et al. ([2018](#)) observed that, “on Twitter, most user accounts are publicly visible and accessible even for non-registered audiences,” and since “its usage is centred around topics, the retweet feature facilitates the diffusion of political information beyond the direct follower network via two-step flow processes” (p. 54). This feature is dissimilar to what is obtainable in other platforms, such as Facebook, where many profiles “are private and its usage based on one-way or reciprocal friendship ties” (Stier et al., [2018](#), p. 54). On many occasions, politicians utilize Twitter as an “index of public opinion” (as Kreiss, [2016](#), p. 1487 puts it). The implication of this, as Stier et al. ([2018](#)) argue, is that targeted political campaign messages on Twitter and other social media platforms have the potential to create domino or spillover effects on other media (p. 55). Because of the spill-over effect of Twitter, and “following the successful use of Twitter for election campaigns and civic engagement in more advanced democracies, Nigerian political actors are now deploying this microblogging technology for purposes beyond private communications and personal social networking services” (Opeibi, [2019](#), p. 6). This renewed interest in Twitter by politicians is not surprising at all. This is because a study had revealed that, “data published in Twitter’s own ad planning tools show that Twitter’s potential ad reach in Nigeria increased by 4.6million (+1,421

percent) between the start of 2022 and early 2023” (Kemp, [2023](#), Twitter User Growth section, para. 1). This suggests a growth in the usage of Twitter during the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns.

In addition to the above peculiarities of Twitter, the focus on Twitter in this research is premised on other factors. They include: 1). Social media research is very broad. Therefore, it was necessary to select one of the platforms as a case study for this study. 2). The impact of Twitter on protest movements in Nigeria, specifically the October 2020 EndSARS protest in Nigeria, has instigated the researcher’s curiosity to further research regarding how the platform has been useful for political causes in Nigeria. 3. Another factor responsible for the choice of Twitter is the unique feature of Twitter which allows for real-time or on-the-spot coverage of events. 4). Finally, another factor is the unique feature of Twitter in the area of affording users the ability to easily catch up with trendy topics by keying into hashtags and selecting what topic(s) they are interested in.

This study is structured in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research whilst Chapter two provides the literature review for the research. Other interesting sub-topics in Chapter two include sections on the nature of elections (campaign) in Nigeria before 2022, and the theoretical and conceptual framework for the research. Chapter three include the methodology of the research, while Chapter four represents the Result and discussion of the study. Chapter five includes the summary, conclusion, and recommendations for policy makers and future research.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The following below are the objectives of this study:

1. To investigate and analyse the diverse ways in which Twitter was utilized by the key presidential aspirants, political parties, and citizens, during the 2022/2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria.
2. To identify and critically access the extant and new challenges associated with the use of Twitter in election campaigning in Nigeria.

1.3 Research Problem and Questions

Apparently, “the use of social media as formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow” not only in advanced democracies but also in “unstable” democracies, such as Nigeria (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013, p. 13). As earlier noted, Nigeria’s first attempt at the integration of social media in election campaigning was heralded by Goodluck Jonathan during the 2010/11 elections campaign (Okoro & Nwafor, [2013](#); Okoro & Santas, [2017](#)).

Ever since 2011, the use of social media for election campaign has undergone significant changes, while extant practices (such as physical campaigning and the use of traditional media) have continued. The significant changes in the use of social media for election campaigning in Nigeria are largely as a result of the continuous advancement in ICT globally, and the upward increase in both Internet penetration and social media usage in Nigeria. Further to this is the recent, unprecedented increase in the number of youths who, according to Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), came forward to register and collect their Permanent Voters’ Card (PVC) ahead of the 2023 general elections (Dibie, [2022](#); Ukpe, [n.d.](#)). Accordingly, “of more than 9.5 million Nigerians who completed their registration process, 7.28million or 76 percent of new registrants, who are within 18 to 34 years of age,” were youths (Nzeagwu, [2023](#), para. 1). Given this, ahead of the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, there was an increasing awareness by political parties that youths constitute over 50 percent of 93.5 million Nigerians, who were eligible to vote (Busari, [2023](#)). The forgoing gets a bit more interesting when reference is made to the findings by Sasu ([2023a](#)) that the age group mostly targeted by social media advertising in Nigeria is between the ages of 18 to 34years – which coincides with the PVC demography mentioned earlier. In view of this, one cannot but conclude that “the young men and women with these statistics constitute a critical mass whose participation in public life vis-à-vis” election campaigns cannot be neglected or ignored (Nzeagwu, [2023](#), para. 4).

Notwithstanding the increasing importance of social media (or for the sake of this study, Twitter) for election campaigning in Nigeria, there is no comprehensive knowledge regarding the various ways political parties and their candidates utilise new media to reach out to and mobilizing voters during election periods. Consequent upon this, the researcher strongly believes that given the nature and uniqueness of the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, there is a need to understand the changing nature of new-media-

driven election campaigns in Nigeria. This would be especially important for the purpose of understanding the unfolding challenges associated with new-media-driven election campaigns in Nigeria and how to effectively tackle them going forward.

To the end of addressing the above problem, this study aims at answering the following research questions below:

1. What were the various uses of Twitter in the 22/2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria?
2. What are the extant and new challenges facing the use of Twitter in election campaign in Nigeria?

1.4 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the use of Twitter in the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Meanwhile, this study is important for a number of reasons. First, it is hoped that this study “in its practical value will educate politicians and political parties on the importance of social media in contemporary political communication” (Okoro & Santas, [2017](#), p. 118). This is especially important since the older demographic of politicians and political strategies/experts in Nigeria seem not grasp that the conduct of elections campaigns have significantly changed from one that was solely physically or traditional-media-driven, to one that is hybrid with an overriding emphasis on online campaign due its comparative advantages: cost effectiveness, real-time impact, and diverse audience.

Importantly, the research would sensitise experts and policymakers about the need to strike a balance between regulating social media and protecting freedom of speech on social media. The research findings would help policymakers to develop and implement robust policies that enhance and protect social media users’ right whilst promoting users’ transparency and accountability before, during, and after elections campaigns in Nigeria.

Twitter has been sampled for this study among the various social media platforms given its unique features that distinguish it from other social media platforms. Other factors include its impact on socio-political advocacy and participation in Nigeria (e.g., the October 2020 EndSARS protest), and the increasing number of Nigerian users on its platform in recent

times. Accordingly, therefore, this study would highlight the general importance of the platform for political participation in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study would highlight the need to encourage political sensitization and digital literacy programme for both electorates and politicians, in order to fully harness the advantages of campaigning on social media. The researcher believes that digital literacy programmes would empower the masses (the electorates) with digital literacy skills that would enhance informed political participation and reduce the problems created by fake news, propaganda, and hate speech, such as witnessed during and after the 2022/23 presidential election campaign. Similarly, this research would highlight some of the new challenges confronting election campaign in Nigeria, and how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) – the body under the Nigerian law saddled with the responsibility of coordinating elections and regulating the activities of political parties in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the research would shade light regarding the ways and different strategies employed by the top three political parties during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, and how those strategies can be fine-tuned in line with world best practices globally. The researcher is optimistic that, implementing such strategies would considerably improve elections campaigns in Nigeria in the nearest future.

Lastly, the study would open up more avenues for future research around the intersections between social media and political participation and political communication in Nigeria.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This research shall investigate the use of Twitter in the 2022/2023 presidential elections campaigns in Nigeria. The research primarily examines the various uses of Twitter by the three major political parties and candidates in the presidential election: Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress (APC). The research would further provide an understanding regarding the nature of past election campaigns (i.e., 2011, 2015, and 2019) in Nigeria. Essentially, such understanding would help in determining whether the nature of election campaigns has changed over the years, what those changes might be, and what

the future holds for election campaigns in Nigeria. The research would, furthermore, study the strategies utilised by political actors to reach out to voters in order to consolidate their support base during the 2023 presidential elections.

This research is limited in scope since it focuses on the use of Twitter for elections campaigns in Nigeria during the 22/2023 presidential elections. Hence, the findings will be limited in its applicability to other countries, apparently because of the divergence in social, political, and cultural configurations in other climes.

According to a recent study, “at the start of 2023, 53.8 percent of Nigeria’s population lived in urban centres, while 46.2 percent lived in rural areas,” thus demonstrating a rural-urban divide (Kemp, [2023](#), Nigeria’s Population section, para. 4). In addition to this urban-rural divide in Nigeria, the country experiences discrepancies in literacy levels, and an uneven distribution of Internet and electricity, which are all critical to the use of social media. The consequence of this is a digital divide in Nigeria, where those in urban areas are expected to be more active on social media than rural areas. In this regard, the research might not have captured the experiences and opinions of segments of the Nigerian population with limited access to social media or the Internet, thus likely skewing the findings towards a digitally connected demographic. However, the research mitigates this problem a bit by relying on secondary data provided by previous quantitative studies, including the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), the Atedo NA Peterside (ANAP) Foundation, and the Nextier reports.

Finally, ethical considerations regarding accessing and processing personal data of individuals other than public officers posed limited access to some kinds of data for this research. In a similar vein, politicians and political parties were reluctant scheduling interviews with the researcher and releasing certain policy documents (e.g., party social media strategy documents) for this research. These politicians and political parties were afraid that certain sensitive information, if released to the researcher, might be accessed by political rivalries. This foregoing limitation further posed a significant impact on the kinds of data collected and processed, and this may have further affected the result and outcomes of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided in five distinct sections, including 1) Conceptual clarification, 2). Theoretical framework, 3). The nature of election campaigning in Nigeria before 2022, 4). Previous research on social media and election campaigning in Nigeria, and 5). Gap in the literature.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

There are important keywords that are central to understanding this study. They are: Political participation, election, election campaign, and social media.

There is no overarching consensus among researchers with regards to the meaning of political participation. Essentially, one reason for the presence of several definition variants for the term is because strong democracies globally, according to van Deth ([2016](#)), “Are characterised by a continuous expansion of the available forms of participation” (p. 1). This continuous expansion has further created some sort of dilemma for researchers to either stick to “using a dated conceptualization of participation and excluding many new modes of political action or stretching their concept to cover everything” (ibid). To address this dilemma, only a matching enlargement of the concept of political participation will fulfil our need to wring more knowledge about the workings of democracy from reality, if the range of political involvement keeps growing (Van Deth, [2016](#)).

Arnstein (1969) defines it as “a categorical term for citizen power” (p. 216), whilst Verba and Nie (1972) define it as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (p. 2). However, for the sake of this study, political participation can be defined as the extent to which citizens’ day-to-day activities influence politics (Van Deth, [2016](#)). Additionally, Van Deth ([2016](#)) contends that there are several defining characteristics of political participation:

First, it is understood as an activity (or action)—simply watching television or being interested in politics does not constitute participation. Political participation, second, is voluntary and not ordered by a ruling class or obliged under some law. Third, participation refers to activities of people in their role as non-professionals or amateurs and not, say, as politicians, civil servants, or lobbyists.

Fourth, political participation concerns government, politics, or the state in broad senses of these words and is not restricted to specific phases (such as parliamentary decision-making processes or executing laws) or to specific levels or areas (such as national elections or contacts with party officials). Thus, any voluntary, nonprofessional activity concerning government, politics, or the state is a specimen of political participation (Van Deth, [2016](#), p. 2)

The forgoing is corroborated by another study that defined political participation as:

(...) any number of voluntary activities undertaken by the public to influence public policy either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make those policies. Though typically associated with voting in elections, political participation includes activities such as working on political campaigns, donating money to candidates or causes, contacting public officials, petitions, protesting, or working with other people on issues (Longley, [2021](#), p. 1).

From the above definition, it appears that elections and elections campaign are some of the activities that the citizens participate in that constitute political participation. Following this, two questions remain open: first, what is election? Second, what is election campaign?

Eulau et al. ([2023](#)) define election as “the formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting” (para. 1). On the other hand, according to Fasakin et al. ([2017](#)), election campaigning “is an organised effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group” and “usually determines how the real election would look like” (p. 950). More so, election campaigning is the “means by which candidates and political parties prepare present their ideas and positions on issues to the voters in the period preceding election day” (“Open Election Data Initiative,” [2022](#)., para. 1).

Essentially, political aspirants employ many methods to engage voters and send their political messages. Some of such methods include: advertisement on print materials, television and radio stations, social media, and public gatherings (ibid). In this regard, Nigerian politicians adopt a myriad of methods and ‘unusual behaviours’ in conducting their campaigning, including “identifying themselves with the common mean in the streets (something they would not have done when there was no election)” (Fasakin et al., [2017](#), p. 950). Some of those ‘unusual behaviours’ by Nigerian politicians include drinking or eating among the downtrodden of society (Ajaja, [2022](#)), frying bean cake (Isaac, [2015](#); Oyeleke, [2019](#)), joining public transport (Ayo-Aderele, [2017](#)), and turning into a hairstylist (Ikeji, [2019](#);

Oyeleke, [2019](#)) – which are all a temporary appearance they put up to ‘demonstrate’ (howbeit deceitfully) that they identify with the common man in society.

Meanwhile, just like the concept of political participation, there is single definition for social media. Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010 (as cited in Bello & Kolawole-Ismail, [2017](#)) defined it as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user generated contents” (p. 3). In his study, Chijioke, 2013 (as cited in Okoro & Santas, [2017](#)) defined social media as “simply Internet-based interactive platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis” (p. 120). However, for the sake of this study, social media is defined as “online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation, and connectedness” (Mayfield, 2008, as cited in Madueke et al., [2018](#), p. 48). In the context of this study, social media refers to Facebook, Twitter (recently changed to “X”) Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and others. Although Twitter rebranded its name to ‘X’ on July 23, 2023 (Wilson, [2023](#)), the original name – Twitter – is used throughout this study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study employed two theories as a roadmap to addressing the research questions and problems. They are: 1). Digital Divide, and 2). the Hybrid Media system.

2.2.1 Digital Divide Theory

Proponents of this theory contend that “that there is an economic and social gap between the population of a nation and their access to technologies pertaining to information and communication” (“Theory of Digital Divide,” [n.d.](#), Introduction section, para. 1). Furthermore, according to communication theory experts, digital divide is determined by three factors, including: 1) information accessibility 2) information utilization, and 3) information receptiveness. It is possible for a specific geography to have access to technology but lack the capacity to optimally harness the information from such technologies. Little wonder that, Theory of Digital Divide ([n.d.](#), Determinants of Digital Divide section, para. 3) argues that the difficulty in accessing information “cannot be solved merely by transplanting more technology.” It goes further to note that:

People need to know how to utilize the information that they get from, say, the Internet. An illiterate person will not be able to use a computer. People need to be receptive to the information as well (Theory of Digital Divide, [n.d.](#), para. 3).

Applying the theory of digital divide to the Nigerian context, one is bound to discover a sharp divide in the distribution of smart phones and the use of social media and Internet in Nigeria. In this regard, Mba ([2022](#), para. 3) finds that “approximately 61 percent of Nigerians living in rural areas are unconnected” to Internet “compared to 40% in urban areas.” Another report by the EU *European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2023 Final Report* ([2023](#), p. 34) illustrated that “almost half of the Nigerian population has access to the Internet, which is mainly utilised through smartphones, owned by about 45 per cent of the population, mostly in urban areas” Essentially, this shows that most people in urban places in Nigeria have more access to Internet and social media, compared to those in rural areas. Reasons for this is not far-fetched: it is related to the issue highlighted by the digital divide theory, where (digital) illiteracy affects the optimal utilization of social media and the Internet in rural areas in Nigeria.

Therefore, the digital divide theory is applicable to Nigeria in the context of the uneven distribution of electricity and the unequal social as well as Internet penetration between rural and urban areas in Nigeria. Thus, because of such digital divide and given that a good number of eligible voters in Nigeria reside in rural areas, the use of social media for election campaign targeted at those rural areas might be less effective than urban areas.

However, while it offers some important explanations (howbeit in part) regarding the reluctance by politicians to optimally integrate social media in their election campaigns, as this study would demonstrate later, the digital divide theory does not depict the full picture. This is because, though rural areas in Nigeria generally experience low Internet penetration, campaign news still get to them through radio and television stations. Connectedly, the above-mentioned types of traditional media, sometimes, obtain their news content from posts on social media platforms, before verifying such information or contents and posting on their channels. Consequently, this convergence between social media and traditional media is expected to remarkably bridge the gap created by the supposed digital divide. The inefficiency of the digital divide theory, thus, necessitates the adoption of a supporting theoretical construct: the hybrid media system theory.

2.2.2 The Hybrid Media System Theory

The Hybrid Media System Theory, proposed by Andrew Chadwick, explores the dynamic interplay between traditional media and digital media in contemporary societies. It highlights how these media systems interact, intersect, and shape each other's influence on politics and society.

In the context of election campaigns in Nigeria, the theory is plausible since it explains how the use of social media and traditional media complement and compete with each other. While traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) remains influential and reaches a broad audience (especially among the older demographics), social media platforms, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, have gained significant traction in Nigeria. Political actors, including candidates and parties, use social media to amplify their campaign messages, share news, and engage with voters online. In terms of their complementarity, traditional media outlets may also integrate social media contents, such as tweets or social media users'-generated videos, into their coverage, thereby extending the reach of political communication. This interplay between traditional and social media reinforces each other's medium impact, creating a broader and more diverse information ecosystem during election campaigns in Nigeria.

Another interesting advantage the hybrid theory has over the digital divide theory is its insight into the convergence of gatekeeping functions (performed by traditional media) and the gate-watching functions (performed by social media). In this regard, social media users in Nigeria play a vital role in organising, curating, and sharing election-related content, which can remarkably influence traditional media's coverage. In fact, during the 2023 presidential elections campaigns, as this study would later demonstrate – contents that went viral on social media attracted the attention of traditional media outlets, and this further led to wider dissemination of certain campaign messages. As a result, this challenges traditional media's gatekeeping function and allows citizens to shape media agendas to some extent.

In relation to this study, “selective exposure and polarization” is another issued discussed by the hybrid media system theory as one of the problems associated with the use of social media for elections campaigns, as with other day-to-day usage of social media platforms. One of the challenging experiences using social media for political communication and political participation is social media's personalised content delivery which is powered by algorithms. In this regard, the hybrid system theory argues that users of social media may

only be exposed to contents that align with their beliefs and preferences. This would further reinforce polarization and create echo chambers for users. Interestingly, such selective exposure may have far-reaching consequences for political participation and election campaigns, since politicians many manipulate algorithms in delivering tailor-made contents to specific electorates, to the extent of changing the latter's voting behaviours.

