

## **Social Media Engagement and Citizens' Participation in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election**

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### **Abstract**

*By creating avenues for information sharing, encouraging civic engagement, and influencing public opinion, this paper situates how social media influenced the campaign and people's perception of candidates and parties during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The paper addresses the central role media play generally in engendering citizen participation, focusing essentially on social media engagement since all citizens above age 18 have the constitutional power to elect who they desire to lead them. Through campaign and voting, Nigerians actively participate in politics, influencing their government representatives' decisions democratically. This study builds upon a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and employing secondary data and case study approach, to assess voters' engagement through the social media, their contributions to shaping public discourse, and critically evaluates the challenges associated with hate speech, misinformation and disinformation during the campaigns. While the study observes that social media engagement is crucial in democracies by accelerating citizens' hold on elected officials to become accountable through voting, party membership and interfaces with party and government officials. The study reveals that the impact of social media has fundamentally altered the terrain of political discourse and the dynamics of interpersonal interactions between politicians, governments, and citizens in the country. It was then recommended that the government of Nigeria should use technology to improve the electoral process, to lower the possibility of manipulation and use electronic voting systems or mechanism in the transmission of election results to strengthen the integrity of future election.*

**Keywords:** Citizenship, Disinformation, Fake News, Hate Speech, Misinformation, Social Media

## **Introduction**

Discussions about citizenship is generally centred on four dimensions – political dimension which focuses on rights and responsibilities; social dimension which relates to the behaviour between individuals and society leading to measures of loyalty and solidarity; cultural dimension that entails the consciousness of a common heritage as well as the economic dimension related to the relationship between citizens and the labour and consumption market. All these are attainable through socialisation processes which take place through various avenues, including the mass media.

As highlighted by the Council of Europe (2023: 16):

Much discussion concerning citizenship is focused on the problem of increasing citizens' involvement and participation in the processes of democratic society. It is being increasingly realised that periodic voting by citizens is insufficient, either in terms of making those who govern in the interim period fully accountable or in promoting feelings of empowerment among ordinary citizens. Furthermore, low voting turnouts indicate levels of political apathy among the population, which seriously undermines the effective functioning of democracy.

Globally, the media offer public awareness, enlightenment, and accessibility; promoting informed decision-making, civic education, democratic culture, and political mobilisation through news, analysis, commentaries and updates on regional, global, and local events. Media comprise a range of communication channels that are employed to disseminate news, entertainment, information, and other types of content to a broad audience (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2023). These channels include radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, the internet, and

social media (William, 2012). Forming public opinion, distributing information, and influencing social, cultural, and political dynamics are all critical functions of the media (Janssen, 2017). According to Anthony and Yves (2019), citizenship is the status of being a member of a certain nation or group, as well as the rights and obligations that come with such membership. For Howell (2015), common legal and political rights enjoyed by citizens include the ability to vote, get work, and be protected by the government. In other words, citizenship entails following the law, contributing to the advancement of the community or country, and actively participating in its activities. Political participation also has to do with the various ways that people participate in politics collectively (Nyman, 2023). This participation involves doing things like casting a ballot in elections, participating in campaigns, joining advocacy groups, going to public gatherings, and expressing political opinions via a variety of media (Nissen, 2021). Political engagement, is essential to a democratic society, as it gives people a voice in the decisions that affect their daily lives.

According to a United Nations Development Programme fact sheet on youth (2013), the youth are “a creative force, a dynamic source of innovations, and they have undoubtedly, throughout history, participated, contributed, and even catalyzed important changes in political systems, power-sharing dynamics and economic opportunities”. Yet, they are often excluded in governance and opportunities to participate in political and decision-making processes. According to Nigeria's National Youth Policy (2019), youth are defined as individuals aged **18 to 29 years**. However, the African Youth Charter broadens this range to include those aged **15 to 35 years**. **However**, the term "young people" is often used more broadly and can include adolescents and youth. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines "young people" as those aged **10 to 24 years**, which overlaps with but extends beyond the youth category. These definitions highlight the fluidity of these terms, depending on the context and the

framework being applied. In Nigeria the universal adult suffrage age is 18.

The contention that young people are apathetic to politics suggesting a failure in their exercise of citizenship to enrich the democratic processes of their countries has been challenged by existing studies (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014). As Loader *et al* (2014, p.141) notes:

Undoubtedly, many young citizens have indeed become disenchanted with mainstream political parties and with those who claim to speak on their behalf. But this should not be misinterpreted as a lack of interest on the part of youth with the political issues that influence their everyday lived experience and their normative concerns for the planet and its inhabitants. As the recent waves of protest demonstrations by young people in all their different forms and contexts testify, the suggestion that the next generation of citizens is any less politically engaged than previous ones seems at least premature. How then are we to understand the actions and political values of the future custodians of our polities and what are their implications for democratic governance?