The hybrid system theory makes sense in explaining the disruptions within the campaign media ecosystem in Nigeria. This is because, before now, media ownership, and, by extension, access to information was largely concentrated in the hands of the political elites and the state. For instance, Television Continental (TVC) and the Nation Newspapers are controlled by the APC; Africa Independent Television (AIT) is owned by a member of the PDP; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) is usually controlled by the ruling party. Though Channels Television and Arise Television are privately owned, some of their anchors are often affiliated to one of the political parties: for example, Reuben Abati of Arise TV was the PDP Deputy Governorship candidate in Ogun State in the 2019 elections. As expected, more often than not, those media stations release information or provide narratives that are only favourable to their financiers or paymasters. Simultaneously, they produce contents that are primarily aimed at damaging the reputation of their financiers' rivalries. However, with the emergence of social media as a real-time source of information, citizens have been provided with alternative, uncensored avenues to information access. The result is media fragmentation, where people have more access to information beyond the confines of traditional media.

Additionally, social media has further changed the status quo of voters from consumers of media to active (i.e., commenting and posting on social media) and passive (liking, retweeting or reposting on social media) participants of the political process. On the other hand, politicians have benefitted from the disruption in information access and distribution since they now have multiple communication channels that cover both social media users and traditional media consumers in the country, thus further widening their political coverage.

Contextualizing the hybrid media system theory to the Nigerian situation, one is bound to understand why the three main political parties (i.e., APC, PDP, and LP) contesting in the presidential election in Nigeria never relied on physical campaigns or on their appearances on traditional media to win the elections. This is because the media directors of the big three

political parties understood that there is a certain demographic of Nigerians – the youths – that can mostly be reached on social media.

2.3 The Nature of Political Campaigns in Nigeria Before September 2022

Since this study focuses on the nature of the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, it becomes important to examine how election campaign was conducted in Nigeria before 2022. This would be necessary in understanding the level of disruption that transpired in the conduct of election campaigns between September 2022 (the official commencement of election campaign) and February 23, 2023 (the official end of the presidential election campaign).

In this regard, the first remark to be made concerning the **nature of election campaign pre-2022 is that the period provided the regulatory frameworks for election campaigns in Nigeria**. Election campaigns are enshrined in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act, 2022. Both legal and constitutional instruments saddle INEC with the responsibility of regulating political parties and their conduct of election campaign in Nigeria.

Interestingly, Section 94 (1) of the Electoral Act (as cited in Abiola, [2022](#)) mandates political parties to commence their election campaigns 150 days before the election date and finalise same a day before the election date. Further interesting guidelines on the conduct of election campaigns are well stipulated in the Act. For instance, Section 92(1-3) of the Electoral Act (as cited in Abiola, [2022](#)) prohibits certain conducts at political campaigns. Such acts, according to Election Act, 2022 (as cited in Abiola, [2022](#)), include:

1. A political campaign or slogan shall not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal, or sectional feelings.
2. Abusive, intemperate, slanderous, or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reactions or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns.
3. Places designated for religious worship, police stations, and public offices shall not be used-
 - a. For political campaigns, rallies, and processions; or

- b. To promote, propagate or attack political parties, candidates or their programmes or ideologies.

Whether or not political parties and their candidates have been adhering to the above guidelines in conducting their election campaigns remains under contention. However, what is obvious is that **pre-September 2022 set the legal and constitutional framework for election campaigns in Nigeria.**

Importantly, since 1999 – which marked the transition of Nigeria to democracy – until the beginning of 2011, election campaigns in Nigeria were mostly conducted physically and further consolidated with the use of traditional media stations (e.g., radios, televisions, and newspapers). A major reason explaining why physical campaigning was preferred by politicians before 2022 was the frequent power outage issues communities (especially in rural areas) in Nigeria face (Sasu, [2023b](#)). A study had revealed that, while global average electricity penetration stood at 90 percent, as of 2018, 110.7 million Nigerians, out of a 195.8million estimated population had access to electricity. This was quite high compared to what was obtainable in previous years. For instance, in 2010, the number of Nigerians with access to electricity was 76.1million out of a population of 159.6Million people (Odunsi, [2020](#)).

Figure 2: A photo of *Muhammadu Buhari*, the Former Presidential Candidate of APC (2015-2023), in a campaign rally.





Source: [The World](#). (February 19, 2015).

Another factor that contributed to the relative emphasis on physical campaigning in elections in Nigeria before 2010 is the fact that most politicians in Nigeria hardly had a visible and active presence on social media before 2015, as Table 2 below shows. This may be connected to the fact that most Nigerian politicians are old in age. The Table 2 below indicates that (n=4) 66.6% of the most prominent politicians only signed up on Twitter from 2015. Additionally, (n=2) 33.4% of politicians only signed up on Twitter before 2015.

Table 2: A sample of prominent politician and the date of signing up on Twitter.

SN	Name on Twitter	Political Portfolio	Username	Date
1.	Goodluck Jonathan	Former President	@GEJonathan	11/2015
2.	Abubakar Bukola Saraki	Former Senate President	@bukolasaraki	5/2010
3.	Atiku Abubakar	Former Vice President	@atiku	8/2010
4.	Muhammadu Buhari	Former President	@MBuhari	12/2015
5.	Prof. Yemi Osinbajo	Former Vice President	@ProOsinbajo	12/2015
6.	Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan	Former Senate President	@DrAhmadLawan	10/2017

People’s Democratic Party 

All Progressive Congress 

NB: Two political parties are sampled above because they were the most prominent parties in Nigeria at the presidential level between February 6, 2013, and May 26, 2022. **Data source:** Twitter.

The forgoing argument emphasizes that **pre-2022 marked a preponderance of physical campaigns, with very minimal presence of a structured campaign ecosystem on social media.** In this regard, physical campaigns, especially for presidential elections in Nigeria, took the form of the top presidential contestants scheduling rallies on a specific day and at specific locations throughout the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The campaign does not end after the specific day scheduled for the election campaign rally. Posters (such as shown on figures 3 and 4) are pasted on strategic walls on streets, stickers put on public transports, and, in some cases, billboards are mounted at strategic locations where they can be visible to passers-by.

Figure 3: Photo showing a cluster of 2015 Campaign posters on a wall showing Goodluck Jonathan, the Peoples’ Democratic Party presidential candidate.



Source: [Yahoo News](#) (March 30, 2015).

The campaign posters and billboards are usually provided by the publicity secretaries of political parties and distributed to strategic locations by party loyalists. Adeyemo (personal communication, October 19, 2022) buttresses on the above point:

When you want to campaign, definitely you have some committee members who are permanently within campaign locations. They would be going from door to door, from house to house, from village to village, to campaign even after the candidates must have campaigned there physically. That is the work of the committee members every day, until the election is over. Maybe the candidate himself will just come there once or twice before the election, but there are some people who are permanently positioned there. They also monitor the registration and collection of the permanent voters' card (M. Adeyemo, personal communication, October 19, 2022).

Figure 4: A Photo showing a billboard mounted in Kano State, Nigeria, by a support organisation of Goodluck Jonathan ahead of the 2015 presidential elections.



Source: [Yahoo News](#) (March 26, 2015).

Notwithstanding the preponderant emphasis on physical campaigns, as consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Apuke & Tunca, [2018](#); Asemah, 2017; Bello & Kolawole-Ismail, [2017](#)), **pre-2022 election campaign served as a litmus test – a successful one at that – in the attempt to integrate social media in election campaign in Nigeria.** In this regard, Maigari et al. (2018) established that “the use of social media specifically during elections first became noticeable in the preparations for the 2011 general elections” (Maigari et al., [2018](#), p. 18). Put differently, in 2011, Goodluck Jonathan became the first prominent Nigerian politician to herald the massive use of social media in election campaign (Facebook specifically) in election campaigns (Tattersall & Oluoch, [2010](#); Webster, [2010](#)).

Figure 5: screencast showing the Facebook profile of GEJ as he announced his intention to contest in 2011.



Source: [Michael Tanen Baum](#), September 15, 2010.

Further corroborating the above position, Bello and Kolawole-Ismail ([2017](#), p. 6) have observed that:

President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria successfully utilized Facebook and Bulk SMS to interact with Nigerian citizens during the 2011 presidential elections. Jonathan even took the unprecedented decision of announcing his presidential candidacy on Facebook. The bid was announced on 15th September 2010 to over 217, 000 Facebook followers. By the Election day on 16th April 2011, Jonathan had over half a million fans on Facebook. It is noteworthy that in Nigeria’s electoral process in 2011, social media tools were employed for

political campaigns by most notable political parties such as the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC).

However, unlike the 2011 election campaign, “the 2015 elections witnessed the rapid deployment of Twitter by the two main political parties, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and their key candidates” (Opeibi, [2019](#), p. 6). For instance, “to further buttress the increasing importance of this initiative for political activities in Nigeria, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), now in the opposition, recently announced four (4) new official multilingual Twitter accounts” (Opeibi, [2019](#), p. 6). Apparently, this growth in the number of politicians and political parties on social media by this time was indicative of the growing number of social media users in Nigeria from 13.8% in 2011 to 36% in 2015 (Sasu, [2023a](#)).

Figure 6: Screencast showing former president Goodluck Jonathan re-election bid announcement in 2014, as captured by Fox News.



Source: [FoxNews](#) (November 17, 2014).

The 2015 presidential election campaigns were unique to anything ever experienced in Nigeria’s election campaign structure, until that time. It was arguably the first time politicians from mainly the two dominant political parties (the APC and the PDP) used “hashtags, such as #MeetGej, #Febuhari, #Marchoutjonathan, #WhyiwillvoteGEJ, #MarchforBuhari, #GMB15” to enhance their campaign message to the electorates in Nigeria (Apuke & Tunca, [2018](#), p. 4). In the foregoing regard, Emetumah’s 2016 study (as cited by Apuke & Tunca, [2018](#)) concluded that, the role of Twitter hashtags in Nigeria’s 2015 elections was “inevitable

because it was deployed to shape the opinions of many youths, increasing their political awareness and consciousness, which in turn resulted in an unbelievable win of the opposition party (APC) over the ruling party (PDP)” (p. 5). The foregoing is consistent with the findings by Maigari et al. (2018) that, “one noticeable feature” of the 2015 election campaign “was the expanded use of hashtags as flashpoints for political discussion and advocacy. On the eve of the 2015 elections, between 40 to 50 active hashtags linked to Nigerians actively discussing the elections were identified” (p. 20).

Figure 7: A screencast of the Twitter handle of the APC presidential candidate and winner of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, utilising hashtags to campaign.



Source: Twitter.

Figure 8: A screencast of showing Professor Yemi Osinbajo, the APC Vice-Presidential Candidate in the 2015 elections, utilizing hashtags (i.e., #ThingsMustChange).



Source: Twitter.

Interestingly, the decision of the two major political parties – PDP and APC – to hire professional public relations/communications team during the 2015 general elections further demonstrated the heightened importance of social media in election campaigning in Nigeria. In addition to hiring the services of David Axelrod, Obama’s Chief Campaign Strategist (Gray, 2015), Maigari et al. (2018, p. 20) further observe that:

Statecraft, a Lagos-based communications company, was responsible for APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari's digital drive intended to appeal to younger people. In recognition of the integral role of the social media, the former president Goodluck Jonathan appointed Obi Asika, the Chairman of Social Media Week Lagos (an international conference focused on change in social media technologies) as his Senior Special Assistant on social media.

Meanwhile, another point worth noting is that **pre-2022 set the foundation for the use of public debates in presidential election campaigns in Nigeria**. It is on record that the earliest presidential election debate in Nigeria was aired on NTA between Bashorun M.KO Abiola, the flagbearer of the Social Democratic Party, and Bashir Tofa, the National Republic Convention (NPC) in the 1993 election, which was unfortunately annulled by Ibrahim Babangida (Mbutor, [2015](#); Oyedeji, [2018](#)). It is believed that, until date, the 1992/93 debate has been the best presidential campaign in Nigeria's history (Mbutor, [2015](#)). Remarkably, this tradition of campaign debate among top presidential candidates has continued until date, with extensive coverage by media houses across Nigeria: from radio to television stations.

Figure 9: L-R Middle: Picture showing Peter Obi, the People's Democratic Party Vice Presidential Candidate, and Yemi Osibanjo, the Vice Presidential Candidate of the All Progressive Congress in a debate ahead of the 2019 Presidential Elections.



Source: [Premium Times](#) (December 14, 2018).

Though the earliest election debate in Nigeria is usually traced to 1992/93 (as discussed earlier), a more systematic procedure for election debate never happened until 2015. By this latter time, debates were not only organised for presidential candidates, but for various gubernatorial candidates across Nigeria. These debates, moderated by supposed non-

partisan individuals, are usually issue-based, and are aimed at addressing the problems facing the country. For instance, in the run-up to the 2019 Elections, the two main Vice Presidential Candidates (as shown on figure 9), took their turns to address questions regarding the prevailing issues of corruption, infrastructural deficits, and unemployment in Nigeria. One of the highlights of the debates was the statement by Peter Obi (PDP's vice presidential candidate in the 2019 presidential elections), that, in the effort to fight corruption in Nigeria, government cannot close down the shop (meaning stop governance) and be chasing thieves. Professor Yemi Osibanjo responded by noting that, if the government allows criminals to steal, there would be no more inventory (Onyeji & Ogundipe, [2018](#); Tosin, [2018](#)).

Furthermore, **pre-2022 election campaigns marked the beginning of vote buying as an election campaign strategy**. The exact year this practice commenced in Nigeria is not readily available; however, it can be stated for a certainty that its origins predates 2008. Nwagwu et al. ([2022](#)) define vote-buying as “the transactional process through which voters offer their votes for sale and political parties or public office aspirants or their agents’ bargain to buy the votes from the sellers” (p. 1). Nwagwu et al. ([ibid](#)) further argue that this phenomenon “is synonymous with selling and buying goods and services to the highest bidder.” Other studies abound that have studied the phenomenon. For instance, Bratton ([2008](#), p. 621) observe that:

(...) instead of providing opportunity for public deliberation *Nigerian* elections campaigns are mainly moments for politicians to engage in mass mobilization and the manipulation of electoral rules” *such as vote buying*. All too often, campaigns strategies feature material inducement and political inducement.

In their studies, Danjibo and Oladeji (2007) linked the causes of vote-buying in Nigeria to a high illiteracy level, endemic poverty, and the practice of constitutional engineering. Nwagwu et al. ([2022](#)) viewed vote-buying as a strategy used by politicians during election campaigns to manipulate voters’ behaviour in Nigeria. More so, Lucky ([2014](#)) argue that “money politics and vote buying have taken the centre stage” politicking in Nigeria (p. 99). He explains that a strong reason for the prevalence of vote buying is “because parties and candidates have shown by their conduct during political campaigns that good party manifestoes and integrity of candidates jostling for public offices are no longer sufficient to guarantee electoral success” (Lucky, [2014](#), p. 99).

Figure 10: A screencast of a National daily, *TheGuardian*, reporting an incident of vote-buying in Edo State in south-southern Nigeria



Source: [GuardianNewspapers](#), 2020, September 17.

In Nigeria, many people attend election campaigns with the hope of receiving wades of Naira (the Nigerian currency) as well as food staples, and not necessarily because they want to hear the political candidates explain the programmes they would embark upon, should they win the polls. Consequently, since the capacity to lead or previous leadership performance is not an important factor influencing election result, the incentive to perform is significantly weak among Nigerian politicians (Lucky, [2014](#)). Lucky ([2014](#), p. 104) further explains the implications of vote-buying, thus:

Another negative impact of money politics and vote-buying on good governance is that the winner in the elections when he occupies a public office that gives him access to public fund becomes more prone to corruption. For instance, if he is a legislator, he becomes more prone to receiving gratifications to promote and support the private interest of his sponsors. There is now a popular feeling, indeed thinking, among a coterie of Nigerian politicians, that political contest is a high risk investment opportunity. The higher the risk the greater the returns (ibid).

Essentially, though money is very indispensable to successfully conduct elections, the extreme use of money with the intent of buying votes is inimical to good governance (Lucky, [2014](#)). Unfortunately, the foundation of vote buying built before 2022 spilled over during the 2022/23 presential campaigns in Nigeria, and the implications of the nefarious phenomenon has continued to become the bane of good governance and development in Nigeria (Ebuka, [2023](#); Opejobi, [2023](#)).

More so, pre-2022 election campaigns marked the advent of election propaganda and hate speech as a campaign strategy. Several studies (e.g., Asemah, 2017; Fasakin et al., [2017](#); Apuke & Tunca, [2018](#)) argue that, one of the highlights of pre-2022 (especially the 2015) election campaigns in Nigeria was the foundation stone that was laid by the APC and the PDP with regards to the use of fake news, hate speech, and propaganda during election campaigns in Nigeria. Corona's 2011 study (as cited by Okolie et al., [2021](#)) argues that, while it is primarily aimed at electorates, campaign propaganda:

(...) intends to exert its influence with emotive effects and not through reasons by exaggerating the candidates' qualities and concealing their defects, just like it would happen with products. Political propaganda, made by skilled specialists and foreign advisors, intends to interpret, and answer surveys, study different aspects of electoral behaviour, to offer the people what they want to hear (p. 2).

Okolie et al. ([2021](#), p. 2) further contend that, campaign propaganda:

is creatively designed not just to provide concrete and feasible programmes and agenda of a political party or its candidates, but also to convince the electorate through popular sentiment. Indeed, campaign propaganda serves a dual purpose of educating electorate on the proposed plans and programmes of the incoming government and committing voters to exercise their franchise during elections.

Without any doubt, the foundation for the use of social media for propaganda in election campaign was set by the APC, and further reinforced by the PDP in the 2015 general elections. Corroborating this, Fasakin et al. ([2017](#)) have observed that:

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria, like other elections, have come and gone but the different events and issues surrounding the elections cannot be ignored by analysts, observers, and scholars. The campaign period of the elections saw many hate speeches being used by politicians in the country. Most of these derogatory speeches and advertorials were used by the members of the two leading political parties in the country – People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) (p. 949).

Segun's 2015 study (as cited by Fasakin et al., [2017](#)) emphases, that:

Hate and divisive speeches dominate political rallies as the elections heat up a political space already notorious for its violence. Voting will take place February 14 across the country. Hate and divisive speeches take on more frightening dimensions online via social media, notably Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by cashing in on the fault-lines: religion and ethnicity (p. 949).

Commenting further on this issue, Okolie et al. (2021) have observed that:

(...) three kinds of propaganda featured prominently in the build-up to the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election, namely ethno-religious propaganda, externally oriented propaganda, and politicians-activists-propelled propaganda. The first typology reflects the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Nigerian state in which political actors seek to manipulate the sensibilities of voters. Above all, the diverse character of the Nigerian state is a proximate condition for sensitivity and political mindfulness of the citizens while electing leaders. Through well-crafted ethno-religious messages, political actors, and loyalists of the two major contestants aroused the sentiments of the voters (p. 8)

Ayo-Ayederere's 2015 study (as cited by Fasakin et al., 2017) discovered the use of certain derogatory words by the two popular political parties — the PDP and APC — in driving their campaign agendas both on social media and on television channels. Ayo-Ayederere's 2015 (as cited by Fasakin et al., 2017) observed that, the verbal attacks were not restricted to derisive jabs; the psychological attack was also utilised in traditional media advertisements, social media platforms and, in other cases, inter-personal discussions. Further buttressing the role played by television stations, Fasakin et al. (2017, p. 951) revealed that:

During the campaign, many political enthusiasts and politicians were seen on the different television programmes attacking their political opponents with derogatory speeches during political rallies and even interviews. Television documentaries, political jingles and used by politicians to attack and condemn their political opponents. Notable ones were the documentary aired on African Independent Television (AIT) on March 1st, 2015, to condemn the persons of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC Chieftain) and the APC presidential candidate, General Muhammad Buhari (Now president). This documentary made the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission to indict and sanction the two television stations alongside 21 other broadcast stations for violation of its code.

Figure 11 show how the supporters of the APC utilised Twitter to support and spread hate speech, lies, and deceit against Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ), the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party. This had a remarkable effect on the public perception of the person of GEJ and his cabinet members, and furthermore affected his re-election bid in 2015.

Figure 11: A Twitter screencast showing an APC supporter insulting Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Yale PhD graduate, economist, and current Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. Okonjo-Iweala served as the Minister of Finance during GEJ's tenure (2011-2015)



Source: Twitter

The above Twitter user (as shown in Figure 11) did not act alone in abusing Okonjo-Iweala. He had accomplices such as Sowore (as demonstrated in Figure 12 below).

Figure 12: A Twitter screencast showing an APC Supporter requesting for a petition be signed and forwarded to Yale University for Okonjo-Iweala’s PhD be withdrawn.



Source: Twitter.

Further corroborating the level of social media propaganda utilised by the APC in the 2015 general election, David Hundeyin, an international investigative journalist, had this to say:

What the APC demonstrated during the 2019 elections was to basically weaponize its dominance over the traditional media space. The rest of the Nigerian mainstream media was heavily and obviously slanted in the direction of the ruling party. Which was kind of similar to what was done in 2015 where they somehow achieved media dominance. APC’s determination to substitute campaigning for propaganda that was

definitely a key feature of elections in 2015 (D. Hundeyin, personal communication, July 8, 2023).

Hundeyin further affirms that:

I think that prior to 2015, Nigeria had never seen that type of political campaign before. I think prior to 2015, Nigerian political campaign messaging was sort of low level. It was not really sophisticated. 2015 was the first time we started seeing sophistication in the messaging, the channels, and the methods of social media campaigns. We had people like David Axelrod, Obama's Chief Campaign Strategist in the 2012 election, who was working for APC in 2015. The sort of institutional capabilities that they built up within the ranks of the APC spilled over to 2023. It was in the 2015 elections that we started seeing for the first time in our political landscape the phenomenon of having a political formation having a fully funded and well-resourced propaganda centre where you have 100 young people sit down with computers and their job was to push out narratives into the social media space and basically create an artificial narrative that favours that a particular political formation. (D. Hundeyin, personal communication, July 8, 2023).

A minor search on the Internet – as demonstrated on figure 13 below – confirms the assertion by Hundeyin that APC recruited the services of David Axelrod during the 2015 election campaigns.

Figure 13: A screencast from Washington Free Beacon confirming Axelrod's role in APC's 2015 presidential election campaign.



Source: Washington Free Beacon (February 9, 2015).

Though both leading parties (PDP and APC) contributed to the spread of fake news and propaganda (especially in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria), it seems inevitable

agreeing with the position of some scholars (Anya, [2015](#); Mbutor, [2015](#); e.g., Ukwu, [2015](#)) that the historic defeat of former president Goodluck Jonathan by Buhari in 2015 was the inability of his new media team to control the narratives on social media, and effectively manage the massive deployment of propaganda against his government (Mbutor, [2015](#)).

2.4 Previous research on social media and election campaigning in Nigeria

The role of mass media in election campaigns has been a topic of interest for many researchers.

Jungherr ([2015](#)) appears to be one of the earliest scholars to specifically and extensively review literatures regarding the use of Twitter in election campaigns. Fundamentally, the study focused on the problem of developing a common body of evidence and shared approaches to data collection and selection with regards to the study of the use of Twitter in election campaigns.

To address the above problem, the 2015 study by Jungherr reviewed that 127 “studies published in peer-reviewed journals or in peer-reviewed conference proceedings that focus on the use of Twitter by political parties, political candidates, and publics during election campaigns and during campaign-related high-profile mediated events—such as political talk shows or televised leader’s debates” (Jungherr, [2015](#), pp. 72). The study further examined “the available research with regards to findings on the use of Twitter by parties, candidates, and publics during election campaigns and during mediated campaign events” (ibid).

Jungherr [2015](#) study’s finds that one thing problematic about previous research on the topic of Twitter in election campaign, as the author argues, is that such research have been approached from different methodologies and perspectives and fields (such as communication science, computer science, and political science). Consequently, this has invariably led to “a fragmentation of research focusing on the uses of Twitter in election campaigns, with studies seldom addressing most of the available evidence” (ibid). To fill the above research gap in literature, the study presented “such an account, offering researchers a collection of robust findings, enabling them to offer supporting or contrasting evidence” (ibid).

No other study was more direct in providing clear explanation regarding how politicians utilise various social media platforms for political communication than Stier et al. (2018). In their study titled “Election campaigning on social media: Politicians, audiences, and the mediation of political communication on Facebook and Twitter,” Stier et al. (2018) examined the 2013 federal election in Germany, with the objective of understanding “whether election candidates address the topics most important to the mass audience and to which extent their communication is shaped by the characteristics of Facebook and Twitter” (p. 50). The study revealed that political aspirants in Germany preferred Twitter to discuss their policies and provide updates about their campaign while preferring Facebook for the mobilization of voters (Stier et al., 2018). The study observes that, contrary to previous studies (Druckman et al., 2010; Lilleker et al., 2011; Stromer-Galley, 2006), politicians use the Web in an interactive manner rather than conservatively. The study further reveals that “campaign strategies and political communication in general are mediated by varying sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms” (Stier et al., 2018, p. 66). While the study by Stier et al. was centred around Germany, a lot can be applied to the Nigerian context.

In his study, Opeibi (2019) investigated how the integration of social media networks into politics are altering party politics and election campaigns in Nigeria, particularly how these technologies foster new methods of engaging as well as persuading voters. Opeibi (2019) argues that social media platforms have been beneficial in the area of “politically-related activities such as electioneering campaigns, image branding, special identity-laundering, voters identification strategy, crowdsourcing, as an electoral marketing platform, as an interactive platform to post comments and respond to queries from online users, connecting followers, supporters and ordinary citizens; and increasing participation in the global discourse” (p 7). Additionally, the study established that the 2015 elections in Nigeria was a major turning point in the rapid deployment of Twitter by the two main political parties, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and their key candidates” (Opeibi, 2019, p. 6). The study is limited in the sense that it only examined “the growing awareness of the use Twitter for election campaigns and civic engagement between 2012 and 2015” (ibid). However, the study is still very relevant for this current study and for future research because it provides a background knowledge of how election campaigns were conducted before its current state.

In their study, Okolie et al. (2021) examined the contributions of propaganda in the 2015 presidential election and post-election governance in Nigeria. With the use of the rational

choice theory, the researchers were able to demonstrate how politicians take advantage of social media to foster campaign messages that are rooted in ethno-religious sentiments to influence electoral outcomes (Okolie et al., [2021](#)). A key finding by the study was that 2015 was a watershed in the use of propaganda and hate speech in election campaigns in Nigeria, resulting to the unprecedented defeat of president Goodluck Jonathan by Muhammadu Buhari during the 2015 presidential elections. However, the research showed that nonetheless the numerous promises delivered by the then opposition party (APC), five years after their election success, APC was yet to deliver on its campaign promises. The party, instead, employed social media to spread propaganda regarding its activities. To tackle the challenge of fake news and propaganda, the study proposed the expansion of the constitutional roles of INEC, widespread political education, and the creation/consolidation of essential democratic institutions.

The above study by Okolie et al. ([2021](#)) is consistent with the study by Apuke and Tunca (2018). In their study, Apuke and Tunca ([2018](#)) explored the implications of social media usage in electoral processes and campaigns in Nigeria. Their study argued that, the increased availability of smartphones has propelled electorates to publicize messages during election campaigns, thus creating new implications for electoral democracy in Nigeria. Apuke and Tunca ([2018](#)) further observe that, social media are not only used before elections, but also after elections in Nigeria. The implication of this, as Apuke and Tunca ([2018](#)) argue, is that “whilst such approach may develop new chances for political campaigns, mobilization, engagement, and participation, it could also create misinformation geared towards discrediting a political adversary” (p. 2).

An interesting finding by Apuke and Tunca ([2015](#)) was that several hashtags, such as “#MeetGEJ, #Febhuhari, #Marchoutjonathan, #WhywillvoteGEJ; #MarchforBuhari, #GMB15,” #thingsmustchange, #ChangeisComingToNigeria were created by the key political parties to create awareness on Twitter during the 2015 elections. Summarily, the study established that the two prominent political parties in the 2015 presidential election majorly utilised Twitter for the announcement of their political aspirants, and to accuse each other of electoral malpractice.

In their study, Nwagwu et al. ([2022](#)) defined vote buying “as the transactional process through which voters offer their votes for sale to political parties or public office aspirants, or their agents’ bargain to buy the votes from the sellers” (Nwagwu et al, [2022](#), p. 2). They refer

to Nigeria's electoral democracy as "cash-and-carry," where "competition is very high, the process seems to be auction sales where the voters sell to the highest bidder" (p. 2). They established that vote-buying was phenomenal during the 2015 and 2019 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Further commenting on this, Adigun, 2019, (as cited in Nwagwu et al., [2022](#), p. 2) affirms that, "the 2015 general election was one of the most heavily monetized election which saw the two leading candidates tried to outspend each other." Furthermore, Nwagwu et al. [2022](#) study established that vote-buying was executed in the two election cycles with brazenness and guts in collusion with electoral officers and security personnel. As a campaign strategy to influence voters' behaviour, vote-buying does not necessarily start on the day of the elections. During election campaigns, food items (majorly rice, salt, and seasoning cubes) and money are targeted at Nigeria's rural areas characterized by endemic poverty, to sway their votes away.

Citing Sanni's (2019) study on the perceptions of vote-buying in Nigeria, Nwagwu et al. ([2022](#)) found that "the prevalence of vote-buying and perception that votes were actually purchased from voters placed south-south zone highest with 24% prevalence and (76%) perception of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. Furthermore, in the same election, north-west recorded 23% (53%); north-central, 21% (64%); southeast, 19% (73%); southwest, 19% (71%); and northeast, 18% (52%). The study concluded that, while vote-buying is not peculiar to Nigeria (since it is practiced in several places around the world (e.g., Kenya, Pakistan, Botswana, South Africa, Dominican Republic), the degree to which it is practiced in Nigeria is very alarming.

In his study, Bratton ([2008](#)) investigated the relationship between vote buying and violence in election campaign in Nigeria. He defines vote-buying "as infractions of public morality" (p. 622). The study finds that, based on survey-based estimates, the number of Nigerians who have experienced vote-buying in their lifetime are one out of five people. Accordingly, the study emphasized that the practice of vote buying during election campaigns reduces the quality of the outcomes produced by the elections. The result is that "vote buying enable(s) the elevation into elected office of cronies, criminals and strong-arm godfathers who are singularly unfit for public service" (Bratton, [2008](#), p. 631). The study recommended that, to address the menace of vote-buying, which predominantly affects rural communities with a high level of poverty, the attainment of a degree of economic and social development that cuts prevailing inequalities between political elites and ordinary citizens would unquestionably be one good place to begin with (Bratton, [2008](#)).

The research by Mbutor ([2015](#)) was an interesting read. The author observed that, political communication and election in Nigeria, in recent times, have “been influenced by the American system, in the technical adoption of new media, personal attack on candidates rather than issues, portrayal of images in the media and the hiring of experts as consultants to political parties” (Mbutor, [2015](#), p. 14). If anything, one of Mbutor’s strongest arguments was his position that Goodluck Jonathan lost the 2015 election because of the poor job his public relations team executed. According to him, compared to the APC media team, the PDP media “were more reactive rather than active” (p. 11). Mbutor ([2015](#)) believes that the 2015 general elections in Nigeria followed from the “new trends” that “occurred during the process of media in politics” (p. 13). Mbutor (2015) further affirms that, the 2015 election campaigns marked the dramatic decline in the role of traditional media in election campaign ecosystem in Nigeria. Based on the decline, Mbutor ([2015](#)) rightly predicted that, the most important battlefield in future elections in Nigeria would be on the Internet. This, according to Mbutor ([2015](#)), is because of the continuous modernization of politics globally by reason of advances in Information, Communication Technology (ICT).

The study by Fasakin et al. ([2017](#)) is another interesting research tracing the trajectory of hate speech in the election campaign ecosystem in Nigeria. The authors defined hate speech as “utterances, typed documents, advertorials, musicals or any form of literature that are used to attack an individual, a group – religious, social, political, business - gender or race” (Fasakin et al., [2017](#), p. 948). They contend that, “during campaign, many political enthusiasts and politicians were seen on the different television programme attacking their political opponents with derogatory speeches during political rallies and even interviews” (p. 951). Notable among such instances of hate speech used in the 2015 campaign was the statement by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asiri, a former Niger Delta militant, noting that the 2015 election was a do-or-die affair. Also, the first lady of Nigeria (as at 2015), as the study observed, was alleged to have directed her party supporters to stone those who voted against PDP. Though the research was limited to the role played by television stations in both spreading and enhancing fake news in the 2015 election, the study provides very useful insights regarding the origins and trajectory of fake news in election campaigns in Nigeria.

Maigari et al. ([2018](#)) examined the impact of the Internet on elections in Nigeria. Their study was consistent with previous studies that found that, compared to the 2011 general elections, “there were tremendous changes observed during the 2015 General Election in Nigeria: the use of Internet increased exponentially especially among the youths who use

social media for different purposes” (Maigari et al., [2018](#), p. 18). The study further argues that “technological innovations have not only increased mass participation during election and governance but have also challenged the traditional and orthodox media that are under full control of the government” (p. 22). Consequently, this “widened the scope of freedom of speech and association, which hitherto were censored and dictated by the ruling government,” have become a rallying ground for citizens to be more actively involved in politics (p. 21).

The findings of Maigari et al. ([2018](#)) are somewhat similar to the study by Bello et al. ([2019](#)). Bello et al. 2019’s study focused on highlighting the social media strategies employed by the two prominent political parties during the 2019 presidential election campaigns. Among other things, the study observed that, “while both the ruling party and minority parties focused on promoting their candidates, PDP adopted two strategies in advertising and publicising their political aspirants and attacking APC and its aspirants during the 2019 presidential election campaigns (Bello et al., [2019](#)). The study further discovered that, whilst APC’s presence on social media was less active than that of PDP, the latter attacked the former through social media and gained support for its political aspirants. This was dissimilar to APC’s strategy of depending on news from traditional news media to attack the opposition party – PDP (Bello et al., [2019](#)).

2.5 Gap in the Literature

As the review of previous studies has demonstrated, there is a growing body of research on the intersection between social media and election campaigns in Nigeria. Understandably, such increase in literature is reflective of the general interest in the contributions of ICT to politics globally. However, the reviewed literature has predominantly focused on the 2011, 2015, 2019 elections, with no exploration of the 2023 presidential election campaign. Interestingly, given the rapid evolution of social media platforms and their increasing integration into political processes in Nigeria, there is a research gap in understanding how the use of Twitter in election campaigns has evolved over time, particularly in the context of the recent elections: the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

More so, most of the reviewed literature were generally focused on social media as a broad category, with no specific research on the various ways politicians and the electorates use

Twitter during election campaigns in Nigeria. For instance, while Bello et al. (2019) did not specifically sample any social media platform for their study, Opeibi (2019) mostly examined hashtags as a Twitter strategy employed by political parties and their candidates during election campaigns in Nigeria. Additionally, since the above studies all pre-dated 2022/23, and given that a lot of things have changed viz-a-viz the use of Twitter in election campaigning in Nigeria, previous studies cannot be wholly relied upon as sufficient body of knowledge for the current state in the adoption of Twitter in election campaigns in Nigeria. Consequent upon this, the researcher strongly believes there is a great need to provide an up-to-date body of knowledge regarding the different ways Twitter is utilised in election campaigns, using the 2023 presidential elections campaign as a case study.

Importantly, this empirical study adds to the existing knowledge on the broader contributions of social media to political communication, political participation, and elections campaign in Nigeria. Nonetheless the literature gap, these previous studies are very relevant for this current study in terms of facilitating the analysis of the change and continuity in the conduct of election campaigns in Nigeria from 2011 until 2023.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into four sections, including: 1) Research design and approach, 2) Data collection techniques, 3) Sampling strategies and criteria, and 4). Data analysis techniques.

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study utilised case study research design, which significantly helped the researcher to examine the subject matter critically. The choice of Nigeria as a case study for this research is predicated on three reasons. First, Nigeria plays important leadership roles in the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As such, most African countries look up to Nigeria for democratic leadership. Second, the country enjoys the reputation of being the most populous black country in the world, with enormous human and natural resources. The third reason is the most recent changes in the integration of social media in election campaigns during the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns in the country. The researcher believes that such level of integration has been unprecedented in the electoral history of the country, thus requires immediate investigation.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

To comprehensively explore the use of Twitter during the 2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria, a mixed-methods approach was utilized. This approach combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Quantitative data collection: A digital survey was conducted among a diverse group of 200 participants. The survey was distributed widely, allowing willing respondents to participate to fill it out. The structured questionnaire gathered quantitative data on participants' demography, social media usage patterns, engagement with political content on Twitter, and perceptions of the influence of Twitter on their voting behaviour. Due to the dramatic change to Twitter's API access effective February 9, 2023, it was not possible to

electronically collate quantitative data from Twitter. However, this problem is partly solved by referring to secondary data contained in the EU EOM ([2023](#)) and the Nextier reports ([2022](#)).

Qualitative data collection: Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with key respondents from each of the three main political parties participating in the 2023 presidential elections. These political parties include: the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP), and the All Progressive Congress (APC). Additionally, the researcher interviewed one INEC official to understand how the Commission utilised Twitter during the election campaigns. All these interviews aimed to capture the perspectives of party representatives on their strategic use of Twitter for election campaigning between September 2022 and February 2023.

Additionally, a content analysis of the Twitter handles of the three main presidential candidates (i.e., Peter Obi of LP; Atiku Abubakar of PDP; and Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC) presidential candidates was conducted. The analysis mainly focused on the aspirants’ activities and contents posted 30 days preceding the elections: January 22 until February 23, 2023. This is in addition to a random content analysis of their supporters’ Twitter handles, as well as some traditional media on Twitter. Several aspects of the presidential aspirants’ social media handles were analysed. They included the aspirants’ frequency of tweets, their use of hashtags, and their various uses of Twitter during the election campaigns. Significantly, the researcher strongly believes that the frequency of tweets by the three presidential candidates would provide solid insights into the level of engagement and communication between them and the public, thus reflecting the presidential aspirants’ commitment to a top-to-bottom or an interactive campaigning. More so, it is believed that, by examining the aspirants’ strategic use of hashtags, the study would provide an understanding of how some facilitated message dissemination, fostered online community engagement, and enhanced the visibility of campaign content, amplified the potential reach and impact of election messages during the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria.

More so, the researcher used secondary data to support the primary data. A critical document used for this study is the EU EOM final report ([2023](#)), which extensively and quantitatively studied the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The researcher strongly believes that such secondary data would provide the relevant information for this study.

3.3 Sampling Strategies and Criteria

The sampling for the survey was non-probabilistic and based on convenience, allowing willing respondent to participate. Due to time and resource constraints, it was difficult to physically deploy and collate the survey responses. As such, the survey was deployed electronically, and the respondents capped at 200.

Meanwhile, the qualitative data sampling involved purposeful selection. For the in-depth interviews, a minimum of three representatives for the in-depth interviews were chosen from each of the three main political parties that participated in the presidential elections, based on their roles and positions within their political parties. On the other hand, the Twitter handles of the three presidential candidates and a random sampling of some of their supporters were chosen for the qualitative content analysis for the study. The three political parties include: the LP; PDP; and APC. Though sixteen political parties registered with INEC to participate in the election campaigns and the general elections, it was not possible to sample all of them. This limitation was due to time and financial constraints needed to pursue such an elaborate study involving the sixteen political parties.

The choice of the above-mentioned political parties is further explained. First, the flagbearers of the three political parties constitute the three major ethnic groups – and as a matter of fact, the largest voting bloc – in Nigeria, based on their population percentage share. Those ethnic groups largely decide who becomes the president of Nigeria. While each of their exact population size is yet to be determined, a study (i.e., “Central Intelligence Agency,” [2023](#)) puts their 2018 estimate as 36%, 15.2%, and 15.5% for the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba ethnic groups respectively. In this regard, while Atiku Abubakar of the PDP represented the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group; Peter Obi of LP represented the Igbo ethnic group, while Bola Ahmed Tinubu of APC represented the Yoruba ethnic group.

Second, the three political parties, based on the outcomes of the presidential elections, scored the highest number of votes declared by INEC after the 2023 general elections. For instance, PDP scored 6,984,520; LP scored 6,101,533; APC scored 8,794,726 votes (“Explore prior Presidential election results,” [n.d.](#), para. 4; “2023 presidential election results by states (declared by INEC),” [2023](#), para. 1). Thirdly, the three political parties sampled for this study are the largest political parties in Nigeria, based on their national spread and membership at the Nigerian parliament (called “National Assembly”). In the Upper chambers (‘the Senate’) of the Nigerian legislature, as of March 24, 2023, PDP had 29 seats, LP, 8;

while APC won 57 seats. On the other hand, in the Lower Chambers (“House of Representatives”), PDP won 102 seats; LP, 34; while APC won 162 seats (Mbagwu, [2023](#)).

Nonetheless the time and financial constraints earlier mentioned, the researcher believes that the flagbearers of the above-mentioned three political parties are sufficient representation for this research.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Generally, the data collected through the primary sources (e.g., in-depth interviews and field surveys) were crossed referenced with the existing literature to decipher whether the findings of the current study support or diverge from the outcomes of previous studies.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Furthermore, the field survey data was subjected to simple descriptive analyses. Simple descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency, were used to summarize participants' responses. This is similar to the survey analysis method Shadrach and Apuke ([2020](#)) utilised in their previous study.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed interviews. The interviews were coded in a way as to identify recurring themes related to the various usage of Twitter by the three aspirants and their political parties during the 2022/23 presidential election campaigning. By applying thematic analysis on interview responses, it is hoped that the participants' perspectives and experiences would support and enrich the study findings.

Additionally, a content analysis of the Twitter handles of the three presidential candidates was performed, focusing on the types of content posted, and the frequency of certain strategic words. This was done to undercover the core campaign messages and issues which the presidential aspirants emphasized during the election campaign. A comparative analysis of the key presidential aspirants' multimedia usage was also analysed so as to provide readers with the understanding of the visual elements of the election campaigns and their implications for political imagery and branding.

By utilising both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship existing between Twitter and election campaigning in Nigeria. The researcher believes that the research findings from both data sources will be triangulated to provide answers to the research questions and problem.

In the next chapter, the results of the data that were collected and analysed will be presented and discussed in details.

CHAPTER 4

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter answers and discusses the research questions: 1). What were the various uses of twitter by the three main political parties, their candidates, and supporters in the 2022/23 presidential campaign? 2). What are the extant and new challenges facing the use of Twitter in election campaign in Nigeria?

4.1 Various uses of Twitter in the 2023 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria

The following were the uses of Twitter in the 2022/23 presidential election campaign, including 1). Voter engagement and mobilization, 2). Voter education, 3). Crisis management, 4). Fundraising, 5). Campaign updates, 6). Candidate image laundering, and 7). Propaganda, fake news, and fact-checking.

4.1.1 Voter education, engagement, and mobilization

One of the outstanding features of the 2023 presidential election campaign was the amount of voter education that went on during the period. Efforts were made by political parties at mobilising people for PVC registration and collection, procedures on how to cast their votes properly, and at sensitizing potential voters against vote-buying. Some studies (e.g., Idowu & Odeyemi, [2021](#); Odeyimi & Mosunmola, 2015) revealed that, in previous elections, “INEC used its social media platforms to sensitize the public regarding PVC registration, the scheduled date for elections, and other firsthand information for an effective electoral process” (Idowu & Odeyimi, [2021](#), p. 52). This is consistent with the 2023 presidential election campaign period where INEC continued to deploy Twitter like it had done in previous elections. In an In-depth interview with the Ms. Geraldine, a Unit Head of Public Affairs and Protocol department with INEC Rivers State, Nigeria, affirms that:

The innovation that brought in social media, and especially Twitter, into the electoral space is such as commendable one. Prior to the 2022/23 presidential election campaign, INEC mostly assessed other mass media (e.g., the radio and television stations) to disseminate information and interface with the public with no direct feedbacks. However, ahead of the 2023 presidential election, Twitter provided the

platform (e.g., Twitter spaces) through which INEC pushed out information, shared ideas, and in swift seconds got responses as well as feedbacks, and monitored engagement on these platforms. I may not be able to give you specific numbers, but I can tell you categorically that Twitter was helpful. When it has to do with political topics and nation-building, Twitter is usually at the forefronts. INEC Headquarters, also, organised some Townhall meetings on the Twitter spaces, received questions and clarifications were exchanged between INEC staff and the general public on such Twitter spaces. INEC, as a Commission, used it and it provided massive responses and interface with the public (Geraldine, personal communication, *September 4, 2023*).

Geraldine (ibid) further observes that,

The publicity that the 2023 election campaigns and general elections got on Twitter, I do not think other elections in the history of Nigeria had got that widespread sensitization and awareness to the extent that we had more of the youths who basically were the major users of these platforms. The youths got really more interested in politics; they got engaged, and political and voters' sensitization messages were targeted at them, and we saw how that impacted the turnout during the 2023 presidential elections. So, for me, I think, the use of Twitter (and other social media platforms) was so helpful in pushing out the election campaigns, both from the election management body (INEC), the political parties and the candidates (Geraldine, personal communication, *September 4, 2023*).

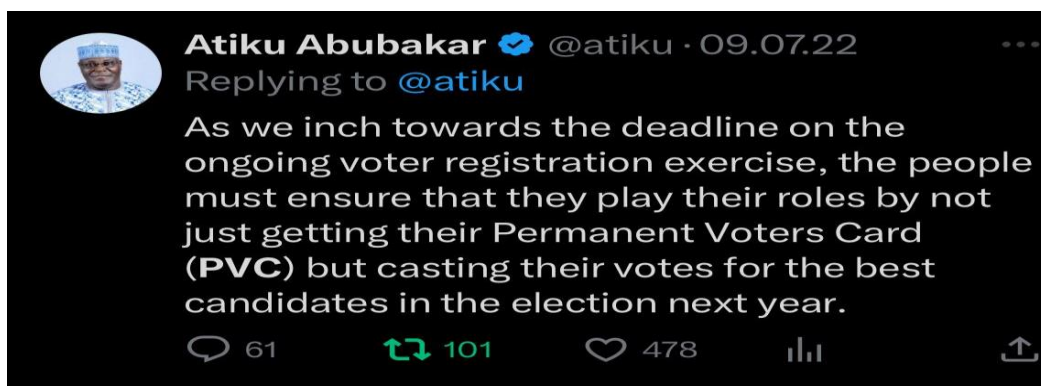
Figure 14: A Twitter screencast of the LP presidential candidate, Peter Obi, using his handle to encourage people to get their PVCS.



Source: Twitter

Using the acronym “PVC” to run a manual search on the Twitter handle of Obi of LP, the study finds that, between May 25, 2022, and February 1, 2023, the acronym appeared five times on Obi’s Twitter handle (a sample is shown on figure 14 above). Replicating similar search for the two other presidential candidates produced one result for PDP (as shown on figure 15 below), while there was no result for the handle of Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate. A further analysis of Tinubu’s multi-media on Twitter returned with no result. This demonstrates that, out of the three presidential candidates, only two utilised their handles to encourage the Nigerian electorates to register and collect their PVCs ahead of the presidential elections. Based on the number of times the word appeared on his handle, it can be concluded that the LP presidential aspirant was more consistent in his effort to encourage eligible voters to obtain their PVCs.

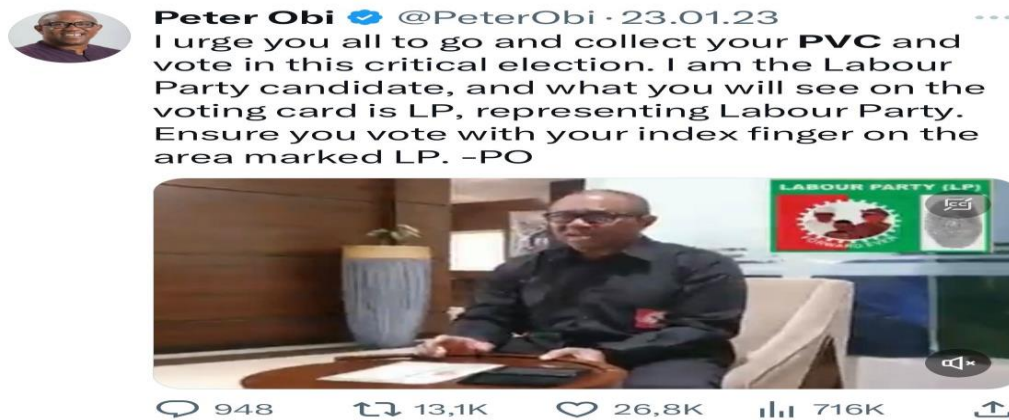
Figure 15: A Twitter screencast showing Atiku encouraging eligible voters to register for their PVCs.



Source: Twitter.

One factor that explains the frequency of the LP presidential aspirant in using his Twitter handle to encourage eligible voters to register and collect their PVC was because, prior to May 27, 2022 (i.e., when Obi officially defected to LP from PDP) LP was relatively an unknown political party in Nigeria. Obi understood that his new party (LP) needed a lot of visibility, and sensitization regarding its emblem to prevent potential voters from being deceived into believing he was contesting the presidential election under his former political party: PDP. This was especially so since aspirants’ picture or names do not appear on voting papers (‘ballot paper’). This better explains why, as figure 16 demonstrates, Obi utilized his handle to both inform his teaming supporters he was in LP and how the latter could identify the party logo on election day.

Figure 16: Showing a screencast of Obi's post and the 43seconds video attached on his Twitter page demonstrating to his supporters how they could identify the party's logo, and how to vote properly using their index fingers.



Source: Twitter.

Answering an interview question regarding his Support Group's use of Twitter to mobilise and educate eligible voters during the election campaign, Chigozie Alex, a member of the Presidential Campaign Council (PCC) of the LP, and the Coordinator of the 'UpNorth Ambassadors' for Peter Obi, narrated that:

The first thing we did was to control the narrative as to the reasons why Peter Obi left the PDP to the Labour Party – a party believed by the opposition to have no structures. Influencers like me started by educating people on primary elections, because we wanted to end money politics in Nigeria. From there, we started influencing people on Twitter to go on the streets to show solidarity for Peter Obi, and that was another way of creating awareness for the new political party Peter Obi joined. That led to the one million-man rallies that we started seeing across the different parts of the country. After this, we started influencing people to register and collect their PVCs. This was because we knew that we had a lot of supporters and active youths online, but the challenge was the most of them did not have their PVCs, which qualifies them to participate in the elections (C. Alex, personal communication, July 2, 2023).

Alex (ibid) further buttressed that:

The approach used in the 2022/23 presidential election campaign was different from the 2019 elections which had a lot of social media influencing but it did not translate to votes since the influencing ended on social media. When the online rallies gained enough momentum, we encouraged people to go out from online to offline to inform people about Peter Obi and the Labour Party. That was

when different grassroots support groups started springing up across the country to sensitise people against the menace of vote-buying using the popular phrase “take politicians money but vote for your conscience.” Additionally, the proper way to vote. The final step was influencing people to come out on the election day to cast and protect their votes on election day (ibid).

In addition to mobilising voters for their PVC registration and collection, noteworthy is the fact that, during the presidential election campaign, Twitter became a recruitment ground for volunteers who would eventually penetrate the grassroots or rural areas to mobilise more voters. Answering questions regarding how LP utilised Twitter during the election campaign to mobilise grassroots volunteers for rural areas not covered by social media, Morris Monye, the Coordinator of the ‘Peter Obi Super Volunteer Force,’ and member of the LP PCC remarked that:

Every single member of the super volunteer force came from Twitter: Twitter was the major recruitment ground. There were people who used Twitter in Kogi, Kano, Zamfara states on Twitter. What I did was that, to join the WhatsApp group, I put up a link on Twitter, so all manner of people would join through the link. Once one joins through the link, it takes the person to a WhatsApp group where people would ask him/her their place of residence, and other important questions about their personality. To do a background check on these people joining, we go to their Twitter handle and look at their timeline and see what their thoughts are about the Obidient movement. If they are cleared, we assign them to their states (M. Monye, personal communication, July 3, 2023).

As demonstrated on Figure 17 below, a minor search on Monye’s Twitter account confirms that he utilized Twitter for volunteers’ and voters’ mobilization.

Figure 17: A Twitter screencast showing a prominent member of the PCC of the Labour Party, Morris, recruiting grassroots volunteers on Twitter.



Source: Twitter.

The foregoing discussion demonstrate that mobilization did not end on Twitter during the election campaign. Twitter was both used as a platform for volunteer mobilization and as an interface between those who had Twitter accounts and those with no (or limited) access to both Internet and social media in rural areas or grassroots.

4.1.2 Reputation Management, Crisis management, Damage Control

One of the features of Twitter, just like other social media platforms, is the possibility it offers users to send and receive information in real time. Similarly, one of the quickest and fastest means of performing damage control is by using the real-time capacity of Twitter for this purpose. In this regard, the study found that, most of the presidential candidates utilised Twitter for reputation management, as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3: Showing instances when the three presidential candidates used their Twitter handle for crisis management and damage control.

Name	Direct Quote from Twitter	Context	Date
Obi	1). "As we approach the official kick off of the 2023 election campaign, it has become evident that the opposition have adopted a negative	Obi, at the commencement of the campaign in August 18, 2022 , set the record straight that his campaign would be based on issues and not on fake news and propaganda.	August 18, 2022.

	<p>strategy of trolling and insinuating fake news and misinformation in the social media space and blaming the Labour Party, its presidential candidate, and their supporters of same. We remain resolute in our commitment to an issue-based and clean campaign We will also rebuff all such ploys of deceit and calumny meant to create disaffection among Nigeria's voting population, who desire credible leadership change.” (Obi, 2022a)</p>		
	<p>2). “Let me reiterate that the audio call being circulated is fake, and at no time throughout the campaign and now did I ever say, think, or even imply that the 2023 election is, or was a religious war” (Obi, 2023b).</p>	<p>Obi utilised his Twitter handle to clear the air on the doctored audio, which was fast-circulating and gaining traction on Twitter (as well as other social media platforms) and on traditional media platforms, that he referred to the 2023 elections campaign as a religious war for Christians to take back their country from Muslims. By posting the sample Tweet, Obi reiterated his commitment for an issue-based campaign, whilst salvaging his reputation.</p>	<p>April 25, 2023.</p>
<p>Atiku</p>	<p>“You should never allow political slogans to take the place of development plans. Political propaganda on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is never a substitute for proper socio-economic and</p>	<p>Atiku used this tweet to speak against the general use of propaganda during the 2022/23 presidential campaign. Besides this, there was no time Atiku used his personal Twitter handle for damage control or crisis management.</p>	<p>September 13, 2022.</p>

	political agenda. #AtikuAtLCCI” (Atiku, 2022).		
Tinubu	“Many have said I have died; others claim I have withdrawn from the presidential campaign. Well... Nope. This is the reality: I am strong, I am healthy, and I am READY to serve Nigerians from Day One” (Tinubu, 2022).	Tinubu tweeted the statement following several days of speculations on social media regarding his whereabouts. As of August 20, 2023, the Tweet has gone to be the most performing post ever tweeted by the handle, with over 26,000 comments, 11,000 retweets, and 35,000 likes. This shows the level of engagement the Tweet had, and how it helped control the narratives across both social media and traditional media about Tinubu’s whereabouts and health status. However, an analysis of the first twenty (20) comments from the sample tweet revealed that the majority of the responses/comments on the tweet were from the supporters of LP, who boldly argued with evidence that the video was outdated.	October 2, 2022.

Source: Field content analysis.

4.1.3 Fundraising

Among the three political parties sampled for this study, the study finds that LP solicited more for funds than the two other political parties. The preceding conclusion was arrived at by searching the Twitter handles of the three presidential candidates using a specific

keyword (i.e., 'donate'). The result indicates that, between October 2022 and February 2023, Obi of LP utilised his Twitter account thrice to solicit for campaign funds (a sample is shown in figure 18 below). However, no result was found when similar search was replicated on the handles of the two other presidential candidates: Atiku and Tinubu.

Figure 18: A Twitter screencast showing Obi using his Twitter handle to solicit for campaign funds.



Source: Twitter

Further confirming the use of Twitter by LP to raise funds for his party's presidential campaign, in an interview with the Official Master of Ceremony (MC) of the Peter Obi Campaign Organisation, Moses Paul confirms that "a lot of funding were raised through Twitter spaces directly even during the elections under the auspices of the Free Nigerian Movement" (personal communication, June 22, 2023). Essentially, one reason why Obi's party was more vocal about crowdsourcing for funding was because, compared to PDP and APC, LP was a smaller party with very scarce funds. This is unlike PDP with enormous national spread and was in power from 1999 (under Olusegun Obasanjo) to 2015 (under Goodluck Jonathan). Same thing was applicable to APC, which had assumed political power in May 2015, and, by implication, had the financial war chest to successfully execute their campaign expenses without crowdsourcing on Twitter.

4.1.4 Candidate Image Attack and Laundering

Okolo et al. 2017 study (as cited in Apuke & Tunca, 2018) find that "there is a significant positive relationship between the usage of Twitter "as an awareness, social media tool and projection of a political candidates' image, suggesting that social media serve as credible

tools and are capable of influencing the image of political candidates in Nigeria” (p. 5). Consistent with the foregoing position, the current study finds that, in the course of the 2023 presidential election campaigns, there were several instances where the coordinators of new media, twitter influencers, and supporters of the three political parties utilised Twitter to set positive narratives and counter negative narratives as well as rumours in favour or against the three main presidential candidates. In this regard, the most noteworthy instance was a well-researched documentary released by David Hundeyin, an International Investigative Journalist. In his 2022 documentary, Hundeyin brings to limelight the long-forgotten story about how Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate, engaged in the heroin trafficking in Chicago, USA in the 1990s.

Figure 19: A screencast of David’s post on Twitter regarding his documentary “resurrecting” the drug case of Tinubu in the USA, with a view to discourage electorates from voting for him.



Source: Twitter.

Interestingly, even long after the conclusion of election campaigns and declaration of Tinubu as the winner of the elections, his opponents (i.e., Obi and Atiku) have relied on Hundeyin’s documentary as a basis to invalidate his credibility. Whilst the outcome of the elections is not the immediate focus of this research, it is important to note that beyond the shores of the Nigerian Twitterspace, the abovementioned publications by Hundeyin have been published elsewhere by top Twitter users globally, as demonstrated in table 4 below:

Table 4: showing the various platforms where Hundeyin’s drug trafficking documentary about Tinubu has been shared on Twitter.

SN	Platforms/Individuals	Location	Date posted	No. Followers	Views as at 24-08-2023
1.	UberFacts	Not available	10.4.2023	13Mil.	19.1Mil.
2.	Mother of All Talk Shows with George Galloway	Great Britain	15.08.2023	506k	336k
3.	Dr. Jeffrey Guterman	USA	24.06.2023	583k	216k
4.	Niko House	USA	8.08.2023	68k	76K
5.	The Grayzone News	NA	6.08.2023	235k	1Mil.
6.	Dail Loud	USA	10.04.2023	2.3Mil	7.6Mil

Source: Content field analysis.

Besides the issue of drug trafficking released on July 13, 2022, Hundeyin further releases another reputation-damaging documentary on his Twitter account on November 17, 2022, as figure 20 shows. This time around, Hundeyin released another documentary revealing that the university certificate submitted by Tinubu to INEC was forged. For context sake, according to the Nigeria’s electoral law, both offences (i.e., drug trafficking and forging of certificate submitted to INEC) disqualifies one from contesting elections in Nigeria. However, if, for one reason or the other, proper due diligence was not followed before the elections and the candidate eventually wins, the victory would be upturned at the Nigerian Presidential Election Tribunal and at the Nigerian Supreme court. Interestingly, the foregoing analysis explains why the exposé by David has been creating so much sensation on Twitter even after the conclusion of the election and declaration of Tinubu as the winner of the 2023 presidential elections.

Figure 20: Screencast showing another documentary published by David exposing the issues of forged certificate, false claims of work with Deloitte, and non-disclosure of dual nationality by Tinubu.



Source: Twitter

Tinubu did not personally use his Twitter handle to respond to the above controversies contained in Hundeyin’s exposés. However, some of Tinubu’s prominent media team – such as shown in figures 21 and 22 – utilised Twitter to whitewash or control the “reputation” damage created by Hundeyin’s documentary on Twitter.

Figure 21: Screencast showing [Festus Keyamo](#), the Chief Spokesman for the APC Presidential Campaign Council (PCC), using his Twitter page to discredit Hundeyin’s documentary regarding Tinubu’s drug trafficking history.



Source: Twitter.

Keyamo’s effort to whitewash the image of Tinubu is further complimented by Femi Fani-Kayode’s Twitter post (as Figure 22 demonstrates below).

Figure 22: A screencast showing [Femi Fani-Kayode](#), the Director of New Media for the APC, PCC, using his Twitter handle to discredit Hundeyin’s documentary regarding Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s (BAT) drug trafficking history.



Source: Twitter.

4.1.5 Propaganda, Fake news, and Fact-checking

There was no concrete evidence of the direct use of Twitter by the three presidential candidates as a tool to spread propaganda. However, their teaming supporters did so, unfortunately, on their behaves. This is consistent with the “European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2023 Final Report” (2023) which observed that, “there was an increased incidence of misleading information in the days leading up to and during the election. In many cases, false reports were spread by well-known personalities associated with political parties” (p. 91). One of the major victims of such propaganda and fake news was Obi, the LP presidential candidate. The attacks were mostly perpetuated by especially members and supporters of the ruling party, APC. Figure 23 below provides an example of the foregoing.

Figure 23: A Twitter screencast showing an instance of fake news being popularised by Festus Keyamo, the chief spokesman for the APC presidential campaign, against Obi.



Source: *Twitter*

Meanwhile, during the 2022/2023 presidential election campaigns, influencers across the three main political parties were mainly recruited for the job of producing contents that were misinforming, fake, and derogatory against their political opponents. In this regard, Salako (2023) affirms that:

In January 2023 (emphasis added), a BBC report uncovered how Nigerian politicians secretly paid social media influencers as much as 20million Nigerian naira (\$43,000) or promised government contract and political appointments to spread disinformation about opponents. Some of these influencers are being recruited to “situation rooms” to monitor the spread of the fake news, the report added (para. 9).

Besides fake news, the study observes that Twitter was utilised by the supporters of the three political parties to spread and promote hate speech during the 2023 presidential campaign. To buttress the foregoing, a random sample of twelve Twitter profiles of the supporters of the three presidential candidates produced the following derogatory words and their contextual meaning, as utilised during the election campaigns:

Table 5: *Showing a sample of some derogatory words used by party supporters during the presidential campaigns.*

S/N	Instances	Language	Contextual Meaning
1.	Obi-tuary	English	It was first used by Sam Omatseye in his Nations Newspaper (owned by the APC presidential candidate) article dated August 1, 2022 to describe Peter Obi. The link to the article was later shared on his Twitter handle (@samomatseye) on the same date.
2.	„Mu-Mu,“ or „MuMu,“ or „MuMu“ Ticket	Pidgin English	The term means ‘stupid,’ ‘foolish,’ ‘idiotic,’ ‘daft.’ It was used during the presidential election campaign to refer to the Muslim-Muslim Presidential and Vice-presidential tickets of the APC. Influencers from both PDP and LP, such as @JosephOnuorah , @quinlateefa , @Spotlight Abby , popularised the use of the term on Twitter.

3.	IPOB	English	The acronym originally stands for the “Indigenous People of Biafra,” a secessionist movement in the South-eastern part of Nigeria. The Movement was proscribed as a “terrorist organization” by a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja, Nigeria, on September 21, 2007. During the presidential campaigns, the acronym was used to refer to Peter Obi and his supporters as terrorists.
4.	Ebola	English	The term was originally used to refer to a deadly virus in Nigeria. However, after the presidential elections, videos circulating online on August 4, 2023, from Niger Republic, show protestors referring to the presidential candidate of the APC as “Ebola Tinubu” instead of “Bola Tinubu.” A random sample of four top influencers of LP, including @weyimi , @Morris Monye , @FS Yusuf , and @diisa2002 , revealed that they promoted the term on Twitter to denigrate the person of Bola Tinubu.
5.	People’s Pig Party	English	The term was used to refer to the supporters of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). The term was popularised on Twitter on February 1, 2023, by @realFFK , the Director of New Media for the APC Campaign Council.
6.	PitObi	English	There is no consensus regarding the meaning of the term. However, what is certain is that term was utilised by both PDP and (especially) APC supporters to insult Obi. Prominent influencers on Twitter who promoted the term during the presidential election, include @DOlusegun , @Jeffphilips1 , @DeeOneAyekooto .
7.	Obingo	Pidgin	Originally, “bingo” is a Nigerian-bred dog. However, in the context of the 2023 presidential election campaign, it was popularised by Twitter influencers of APC against Obi and his supporters.

Source: Field content analysis.

Fake news and hate speech during the 2022/23 presidential election campaign did not go unchecked. In this regard, the study finds that one innovation which was specifically interesting about the 2023 presidential campaign was the role played by several online media platforms – as Table 6 shows below – to abate the high influx of fake news and propaganda on Twitter.

Table 6: Showing a sample of some online media platforms and some instances of fact-checking newsfeed by supporters of the three main political parties.

SN	Instances	Online Media/ Date of Fact- Check
1.	A Twitter user (@mr_commonsense) had posted a video on his handle alleging that PDP/Atiku was using Obi's pictures on bags of rice to deceive voters that the latter was still in the PDP. However, a fact-check by The Cable , which was posted on their Twitter handle, found that the video was from the 2019 presidential election campaign.	The Cable, NG , February 17, 2023.
2.	During his election campaign in Enugu on January 11, 2023, Tinubu remarked that Nigeria never had lithium. A fact-check by CDD-West Africa, which was also posted on its Twitter handle (@CDDWestAfrica), flagged the statement as false.	CDD-West Africa , January 13, 2023.
3.	On February 12, 2023, a Twitter user (@Laaycon) was among the number of Twitter users promoting an alleged letter from one Pastor Onwumere petitioning the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) over 2billion naira alleged to have been given to CAN by Peter Obi "to help and assist in mobilising and convincing their congregation to vote massively for the candidacy of" the latter – an excerpt from the letter reads. However, a thorough fact-checking was conducted by PRNigeria on the email address, phone numbers, and physical	PR Nigeria , February 12, 2023

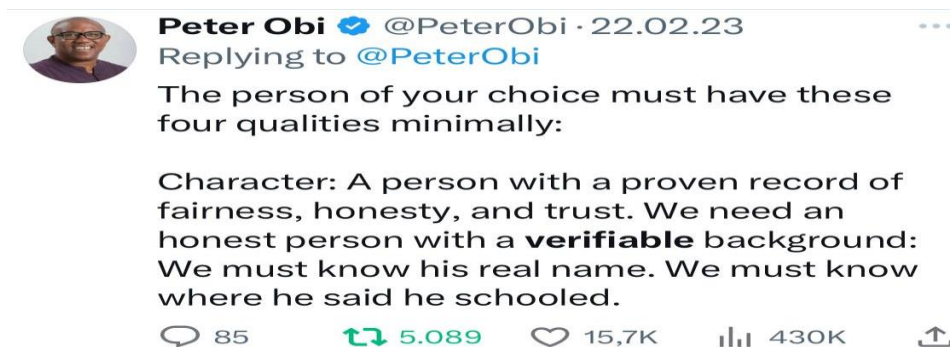
	address contained on the letter, and it was concluded that the supposed letter was fake.	
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Source: Field content analysis.

In addition to the efforts by online media platforms (as shown in table 6 above), through the use of the “Go and Verify” hashtag, the LP presidential candidate and his supporters further amplified the need for users to fact-check information they encounter on Twitter. Besides popularising the “go and verify” phrase, Obi’s further use of strategic phrases, such as “verifiable track records” and “verifiable background,” – which appeared on his Twitter handle on August 14, 2022 and February 22, 2023 – was a subtle attack on Tinubu. Tinubu’s age and the university certificate he allegedly obtained from Chicago University, USA and submitted to INEC have been shrouded in secrecy, and as such, subject to much scrutiny during the election campaigns.

Besides confronting Tinubu’s biography, such phrases by Obi were strategically used to invoke a sense that the latter had the competence and capacity to address the issues of unemployment, insecurity, and rising inflation bedevilling Nigeria. Obi’s use of such words was to further demonstrate that he had the capacity and verifiable track records to replicate nationally the development strips he achieved as the Governor of Anambra state, Nigeria.

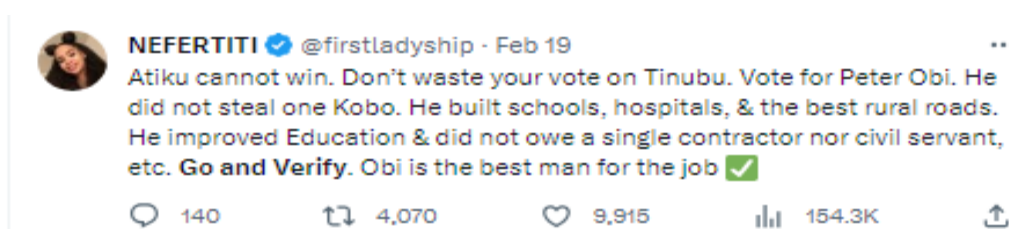
Figure 24: A Twitter screencast of Obi’s tweet – sent two days before the election – subtly attacking Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate, whose academic record and personal life history have enmeshed in secrecy.



Source: Twitter.

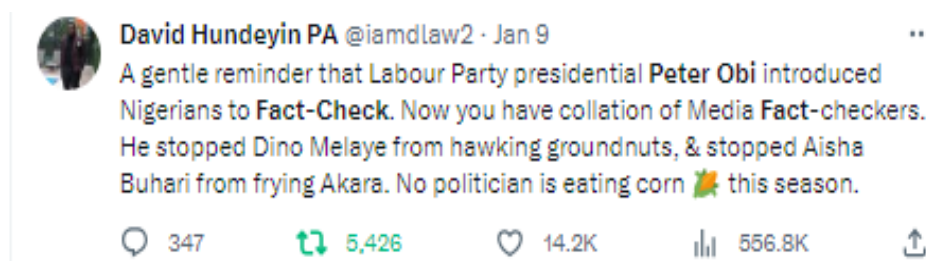
Interestingly, because of his constant calls for users to verify his past records in political office, as figure 24 illustrates above, many users on Twitter believe that Obi introduced citizen-based fact-checking on social media – a clear departure from previous election campaigns, where politicians made claims about their previous times in office, and people hardly bothered to verify same. This, also, was a clear departure from previous election campaign seasons in which politicians hardly focused on the issues, but engaged in frivolous activities, including, but not limited to, eating among the downtrodden of society (Ajaja, [2022](#)), frying akara or bean cake (Isaac, [2015](#); Oyeleke, [2019](#)), joining public transport (Ayo-Aderele, [2017](#)), and turning into a hairstylist (Ikeji, [2019](#); Oyeleke, [2019](#)) – a temporary appearance they put up to ‘demonstrate’ (howbeit deceitfully) that they identify with the larger part of society.

Figure 25: A screencast showing a prominent Twitter influencer for LP highlighting the achievements of Obi and asking people to “Go and Verify.”



Source: Twitter.

Figure 26: A screencast of one of Peter Obi Twitter influencers narrating how Obi transformed election campaigning in Nigeria – by introducing fact-checking in Nigeria’s election campaign ecosystem.



Source: Twitter.

4.1.6 Campaign Update

A previous study by Maigari et al. (2018) affirms that, “social media allow for easy and instant updates on what is happening on the campaign trail.” (p. 23) Consistent with the forgoing, as Table 7 demonstrates, this current study finds that, (n=118) 59 percent of the respondents preferred Twitter to other platforms (including traditional ones), while (n=29) 14.5 percent of the respondents preferred Facebook to other platforms. The foregoing is consistent with previous studies (Madueke et al., 2018; Shadrach & Apuke, 2020), which found that Twitter and Facebook were more popular for political participation in Nigeria.

Table 7: Respondents’ most preferred and most trusted platform during the 2023 presidential elections

Form of social media	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Twitter	118	59
Facebook	29	14.5
Instagram	11	5.5
Traditional media	25	12.5
Others	17	9
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2023.

Furthermore, Table 8 below indicates that, (n=171) 85.5 of the respondents on Twitter were LP supporters, while (n=4) 2% and (n=8) 4% represent PDP and APC supporters on Twitter respectively. This indicates that LP and Obi had more supporters and engagement in their campaign updates on Twitter than the two other presidential candidates and political parties.

Table 8: Party affiliations, and Importance of Twitter to receiving updates regarding the 2023 presidential elections campaigns.

Items	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Which political party did you support doing the presidential election campaign		

<i>LP</i>	171	85.5
<i>PDP</i>	4	2
<i>APC</i>	8	4
<i>Other</i>	17	8.5
Total	200	100
How important was Twitter to receiving updates regarding the presidential campaigns?		
<i>Very important</i>	135	67.5
<i>Moderately important</i>	36	18
<i>Slightly important</i>	20	10
<i>Never important</i>	9	4.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey, July 2023.

Table 9 below further demonstrates that (n=66) 33 percent of the respondents either created, signed up with, or became more active on Twitter during the 2023 presidential elections campaign. This indicates that, Twitter’s user membership and user activity grew in Nigeria due to the presidential election campaigns.

Table 9: Did you create a Twitter account or become more active on Twitter primarily because of receiving and sending information regarding the 2023 presidential elections?

Item	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	134	67
No	66	33
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey, June 2023.

Table 10 shows that (n=159) 79.5% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34 – broadly defined as youths – as against (n=41) 20.5% between the ages of 35 and above – broadly defined as adults. Regarding occupation, Table 10 further revealed that (n=69) 34.5% of the respondents were students, whilst (n=78) 39% were employed. The result clearly demonstrates, therefore, that youths (who are majorly students) constitute the largest consumers of political content on social media. Interestingly, this result is consistent with previous studies (Okoro & Santas, [2017](#); Shadrach & Apuke, [2020](#)).

Table 10: Respondents’ demographic data.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-24	49	24.5
25-34	110	55
35-44	35	17.5
45-and above	6	3
Total	200	100
Occupation		
Student	69	34.5%
Employed (full-time)	78	39
Self-employed	49	24.5
Unemployed	18	9
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey, June 2023.

Twitter was used by politicians, political parties, and the general masses as a real-time campaign hub, enabling political parties to disseminate information regarding their campaign trail, and present their manifestos to the public. One feature that made Twitter stand out during the presidential campaign was the innovative idea of integrating Twitter Spaces as a continuous part of the presidential election campaigns. By the use of the word “continuous,”

reference is made to an excerpt from the field interview with Moses Paul, the official MC for the Obi Campaign Organization and member of the LP PCC.

All the organization with regards to the pre-election rallies was conducted on Twitter. Specifically, as much as ten different Twitter Spaces were running concurrently with between 700 to 5000 participants attending to organise the 2022 pre-election rallies, and create consciousness about Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People’s Party. Peter Obi was invited on some occasions to speak on some of the Twitter Spaces in real time with an average audience of forty-thousand participants coming to listen. As of June 22, 2023, there was a minimum of two Twitter Spaces running unstopped. That is a complete shift and transition in the electioneering process in Nigeria (P. Moses, personal communication, June 22, 2023).

Meanwhile, a thirty-day analysis of the Twitter handles of the three main presidential candidates before February 25, 2023 provided the following information regarding their use of Twitter for campaign update.

Table 11: Showing Tweet Content Analysis of the three presidential candidates.

SN		Obi	Atiku	Tinubu
1.	Frequency of update	Obi posted daily on his Twitter handle. By implication, he had the most frequent use of Twitter to communicate his campaign manifesto and update his teaming supporters regarding his campaign trail.	He tweeted more regularly than Tinubu: sometimes twice a day. For the sample period under consideration, he did not tweet on 12, 16, and 17 February, 2023.	He did not Tweet every day for the 30-day window before the elections on February 25, 2023.
2.	Nature of update a. Words b. Multi-media.	Obi scarcely used videos but mostly utilized more of texts in threads to speak	Atiku utilised diverse communication strategies –	Tinubu hardly wrote long threads but utilised more of videos and pictures

	<p>Interpretation of tweets:</p> <p>Every post on Twitter has the possibility of being liked, reposted or retweeted, or commented on.</p> <p>a.) Likes = endorsement</p> <p>b.) Retweet = more publicity</p> <p>c.) Comments/replies = more engagement</p>	<p>to the issues facing Nigeria, and how he intended to solve them. His preference for words (over pictures and videos) is not unconnected with his emphasis on encouraging the reading culture and education in Nigeria.</p> <p>Based on the number of likes, retweets, and comments on these posts, it can be established that he was more engaging on Twitter than the two other presidential candidates.</p>	<p>pictures, videos, and texts – to explain some of the challenges facing Nigeria, and how he intended solving them.</p>	<p>on Twitter to summarise each day he campaigned, compared to the two other candidates.</p> <p>More so, he hardly addressed issues facing the country, and hardly provided constant reminders regarding how he will tackle those issues.</p>
3.	Keywords/hashtag.	<p>Obidient movement, Consumption to production, multi-dimensional poverty, unemployment,</p>	<p>RecoverNigeria, prosperity, economic transformation,</p>	<p>#RenewedHope23, #BAT, #Emilokan</p>

		corruption, insecurity, TakeBackNigeria, New Nigeria, It's POssible, China, Mama, Papa, Pikin.	mission, better Nigeria.	
4.	Average number of views or audience reached.	1 Million views Interpretation: Obi had a more engaging appearance on Twitter.	200k views	300k views
<i>Some of the above are further interpreted in details below.</i>				

Source: Field content analysis

4.1.6.1 Multi-media usage

The three presidential candidates utilised diverse multimedia to add colour to their campaign updates on Twitter, though Obi used videos sparingly. Similarly, the three presidential candidates hired professional photographers and videographers to capture exciting moments in their campaign trails. More so, pictures, videos, and texts were posted on their respective handles for public consumption. The analysis of thirty pictures (ten each) on the handles of the presidential candidates between January 22 and February 22, 2023 shows that the entire pictures uploaded on their Twitter handles only captured areas of the campaign venues/grounds filled up with people. This was deliberately done by the media strategists of the aspirants to give users the impression that the candidates enjoyed broad acceptance and popularity among the people. In the same vein, also, since pictures that capture empty spaces on campaign grounds would most likely portray a picture of non-acceptance or lack of popularity, they were deliberately omitted from being uploaded on Twitter. Alluding to the foregoing, a study finds that:

the admixture of text, colour and image in the post signifies a persuasive semiotic visual attraction to complement the political

message. As a typical political advertising text, the graphological attraction of the twitter post catches the attention of the readers and communicates the message in a brief but strong persuasive sense, reinforced with attractive visual text (Opeibi, [2019](#), p. 19).

4.1.6.2 Frequency of Tweets

Based on the manual analysis of the Twitter pages of the three presidential candidates within a 30-day period before the presidential election in February 23, 2023, the study observes that Obi was more active on Twitter than the two other presidential candidates.

Meanwhile, as highlighted on Table 11 above, an analysis of their accounts further shows the use of specific buzzwords, such as “From-Consumption-to-production” (for Peter Obi), “Renewed Hope” (for Tinubu), and “Recover-Nigeria” (for Atiku), to emphasize their core campaign messages.

4.1.6.3 Word usage

One of the defining moments during Tinubu’s campaign was when he coined the buzzword “Emi Lokan,” a Yoruba word that is literary translated as “It is my turn.” The word was used for the first time during one of Tinubu’s campaign visits in Ogun State, Nigeria, on June 2, 2022, when he went to solicit for votes ahead of the APC primary elections (Abdullahi, [2022](#); Oke, [2022](#)). By using the word, Tinubu believed that it was his turn to be the next president, having been instrumental to the victory of former president Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 and 2019. Tinubu’s use of the phrase had long attracted criticism from prominent politicians in Nigeria, such as former President Olusegun Obasanjo and Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (Akinlotan, [2023](#)).

Figure 27: A Twitter screencast of Tinubu’s handle showing the first time he used the buzzword, “Emi Lokan.”



Source: *Twitter.*

More so, it is quite interesting to observe how Tinubu further “skilfully” alludes the debate regarding who was the greatest of all time in the world of football to his “Emi l’okan” phrase. Thus, for Tinubu, as figure 28 demonstrates, just as it was Messi’s turn to win the World Cup, it was the former’s turn to become the next president of Nigeria. In a [tweet](#) (as shown on figure 28 below), which, as at August 24, 2023, had generated over 9million views, Tinubu uses visual symbolism to appeal to the demographics of youths who are abreast of and interested in both politics and football. The Tweet had, as of August 24, 2023, become the most viewed post by Tinubu on Twitter.

Also noticeable in figure 28 is the cap (with the broken chain symbol embroidered on it) that Messi wore. The cap is a popular political emblem for Tinubu. In an interview with the Guardian Newspaper, Tinubu had explained that, philosophically, the symbol on the cap was a portrayal of his belief and faith in the fight against the shackles of injustice, diseases, and ignorance (Ayandayo, [2022](#); Oyediji, [2023](#)).

Figure 28: *A screencast showing Tinubu’s use of visual symbolism to compare between the football icon’s victory at the world cup, with his imminent victory at the presidential elections.*



Source: Twitter.

Meanwhile, in a subtle attack on the “Emi l’okan” phrase by Tinubu, during his visit to Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, the Ooni of Ife in Osun State, Nigeria, Peter Obi rephrases the phrase and admonished his audience that it was nobody’s turn to become Nigeria’s next president. Obi believes that it was the turn of Nigerian youths to take back their country (Ige, [2022b](#)).

Figure 29: A screencast of Leadership News, an online newspaper on Twitter, posting the video where Obi was indirectly responding to Tinubu’s “It’s my turn” or “Emi L’okan” statement.



Source: Twitter.

In another meeting with a group of Nigerian students and some stakeholders at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Obi further reiterates that the 2023 elections should not be about any of the presidential candidates' turn, but about the turn of Nigerians to take back their country. Obi emphasized that the 2023 elections should be about characters that can be trusted, and on the capacity and commitment to deliver on campaign promises (Igwe, [2023](#); Nseyen, [2022](#)). In a further attack at Tinubu's use of the "it's my turn" phrase, Obi declares on his Twitter handle on February 13, 2023, thus:

Twelve days from now, we will be called upon to make very hard choices. It won't be about tribe or religion; it won't be about traditional *sentiments of my turn*. It will be about *National interest* (Obi, [2022a](#)).

Meanwhile, in a tweet (as showed in Figure 30), a video of Tinubu appears on his Twitter page, where he was riding on a sport's equipment. This was coming after rumours popularised by several users (e.g., [@HenryUgwuEsg](#); [@harri_onuoha](#); [@KadunaResident](#); [@Naija_Activist](#)) had surfaced on Twitter, with the hashtag "Where is Tinubu?" Though the video attached to Tinubu's tweet in figure 30 had been declared an old video from January 15, 2022 (see [@DavidHundeyin](#)), the tweet attempted to portray Tinubu (aged <70years), as 'youthful' and 'fit,' for the sake of attracting the attention of the Nigerian youths. This was another significant use of symbolism by Tinubu during the election campaign.

Figure 30: A screencast showing a post by Tinubu on his Twitter page. The post was used for crisis management, while the choice of the video in the post was used for virtual symbolism.



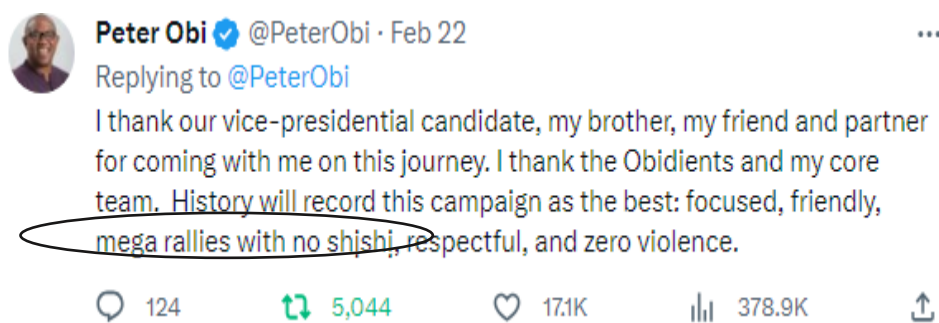
Source: Twitter.

Meanwhile, a manual search on Obi’s Twitter handle revealed that, between September 2022 (i.e., the commencement of election campaign) and February 23, 2023 (i.e., the end of campaigns), the phrase “From consumption to production” was mentioned 21 times. The frequent use of the above phrase underscores Obi’s passionate quest to “leapfrog Nigeria from oil the fourth revolution by expanding physical infrastructure through market-driven reforms that will unleash growth-enabling entrepreneurship and market-creating innovations” (Obi, [2022b](#)). More so, between October 5, 2022, and March 2, 2023, Obi utilised the phrase “Take back your country” five times, as a strategy to appeal to the youthful demographic. More so, it was a strategy to disassociate himself from the “old order” of politicians responsible for plundering the resources of the country and plunging its citizens into poverty. This strategy by Obi had been described by some studies (Jeyifo, [2023](#); Ndubuisi & Orjinmo, [2023](#); Stephen, [2022](#)) as populism. Stephen ([2022](#)) supports that:

Since Obi declared to run for the 2023 presidential election however, he has become the rallying for a lot of youths and other Nigerians who are frustrated with the performance of the regular politicians in the two dominant parties. The momentum that started like a joke among the Igbo has now become almost a nationwide wave propelled by masses’ discontent about the status quo (para. 5).

Another buzz phrase employed by Obi and his campaign team on Twitter was the “we no give shi shi,” (a pidgin English word, which literally means “we do not induce political support with money”). Obi intentionally and strategically used the above buzz phrase to demonstrate that he is capable of addressing one of the most significant needs of governance in Nigeria: cutting the cost of governance. This is incomparable to Tinubu, who “gives shi shi” or was reported to have financially induced people to attend his physical campaigns (Johnson, [2023](#); Nwachukwu, [2023](#)).

Figure 31: A screencast of Obi’s Twitter handle emphasizing that history would be kind to his campaign for not engaging in money politics or “giving shi shi.”



Source: Twitter.

4.2 Factors Enhancing the Usage of Twitter in Election Campaigns in Nigeria

There are certain factors which contributed immensely to the import of Twitter (or in general, social media) during the 2022/23 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. Some of those factors are: 1). The increasing Internet penetration and incremental usage of social media in Nigeria, 2). Cost efficiency, and 3). The distrust of traditional media.

4.2.1 Increasing social media and Internet Penetration in Nigeria

Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed an exponential increase in social media penetration. Thanks to the availability of affordable smartphones, improved Internet access, and increased urban renewal. This is further supported by the expansion of electricity to areas it never existed. Consequent upon this, more Nigerians, especially youths, have now gained more access to social media platforms, leading to an expanded audience for election campaigns. Available data shades more light into the foregoing. According to Kemp (2023) “there were 122.5million Internet users in Nigeria at the start of 2023, when Internet penetration stood at 55.4 percent” (The State of Digital section, para. 3). Same report further notes that:

Nigeria was home to 31.60million social media users in January 2023, equating to 14.3 percent of the total population. A total of 198.9 million cellular mobile connections were active in Nigeria in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 87.7 percent of the total population (ibid).

The above data does not make sense in the context of its implications for elections campaign in Nigeria, except one compares the level of Internet penetration, and the number of social media users in Nigeria in 2023 to what was obtainable in previous election periods. Table 12 below provide a statistical comparison:

Table 12: Showing a comparison between social media penetration between 2015 and 2023.

Year	Population (Millions)	Active Internet Users (Millions)	Active Social Media	Mobile Connections (Millions)
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			Accounts (Millions)	
2015	183.5	70.3	13.6	138 (75% of popl)
2023	221.1	122.5	31.6	193.9 (87.7% of popl)

All data on this table were sourced from www.datareportal.com

Source: field analysis.

Table 12 indicates (n=52.2million) +74.34% increase in the number of active Internet users; (n=18million) 132.35% increase in the number of active social media accounts; and (n=55.9million) 40.5% increase in the number of mobile connections in Nigeria as of 2023 compared to 2015. This obvious increase in social media, mobile connections, and Internet connectivity clearly offered political aspirants with more possibilities of reaching out to a wider audience in 2023, unlike what was obtainable in 2015.

Table 13: Showing that youths constituted the highest voting bloc in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria.

Demography	Number of voters	Percentage (%)
Youths (18-34)	37,060,399	39.65
Middle aged (35-49)	33,413,591	35.75
Elderly (50-69)	17,700,270	18.94
Old (70+)	5,294,748	5.66
Total	93,469,008	100

Source of statistics: [INEC](#).

Table 14: Showing respondents' campaign preference.

Items	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
How did you campaign in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria?		

Online	38	19
Offline	20	10
Online and offline	98	49
I did not campaign	38	19
Total	200	100

Source: *Field analysis.*

Meanwhile, Table 13 indicates that (n=37,060,399) 39.65% and (n=33,413,591) 35.75% of the eligible voters in the 2023 elections in Nigeria were youths and middle-aged. It is no coincidence that Table 10 showed that whilst (n=159) 79.5% of the respondents for the survey were between the ages of 18 and 34, (n=41) 20.5% of the respondents were between the ages of 35 and above. Table 14 further demonstrates that, (n=136) 68% of the respondents campaigned both online and offline, as against (n=20) 10% who campaigned offline. The foregoing result, thus, suggests that online methods (especially on Twitter) were heavily utilised during the 2023 presidential election campaigns. The result significantly questions the theoretical foundations of the digital divide and its applicability to Nigeria, whilst confirming the position of the hybrid systems theory. Consequent upon this, a hypothesis can be developed, thus: social media would continue to play an important role in election campaigns in Nigeria, as long as youths constitutes the highest number of users of on such platforms.

4.2.2 Social Media's Cost effectivity as a Comparative Advantage

Related to the foregoing, social media offers very affordable alternatives to both the use of traditional media and physical venues for election campaigns. Physical campaigning in Nigeria involves sharing of flyers along streets, organising vehicle jingles, and the actual mega physical campaign rallies. All of this constitutes the huge amount of funds spent during election campaigns in Nigeria. Unfortunately, due to their non-disclosure, there is no comprehensive statistical data available at the researcher's disposal regarding the amount of money spent on campaigns by political parties in Nigeria. This non-disclosure of campaign expenditure contradicts Section 225 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) which specifically empowers INEC to examine and audit the funds and accounts of political parties in Nigeria ("About INEC," [n.d.](#)).

Whether or not political parties in Nigeria adhere to the provisions of Nigeria's Constitution to audit and disclose their financial record is not the purpose of the research. However, available secondary data showed that, "INEC, through tracking and monitoring, established that the APC spent N4.6 billion (N4,620,144,784) while the PDP spent N3.3 billion (N3,282,206,642) on the last presidential election on billboards, print media advertisements, electronic media advertisements, and coverage (musical performances) during the 2019 polls" (Oguntola, [2022](#), para. 18). Similarly, a previous study had found that, depending on location and type, the cost of erecting a billboard in Nigeria is estimated between \$450 and \$7,000 monthly (Jogbojogbo, [2019](#)).

Conversely, it only takes a few dollars to campaign on digital spaces with even more engagements, spread, and visibility than campaigning physically or on traditional media (radio and television stations, and newspapers). For instance, according to Squirrelpr ([2022](#)), Vanguard Newspapers, which is one of the most circulated newspapers in Nigeria, circulates 20,000 copies (daily) in Lagos; Abuja-12,000 copies; South-west 15,000; North Central – 18,000, North-East – 7500 and North-west – 7500. Though the exact number of newspaper circulation is not verifiable at the time of this research, some studies (Ekharefo et al., 2013; Hassan, 2015; Mathew et al., 2013) show that print newspapers are gradually losing their fancy in Nigeria, especially since people now have more Internet access with a corresponding proliferation of social media accounts, where they can both follow breaking news in real time and air their opinions by just a few clicks. Squirrelpr ([2022](#), The Sun section, para. 4) further confirms that:

As of 2011, The Sun had a daily print run of 130,000 copies, and 135,000 for weekend titles, with an average of 80% sales. This made The Sun the highest selling newspaper in Nigeria at the time. But online journalism has dealt a huge blow to print circulation in the country and recent surveys show that the Sun as of 2020 enjoys over 700,000 monthly print readerships across the country.

Therefore, with the rising inflation in the cost of printing campaign materials, hosting digital billboards, and the increasing focus on online newspapers, digital campaigns have become a cost-saving alternative to physical campaigning. It has, also, become an effective alternative to advertising through traditional media channels. Summarily, some incentives that encourage the preference for a digitally-powered political campaign include the increasing social media and Internet penetration as well as the high youth demographics in Nigeria.

4.2.3 The Distrust of Traditional Media

The political, social, ethnic, and cultural affiliations of a media determines what is newsworthy, how narratives are told, who and what is often criticised and who/what is not. The foregoing position is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Ibraheem et al., 2015; Nwammuo, et al., 2015; Okaiyeto, et al., [2022](#); Olayiwola, 1991). These studies agree that “political interest determine what issue is prominent and which one is not important as media engage in selecting news items for their audience” (Okaiyeto, et al., [2022](#), p. 210). This sort of political interest in what is reported in newspapers, television and radio stations is referred to as the “politics of news” (Okaiyeto, et al., [2022](#), p. 210) or the “mediatisation of politics” (Idowu & Odeyemi, [2021](#), p. 45).

Given the above, it is no surprise why certain scandals by certain individuals, and certain news and information never attract the attention of certain newspapers and television as well as radio stations in Nigeria. There is an explanation: such media establishments are trying to protect the interests of their financiers.

In Nigeria, historically, there has been some ‘romance’ between political parties and media organizations. Interestingly, such ‘romance’ has continued unabated until contemporary times. In this regard, Okaiyeto et al. ([2022](#), p. 215) revealed that:

From the earliest newspapers set up by nationalists to fight colonial administration and champion the cause of Nigeria’s independence like: Blaize’s Lagos Times established in 1862, J.B. Benjamin’s Lagos Observer established in 1882, the Eagle and Lagos Critic, set up by Macaulay in 1887, to the chain of newspapers own by Awolowo under the banner of the Tribune to the one owned by Azikiwe and the titles under the defunct Concord press newspaper conglomerate owned by the acclaimed winner of the controversial June 12, 1993 presidential election, late Chief M.K.O Abiola, and the present day crop of newspapers - majority of which are owned by politicians or their cronies fronting for them as publishers in disguise, such as Tinubu’s The Nation, Orji Uzor Kalu’s The Sun newspaper, Gbenga Daniel’s Compass, the Nigerian Tribune owned by the Awolowo dynasty, Ibru’s Guardian newspapers, Jimoh Ibrahim’s National Mirror, Nduka Obaigbena’s This Day and Kabiru Yusuf’s Trust titles, to mention just a few, ownership of media outfits (mainly newspapers) in Nigeria can be seen to be driven more by political motives than mere profit orientation.

Buttressing the ongoing argument, Arch Angel Jesse, a prominent Twitter influencer for LP, opined that:

In Nigeria, traditional media is not a neutral media. Social media is neutral. Traditional media not only takes contents from social media, but also twist narratives in a way that would brainwash the people to think in the manner their political benefactors want the people to think. But, from a partisan ‘us-versus-them’ point of view, traditional media stations are owned by the politicians. About 95% of them are owned by the politicians, whilst the remaining 5% are affiliated to one political party, godfather, cabal, or another. The only news media which is not affiliated to any politician is Arise TV and that is why most youths watch Arise TV these days. AIT is a PDP station. TVC is an APC station, and Channels television is for the highest bidder. You know, mention any one of them, they are affiliated to one political party, one godfather, one cabal or another (A. A. Jesse, personal communication, June 22, 2023).

Consistent with foregoing, Table 15 below further demonstrates some of the major television stations and newspaper outlets, and their political affiliations in Nigeria.

Table 15: Showing the political affiliations of some traditional media stations.

Platform name	Owner	Political affiliation
African Independence Television	Raymond Dokpesi	PDP
National Television Authority	The Federal Government of Nigeria	Controlled by the ruling party
TVC	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC
Silver Bird	Bruce	PDP
Nations Newspaper	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC
Sun newspaper	Orji Uzor Kalu	APC
This Day	Nduka Obiagbena	PDP

Source: field analysis.

In all, because of such political affiliations (as shown on Table 15), it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the above newspapers and television stations to independently produce contents that ‘attack’ their benefactors.

The increasing establishment of television and radio stations by politicians in Nigeria sufficiently explains why certain media channels in Nigeria never report scandals regarding certain individuals. It also, for the sake of this study, explains why the drug trafficking history of Bola Ahmed Tinubu was never sufficiently given the attention it deserved by traditional media channels. However, thanks to the provision of social media. Hundeyin's 2022 documentary had not only been posted and seen by Nigerian social media users, but also published by foreign influencer Twitter accounts (as Table 4 previously demonstrated) with millions of viewership globally.

Furthermore, such political affiliations have created a situation in which citizens distrust the willingness of traditional media to produce narratives and information that are objective and holistic. Today, because of the distrust of traditional media, Nigerian electorates do not have to wait for the mainstream media to provide critical information regarding a political aspirant and that would be essential in helping the former make an informed decision during election campaign seasons. Similarly, social media users who want their voices heard on certain issues, or become whistleblowers about a scandal involving a political aspirant, do not need to pay any newspaper to have their story told, or pay television stations to be on air.

By implication, anyone with a smartphone and an active Internet access can, at the convenience of their location and bypassing traditional media channels, send messages on social media with a wider, more diverse audience, and with a potentially high impact. More so, social media has created a situation where platform users are active participants in (rather than passive consumers or spectators of) political processes in Nigeria. In sum, by terminating the hegemony of traditional media on information access, social media has democratised information sharing and access in Nigeria especially during election campaigns. This democratisation in information access has produced greater freedom of speech and has further improved voter education as well as political participation in Nigeria. This is good for democracy! This is a huge win for Nigeria's fragile democracy!

4.3 Implication of the Study? The increasing convergence between social media, traditional media, and traditional campaign methods (physical campaigns) in Nigeria

One of the arguments of the digital divide theory is that there are a high level of political participation in urban areas characterised by high literacy, electricity, and Internet levels, as against what is obtainable in rural areas. From the perspective of the digital divide theorists, such digital divide limits the impact of social media during election campaigns and, generally, on the political processes in an area. By implication, a disparity in access to Internet connectivity could result to a skewed representation of the electorate on Twitter (like other social media platforms), potentially favouring certain demographics, or urban areas over others.

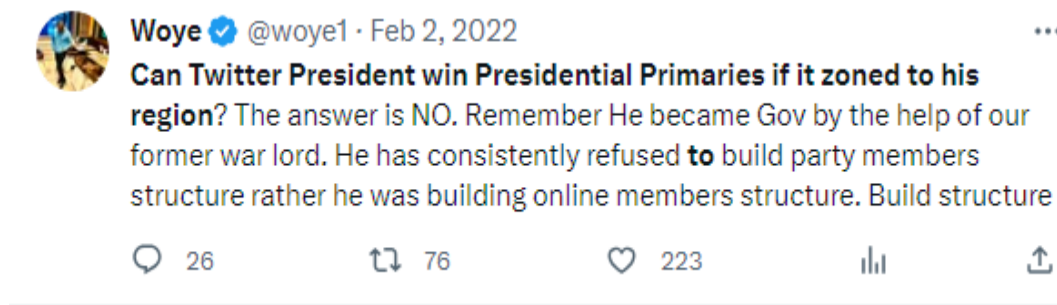
Apparently, it was largely because of the digital divide in Nigeria that favoured certain misconstrued narratives by older politicians in Nigeria, such as El Rufai (Olowolagba, [2018](#)), Kingsley Moghalu (Abiodun, [2022](#)), and Chukwuma Charles Soludo (Ige, [2022a](#)). Some of such narratives are that: 1). There are no polling units on social media, 2). Social media has no usefulness in Nigeria's political processes (Adeoye, [2022](#)). Among these abovementioned politicians, no other individual better captures the forgoing position than Kingsley Moghalu, a former deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and former presidential candidate under the African Democratic Congress (ADC), on his official Twitter handle, thus:

Nigerian elections are not fought and won on Twitter, although social media is certainly a factor, especially for young people. But overall, elections are won by effective structural presence and mobilization at the micro levels at polling units, mainly in rural areas. Illiteracy and poverty are still huge factors in Nigerian politics. The numbers of people with susceptibility to these factors are still more than those who are not. The only variable that can break this really is if young people turn out in overwhelming numbers and if they vote predominantly in any particular direction. @inecnigeria is also perhaps the most important factor of all. They swear they will do better this time. To paraphrase the strategic Cold War doctrine during the nuclear arms race in the 80s, Trust, but Verify (Moghalu, [2022](#)).

Meanwhile, still related to the forgoing narrative, given his consistent update regarding his campaign trail on Twitter during the 2023 presidential elections, the candidate of LP, Mr. Peter Obi, was severally ridiculed and infamously referred to as the "Twitter president" or "social media president" by members of the ruling party, APC. Additionally, El Rufai, who

was the governor of Kaduna State – a state in North-West Nigeria – once commented that Obi would not score above 200 votes in his state, Kaduna, due to the latter’s consistent use of Twitter for his campaigns (Inyang, [2022](#)).

Figure 32: A screencast of the Twitter handle of prominent APC supporter referring to Obi as ‘Twitter president.’



Source: Twitter.

On a similar note, Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), once noted that about 90percent of people in northern Nigeria were not on social media (Chiedozie, [2022](#)).

While the forgoing arguments may appear a bit plausible in explaining why politicians believe that social media has very little usefulness in election (campaign) ecosystem in Nigeria and why they are reluctant in heavily deploying and integrating social media in their campaign, the digital divide theory does present the whole picture. This explains why another theory – the hybrid systems theory – was additional employed to serve as supporting theoretical construct for this study. Below are some arguments in favour of the hybrid systems theory.

To begin with, there is no statistical data to support Atiku’s above claim. However, assuming we agree with Atiku’s statement, the inter-connectedness between social media and traditional media minimises the supposed low presence of social media in northern Nigeria. The word ‘inter-connected’ is used here to imply that, most times, contents on social media spill over to traditional media platforms (whether radio or television), and vice versa.

Furthermore, apart from such interconnectedness is that fact that the Nigerian society is communal, and information received on social media can spread by way of mouth discussions among friends in schools, marketplaces, churches, mosques, and in public transports. Therefore, indirectly, we see social media transcending beyond WhatsApp,

Twitter, Facebook, and traditional media to conversations among friends, business partners, colleagues, and members of religious organisations who may not have access to Internet, or possess social media accounts or smart phones.

In an interview, P. Moses, supports that:

The narrative that social media has no usefulness in election campaigns was proven wrong 100% during the 2022/23 presidential elections. The Labour Party and the Obidient movement were taunted, and that was why you hear things like 'ohh you do not have structure.' What they meant by structure is the physical location of participations. Yes, there are no polling boots on the social media, but the Labour Party and the Obidient movement proved them completely wrong by ensuring that people were mobilized beyond the online agitation to ensuring that they got out to cast their votes all over the country. Young people did not just get online, they were not just four people on Twitter Spaces: People came out en mass during the elections. Old people, mothers, fathers, young people came out en mass to ensure that they carried out their civic responsibilities by casting their vote (P. Moses, personal communication, June 22, 2023).

Hundeyin further corroborates the above argument by P. Moses, thus:

The idea that there is no social media in the northern part of Nigeria and that all they do is to move about with transistor radios is an idea from 2011 general elections which spilled over to the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Maybe that was true twenty years ago, but today, numbers suggest a different thing: at least 65percent of Nigeria has high speed Internet access and with a device that can use the Internet. So, why are we so fixated with this 35%? A few decades ago, Nigeria was overwhelmingly a rural country but now we are about 50/50 between urban and rural areas. And the balance continues shifting daily towards urban. By 2030, Nigeria would have been majority urban. So why are we so fixated with that rural transistor listeners? (D. Hundeyin, personal communication, July 8, 2023).

Here is another interesting perspective. Information, when received, usually does not end with the receiver. In many cases, individuals pass on the information they received to other individuals. This further creates an information distribution chain or information domino effect. The foregoing explains why individuals who were not on Twitter during the presidential election campaigned still received many of the information trending on Twitter.

Table 16: Showing where respondents transmitted the information they received from Twitter.

<i>Place</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Where did you discuss the presidential election campaigns, political parties, and trending issues originating from Twitter during the 2023 presidential election campaigns?</i>		
<i>Public transport</i>	20	10
<i>Church/Mosque</i>	10	5
<i>At home</i>	107	53.5
<i>In School</i>	25	12.5
<i>At work</i>	4	2
<i>Others</i>	34	17
<i>Total</i>	200	100

Source: field survey, July 2023.

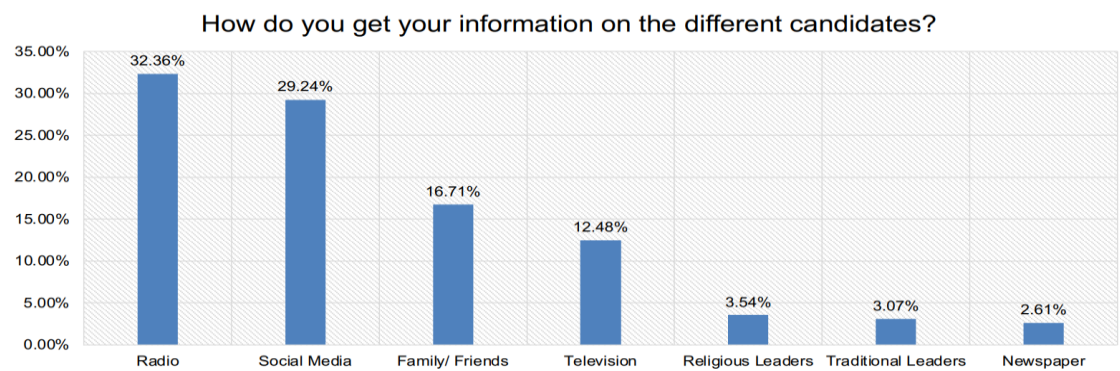
Table 16 above indicates that (n=107) 53.5% of the respondents discussed trending campaigns topics at home; (n=20) 10% in public transport; (n=10) 5% in Church/Mosque; (n=25) 12.5% in school during the presidential campaigns. The above data indicates that, messages tend to spin offline, moving from Twitter to television broadcasts and eventually reaching real conversations on Nigerian streets (Nwonwu et al., [2023](#)).

Put differently, news regarding election campaigns do not end with the tweets, likes, comments or on Twitter Spaces: Information usually transcends the original settings it was produced to places the sender never imagined it would get to. Information sharing is even made easier in Nigeria since Nigerians are very communal. This reflects in their ability to keep strong family ties and community bonds. Little wonder the concept of “Ubuntu,” which means “I am because we are,” has for years remained the underlining philosophy supporting the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Further to this, in Nigeria, there is always this or that event bringing friends, family members, colleagues, and well-wishers

together. Some of such events include birthday parties, funerals, weddings, child naming ceremony, chieftaincy coronation, graduation and convocation ceremonies, cultural festivals, and a host of others. It is during such events that, for instance, a friend catches up with his friend who may not be on social media and may not be aware of the political happenings in the country. Information shared during such moments continues to transcend social media spaces to physical settings, including where Internet and social media penetration is minimal.

The foregoing argument is consistent with the findings by a study by Nextier (2022) which was concluded on November 21, 2022. The study had conducted a face-to-face survey among rural communities in Nigeria, with a total sample size of 2000. If anything, the survey established that Nigerians received information regarding the presidential aspirants majorly from radio (32.36%), social media (29.24%), family/friends (16.71%). The Nextier study further validates the argument that, despite the so-called digital divide in rural areas, people in rural areas still use social media as one of their primary means of receiving information. Social media is further supported by radio stations in those rural areas, further limiting the so-called digital divide.

Figure 33: A chart excerpt from the 2022 Nextier study showing how respondents got information on the 2023 presidential aspirants.



Source: Nextier survey, 2022.

Similarly, in recent times, with the increase of Internet penetration and the growth of social media in Nigeria, most traditional media outlets (especially the newspapers and television stations) in Nigeria now have some sort of presence across social media platforms in Nigeria. An analysis of some of the prominent television stations and newspapers outlets in

Nigeria clearly show that the line between social media and traditional media have increasingly become blurred. In this regard, while social media (especially Twitter) facilitates real-time information sharing, traditional media now play a major role of fact-checking and validating the information and posts made across social media platforms. Such symbiotic relationship existing between social media and traditional media has sustained the relevance of the latter, while removing the barriers to information. What is more interesting is that it is practically difficult for information to be controlled or gatekept by traditional media – which are most times influenced/or controlled by politicians or by the state (as previously demonstrated on table 15).

Table 17: Showing some prominent television stations and newspapers outlets on Twitter.

SN	Name	*No. of Followers	Date of Joining
1.	Channels Television (TV)	6.7M	March 2010
2.	Arise News	692k	January 2013
3	Nigerian Television Authority	1.5M	March 2011
4	African Independent Television	917k	Feb. 2012
5.	TVC News	194k	August 2014
6	The Nation Newspapers	2.4M	October 2009
7.	Vanguard Newspapers	4.5M	May 2009
8.	Premium Times	2.1M	September 2011
9.	Sahara Reporters	5.1M	November 2008

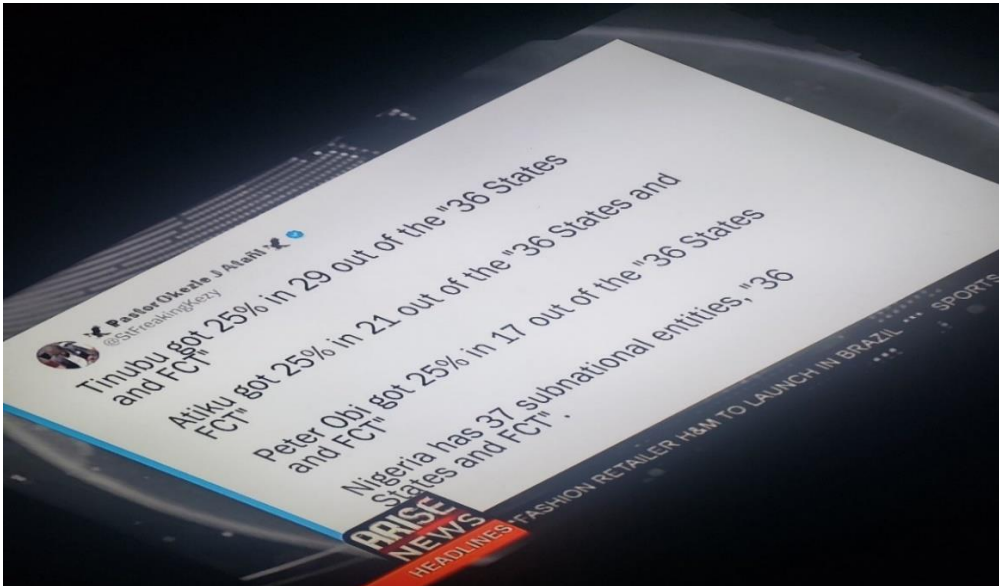
Source: field content analysis. *Data as of September 7, 2023.

The increasing presence of traditional media (as the random sample of some prominent traditional media station show in Table 17) clearly provides sufficient ground for this study to conclude that are some levels of convergence (or put differently, dependence) between traditional media and social media. This invariably implies that news found on social media most likely find their way to the mainstream (or traditional) media, as figure 34 below clearly demonstrates.

It is not possible for reporters or correspondents of newspaper outlets, television, and radio stations to cover every bit of happenings in Nigeria. Therefore, several times, traditional media rely on the real time information posted on social media as a source of information. There is one problem here: information on social media lacks censorship, and, as such, is prone to disinformation. Thus, traditional media in Nigeria has now found a new task of vetting and validating such information before publishing to their audience both online and offline. Additionally, traditional media's relevance on social media platforms is also felt in the area of 'verification' and 'legitimization' or broadly speaking, fact-checking information on social media (as figure 6 had previously demonstrated). The foregoing assertion is corroborated by Laolu Akanda, the official spokesman for former Vice President of Nigeria, thus:

Traditional media plays an important role for the simple fact that they are generally more believable and more credible. Secondly, also, because for purposes of political communication, traditional media has always been the preferred form of communication until the advent of social media. But, even after the advent of social media, traditional media is still the most important media because that is where the true measurement of political clout is available. Social media can do a lot more of make believe. Traditional media also has make-believe but not as much as social media (L. Akande, personal communication, July 13 2023).

Figure 34: shows a tweet being featured on air by Arise TV News, one of Nigeria's popular TV stations.



Source: Twitter.

Consequently, whilst one may agree that there are no polling unit (i.e., a place where elections take place in Nigeria) on social media in the literal meaning of that phrase, it is misleading to assume that there is no connection between social media and traditional media. With this, this study concludes that social media and traditional media are complementary in election campaign in Nigeria. As figures 34 & 35 indicate, posts made and issues discussed on Twitter (or other social media platforms) sometimes reflect the issues discussed on traditional media, and vice versa. This area of convergence supports the position of the hybrid system theory.

Figure 35: A screencast showing a prominent influencer for LP posting a video recorded of Arise Television and posting same on his Twitter handle.



Source: Twitter.

What is obvious is that, despite the convergence between social media and traditional media in Nigeria, the latter continues to play a crucial role in election campaigns in Nigeria. However, in support of the digital divide theory, the relevance and spread of traditional media would continue to be particularly and largely felt in rural areas where social media penetration is low compared to urban areas. Similarly, political candidates and parties would have to combine social media and traditional media strategies to maximize their reach during election campaigns.

Consequent upon this, two key points are important here. Firstly, traditional media must continue to synchronize their processes with new media if they must remain relevant in Nigeria. This is applicable to elections seasons as it is applicable to non-elections seasons. This is due to the cost effectiveness of publishing contents on the Internet (or specifically speaking, on social media), and the higher visibility which social media and the Internet provide users with. An incentive that encourages traditional media, political aspirants (or politicians), and platforms users to maintain and intensify their presence on Twitter is the recent monetization of Twitter, where content creators can now get paid directly by Twitter by posting their contents on Twitter (Sato, [2023](#)). Secondly, it is highly imperative that politicians acquaint themselves with this new paradigm shift in election campaign ecosystem if they must mobilize the youths in future elections (Okoro & Santas, [2017](#)).

4.4 The 2023 Presidential Elections: New challenges facing Twitter viz-a-viz its use in elections campaigning in Nigeria.

This study agrees with previous studies (e.g., Fasakin et al., [2017](#); Okolie et al., [2021](#)) that fake news, hate speech, and propaganda have become an intrinsic feature in the use of Twitter in election campaign in Nigeria. However, a slight departure from the standpoint of these previous studies is the preponderant rate at which fake news, hate speech, and propaganda were employed by the key political parties and their supporters in the 2022/23 presidential election campaigns. The foregoing position is further corroborated by Mwakideu and Steinwehr ([2023](#)), who argued that, during the 2015 election campaigns, people recognized that fake news and disinformation were a problem. In 2019, it transited into a serious concern. However in 2023, the problem of fake news became existential.

Table 18: Showing respondents' answer to the question: what is the most significant threat to Twitter's use in election campaigns?

<i>Items</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Propaganda</i>	52	26
<i>Hate speech</i>	46	23
<i>Fake news</i>	51	25.5
<i>Bots, algorithms, and artificial intelligence</i>	9	4.5
<i>Social media ban</i>	42	21
Total	200	100

Source: field survey, July 2023.

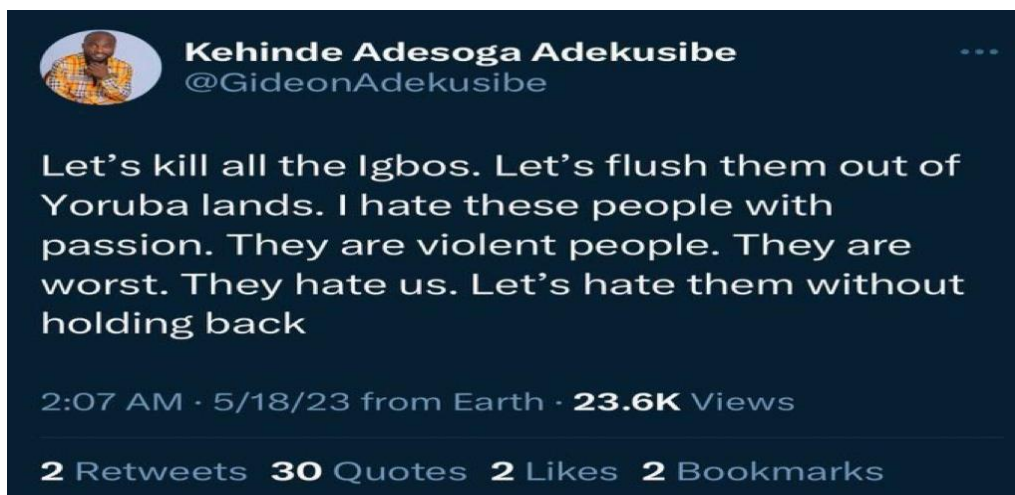
The study finds that, while LP dominated the online campaign space with a leadership-centred and issue-based contents, the APC and the PDP social media handles accounted for a good majority of the hate speech, propaganda, and abusive language used during the presidential campaign on Twitter (“European Union Election Observation Mission NIGERIA 2023 Final Report,” [2023](#)). This is further buttressed by the survey findings on Table 19, which indicates that (n=157) 78.5% of the respondents believed Obi and his supporters ran an issue-based campaigns, as against (n=2) 1% and (n=30) 15% for Atiku and Tinubu respectively.

Table 19: Showing the candidate who ran the most issue-based campaign.

Items	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Which of these presidential candidates and their supporters mostly ran an issue-based campaign on Twitter?		
Peter Obi	157	78.5
Atiku Abubakar	2	1
Bola Ahmed Tinubu	30	15
Others	11	5.5
Total	200	100

Source: field survey, July 2023.

Figure 36: Showing a supporter of APC threatening to physically harm people from the Igbo ethnic group, who were majorly supporting Obi.



Source: Twitter.

Unfortunately, with regards to fake news, hate speech, and propaganda on social media, “even though such claims are quickly debunked, they have been seen, commented on, and shared thousands of times” (Mwakideu & Steinwehr, [2023](#), n.p.). Such hate speech and fake news are usually popularised by influential individuals on Twitter paid by politicians to control

the narratives in their favour but against political adversaries. In an interview with the BBC Global Disinformation Team (as cited in Nwonwu et al., [2023](#), para. 4), Yemi and Godiya (real names withheld by BBC due to data protection concerns), who were prominent political strategist and politicians respectively of a leading political party in Nigeria, confirmed that they:

(...) have paid an influencer up to 20m naira ((\$45,000; £37,000) for delivering a result. We've also given people gifts. Other people prefer to hear: 'What do you want to do in government, be a board member, be a special assistant. We use images that may not even be relevant to the story we are trying to spin. We can take pictures from East Africa in the 1990s in warzones and attach them to a tweet... When people get emotional, they retweet, they like, and it gets traction).

The BBC Global Disinformation Team (as cited in Nwonwu et al., [2023](#)) further revealed that:

Situation rooms are commonplace in the run-up to an election. It's where political parties strategize, develop plans, and monitor their campaigns' success. But in the rooms the whistle-blowers described to us, there was another function: following how false narrative assigned to influencers were performing (para. 5).

Meanwhile, one thing noteworthy from Table 18 above is that the number of respondents who believe that the manipulation of algorithms and the use of bots and political AI (as it is famously referred to) in election campaigns in Nigeria are lower than other variables (i.e., propaganda, hate speech). An explanation for this is that the operations of algorithms, bots, and AI are usually very subtle and covert, and by implication, hard to be intercepted by platform users. Commenting on the use of AI during the presidential campaign, Hassan Chukwuemeka (real name withheld due to data protection reasons), the Head of AI and Data Analytics for the Campaign Organization of one of the major political parties, revealed that:

Advanced software programmes and algorithms were used during the 2022 presidential election campaign to know what people were thinking, their personalities, what they like, and their preferred presidential candidates. With this information, we were able to do voter mapping and advice the Campaign Organization on the campaign strategy to adopt, including what words to use to trigger people's feelings for a certain candidate. We ran data listening and data analysis on websites, social media platforms, but almost 90% of our data emerged from Twitter. Reason for this is because Nigerians spend

most of their online time on Twitter and Facebook (*C. Hassan, personal communication, September 7, 2023*).

Further buttressing on the use of AI during the election campaign in Nigeria, Luckscheiter ([2022](#); Aside from the Use of Bots section, para. 3) observes that:

Another emerging tool is “deep fakes” – AI-assisted footage that bears the face of political actors speaking structured and assigned statements. Over 50 claims [were] fact-checked directly related to forthcoming 2023 general elections, have doctored images and videos attached. Some of them are merely taken out of context to mislead the public.

Another study (“European Union Election Observation Mission NIGERIA 2023 Final Report,” [2023](#)) further corroborated that there was a coordinated attempt to influence the 2022/23 presidential campaign, primarily through hashtags aided with either automated accounts (bots) or anonymous suspicious accounts among new followers of the three leading presidential aspirants. As previously demonstrated in Table 11, some of such hashtags include #Obidient, #kwankwasiya, #BATified, #Atikulated, among others. More so, CIID’s 2022 study (as cited in Luckscheiter, [2022](#)) further revealed, following a bot analysis of the Twitter handles of the major presidential candidates, and it was found that:

Bola Ahmed, the All Progressive Congress candidate, had one million followers as of February 2022. [As of October 2022, Tinubu had] 1.4million followers: an addition of 400,000 followers within eight months. Our bot analysis revealed 17.1% (248,000) of the followers as bots, fake accounts created within that period. Peter Obi had 705,600 followers as of February 2022. [As of October 2022], the Labour Party candidate [had] 2million followers, a tremendous increase of 1.3 million followers within eight months. Analysis of these followers revealed that 26.55% percent [were] bots (Social Media and Their Influence section, para. 2).

In addition to creating an illusion of widespread support or popularity (Luckscheiter, [2022](#)), such bots help escalate fake news, which is very harmful to the health of a young democracy like Nigeria’s.

In sum, there are no doubts that AI and algorithms can amplify political messaging, but they can manipulate public opinion on social media to spread misinformation, enhance existing divides in the Nigerian society, and violate platform users’ privacy. This emerging challenge to election campaign on social media in Nigeria underscores the need for transparency,

regulation, and ethical considerations to maintain the integrity of democratic processes in Nigeria.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Summary and Conclusion

This study assessed the various ways Twitter was utilised during the 2022/23 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. Specific focus was on the three key presidential aspirants and their political parties in the presidential election. The study revealed that Twitter was used by politicians, INEC, and supporters of the three key political parties to educate electorates in Nigeria regarding how to register and collect their PVCs. Also, Twitter was used for grassroots mobilisation for pre-campaign rallies and the actual campaign rallies. It was further utilised to solicit for funds, do damage control, attack political opponents, and to keep electorates informed regarding campaign schedules. Meanwhile, in terms of the domination of Twitter, the study found that Peter Obi of LP had a very strong presence on Twitter compared to the other two presential candidates. In addition to this, Obi's campaign had the strongest online supporters, especially among youths.

Contrary to the belief that the digital divide between rural and urban areas remarkably impinges the usefulness of Twitter in election campaigns in Nigeria, the study revealed that traditional media and social media are not mutually exclusive. In this regard, the study demonstrated that both traditional media and social media mutually complement each other during election campaigns. This is because, several times, posts made (or issues discussed) on social media platforms find themselves discussed on traditional media, and vice versa. With this level of convergence between social media and traditional media, in addition to the communality of the Nigerian society, and the information flow between friends, family members, colleagues who may not be on social media, the study contends that the issue of digital divide becomes pointless and lacks applicability in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, the study further affirmed that online campaigns, more often than not, is an offshoot of physical campaigns. However, while physical election campaigns are limited in time and space, social media campaigns are all encompassing, reach more audience, and are less expensive to organise; but, social media campaigns require technical and marketing knowledge to be effective with them.

Meanwhile, in addition to the extant problem of fake news, hate speech, and propaganda witnessed in previous elections, the study finds that there have emerged newer and more sophisticated challenges to deal with regarding the use of Twitter for both election

campaigns and political communication in Nigeria. These new challenges are powered by AI, algorithms, and bots. The study established that AI and algorithms could be a two-edged sword: it can help political aspirants increase their visibility and amplify their political messages. Unfortunately, they can considerably violate users' data, exacerbate existing ethno-religious divides and promote biased information that may potentially and negatively affect voters' behaviour in Nigeria's election. Due to this, the study concludes that political AI and algorithms can be disastrous on an industrial scale if not properly and ethically used, managed, and regulated.

5.2 Recommendations

Essentially, with the growing popularity of social media platforms and its predominant use by the younger population, such platforms, no doubt, will be critical players in determining how effective and strong a political party or candidate will be in the nearest future (Bello et al., 2019). Therefore, a "more effective and intelligent use of these platforms will be a crucial factor in improving the approval level of political parties or politicians vying for elective positions. Inspiration can be drawn from the recent elections in Brazil, where the victorious candidate relied mainly on social media to engage with the electorate" (Bello et al., [2019](#), p. 149).

From government's perspectives, there should be some sort of platform regulation for the corporations that develop social media applications. This is especially as regarding the data protection of platform users. In a similar vein, regarding the use of AI and algorithms in election campaigns, Hassan Chukwuemeka (real name withheld due to data protection concerns), the head of AI and Data Analytics for one of the key political parties in Nigeria, recommend that:

The 2022/23 presidential election was the first time AI was ever used in elections in Nigeria, so it is still very new in this part of the world. Going forward, however, I would recommend stricter data protection laws to guide the use of AI and algorithms, so it is not overly intrusive. If used wrongly, it can cause serious issues for the security of a country. Currently, Nigeria does not adhere to any strict guidelines or rules regarding the use of personal data. In this regard, a conscious effort has to be made to correct that. For now, there's a treasure trove of data points to be mined and used properly for effective and targeted

marketing of not just political candidates, but also corporate bodies (C. Hassan, personal communication, September 7, 2023).

For political candidates in Nigeria, they should come to terms with the fact that social media is here to stay. Generally, political aspirants should meticulously plan and execute communication strategies using various tools, to fully enjoy the inherent benefits and advantages of social media for election campaigns (Apuke & Tunca, [2018](#)). Furthermore, politicians must be willing to understand the intricacies of social media and how they can integrate same in their campaign strategies, going forward. Alternatively, since social media marketing requires some professional and technical skills, engaging the services of a public relations company would be the ideal decision politicians may want to take. Such a decision would be very relevant to developing a solid social media strategy and implementing same effectively.

For users or consumers of social media content, the researcher agrees with Ozigbo's recommendation that:

People should express their will, but of course, no freedom should be extreme. People should not hide under proxy names to insult people on social media. People must be able criticize government constructively, to bear their minds, express their grievances and frustrations as they will, and government must not do anything to impinge on their fundamental human rights (V. Ozigbo, personal communication, July 24, 2023).

Additionally, verifying information before sharing, promoting civil discourse, following trusted sources online, educating others on the issues of fake news and hate speech, complying with platform regulations, and enrolling in digital literacy programme are essential, voluntary steps social media users can take to create a safer and more informed online environment.

The researcher expresses strong criticism of the bill introduced at the Nigerian National Assembly in 2019 (Iroanusi, [2019](#); Paul, [2019](#)) and in 2022 (Odueso, [2022](#)), which is a subtle attempt to undermine the free use of social media in Nigeria. The researcher recommends that non-legal approaches such as encouraging media literacy programmes among the masses, emphasizing data-based media monitoring, timely ensuring true information is more readily available and accessible, and liaising with technology companies on content moderation should be better alternatives (Luckscheiter, [2022](#)).

More so, from the perspectives of INEC, the researcher agrees with the recommendation of Geraldine, an INEC Public Affairs officer, that:

Given that INEC has identified social media as a viable tool for passing information and exchanging communication, it is pertinent that INEC is proactive instead of reactive in information dissemination. Fake news happens because there is that vacuum in information dissemination. So, INEC should not wait until people start pushing out the wrong information. Certain information should go ahead of people even before they need it so that when fake news shows up, someone can direct social media users to what INEC had posted on their verified handles. Also, when an incident of fake news happens, INEC should respond timely and flag such information, so as to curb fake news and misinformation from spreading further (Geraldine, personal communication, September 4, 2023).

Overall, it had been established in the methods chapter that this study adopted the non-probabilistic sampling method, due to time and material constraints on the part of the researcher. The consequence of this is that the conclusions derived from the field data have less generalizability to the broader population. This limitation makes it very challenging to use statistical techniques for inference and hypothesis testing. This may further raise ethical concerns, since certain ethnic groups in Nigeria were systematically excluded from the sample. Therefore, the study recommends that future studies employ the probability sampling methods, such as simple random sampling or stratified sampling. While the suggested sampling method is more cumbersome, it is a more systematic approach compared to the non-probabilistic method. Meanwhile, further studies may focus on the impact of political AI, bots, and algorithms on election campaigns during the 2022/23 presidential election campaign. Another potential research topic could, for instance, be devoted to studying the use of Facebook during the 2023 presidential election campaigns, and how such compares with the use of Twitter.

APPENDIXES

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List of Interviewees

SN	Name	Position	Place of Interview	Date
1	Valentine Ozigbo	Politician	Virtual/Webex	July 24, 2023
2	Uko Aziza	Communication expert	Virtual/Zoom	July 17, 2023
3	Paul Moses	Politician	Virtual/Zoom	June 22, 2023

4	Morris Monye	Social media influencer	Virtual/Zoom	July 10, 2023
5	Uche Okoye	Social media influencer	Virtual/Whatsapp	July 3, 2023
6	David Hundeyin	Journalist	Virtual/Zoom	July 8, 2023
7	Juliet Isi Ikhayere	Politician	Virtual/Zoom	June 28, 2023
8	Chigozie Alex	Social media influencer	Virtual/Zoom	July 2, 2023
9	Arch Angel	Social media influencer	Virtual/Zoom	June 22, 2023
10	Emma Umeh	Social media influencer	Virtual/Zoom	June 21, 2023
11	Ilemona Onoja	Politician	Virtual/Whatsapp	July 9, 2023
12	Oladayo Ogunbowale	Politician	Physical/Nigeria	Oct. 19, 2022
13	Omolere Omoyinte	Politician	Physical/Nigeria	Oct. 19, 2022
14	Adeyemo Moses	Politician	Physical/Nigeria	Oct. 19, 2022
15	Hassan Chukwuemeka	Data Analyst	Physical/Nigeria	September 7, 2023
16	Laolu Akande	Politician	Virtual/Zoom	July 13, 2023
17	Geraldine (INEC officer)	INEC officer	Virtual/Whatsapp	September 4, 2023