Speaking from his experiences in Somalia, Mohamud (2022) gives credence to the fact that young people are increasingly using social media platforms as means of self-expression, keeping up with the political situation, and commenting on the state of affairs, mostly with a good level of awareness and analysis. Similar patterns can be observed in Nigeria. But do these translate to an actual influence on public policy and participation in the political structures and processes?

### **Importance of Media to Citizenship and Political Participation**

Through a variety of channels, the media play a critical role in shaping and influencing civic engagement and citizenship. Here, we examine a few key elements that highlight its importance:

- i. **Information Accessibility:** The media provide citizens with news, commentary, and updates on events occurring in the local, national, and worldwide arenas, acting as key sources of information (Salvador P., Vivar, P.C., de Vera III E., and Rosaroso, R. (2017). Knowledgeable voters are better able to make decisions and actively engage in the political process.
- ii. **Encouragement of Education and Public Awareness:** The media contribute to civic education by increasing public knowledge of political topics, institutions, and procedures. They help people understand their responsibilities, rights, and how the government functions, making the public more informed and engaged.
- iii. **Promoting Communication and Conversation:** Public conversation and debate are facilitated by media platforms, which include social media as well as traditional media (Kunduru, 2018). By providing residents with the means to express their thoughts, engage in dialogue, and share a variety of viewpoints, they foster a democratic culture that is both vibrant and welcoming.
- iv. **Advocacy and Mobilisation:** The media serve as a spark for political mobilisation, enabling people and organizations to organise and support particular causes (Yamamoto, Kushin and Dalisay, 2013). Media channels contribute to the facilitation of protests, activism, and other political expressions.

### **Citizenship and Political Participation in Nigeria**

Engaging in politics is important in our culture because it has a direct effect on how we live in a globalised world. It gives people the chance to advise government representatives about their preferences and

concerns in a democratic setting, putting pressure on them to act (Eremenko, 2011). It is also about consensus-building. Hence, the foundation of citizenship is the guarantee of legal and political protection against coercive power, which can be applied by a soldier's weapon, a spouse or parent's abuse, or an employer's dismissal that results in the loss of employment, income, status, and possibly even food (Fayomi and Adebayo, 2018). It promotes speaking out against injustice and inequality and helps young people develop critical thinking abilities by encouraging reflection on diverse political, social, ethical, and moral concerns. Nigerians must give up their other citizenship when they turn 22 because the country generally forbids dual citizenship (Unini, 2020). However, there are currently talks about possible changes to this legislation that may permit dual citizenship under certain conditions (Unini, 2020).

According to van Deth (2021), political participation is the voluntary engagement of citizens of a society in the choice of their leaders and in the direct or indirect moulding of public policies. Van Deth (2021) asserts that behaviours such as campaigning, voting in elections, and running for office are only deemed political engagement when they are carried out voluntarily or voluntarily by individuals. Nigeria's youth population is quite significant, and there is a growing emphasis on getting young people involved in politics and decision-making. The goal of many programs and groups is to encourage and promote young people's involvement in politics. The study found a link between socioeconomic inclusion, effective governance, and youth political participation in Nigeria (Akinyetun, 2021). In terms of male and female participation in politics, Heywood in Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014) noted that patriarchy has historically been present in Nigerian politics and has been associated with "rule by men."

## **Role of Media in Shaping Citizenship**

One of the most important roles that the media plays in shaping citizenship is influencing public opinion, promoting civic involvement, and providing a forum for the sharing of knowledge. The following highlights important facets of the media's role in forming civic engagement

- i. **Information Dissemination:** The media serve as the main information source, keeping the public informed about events occurring locally, nationally, and internationally (Prasain, 2023). By giving citizens information about social issues, political changes, and economic trends, news coverage empowers citizens to participate actively in democracy and make educated decisions (Lamidi, Gana and Alafiatayo, 2014).
- ii. **Monitoring Government Accountability:** Investigative reporting and journalism plays a critical role in making sure public leaders and governments are held responsible for their deeds (Muhammed and Antwi-Boateng, 2023). Acting as a watchdog, the media exposes cases of power abuse, corruption, and other problems that may have a negative effect on the welfare of the populace (Cervi, Tejedor and Ikokuwu, 2023).
- iii. **Civic Education:** The media help the public understand complex political issues by making complex laws, policies, and government operations easier to understand (Middaugh and Kahne, 2013). Through news broadcasts, chat shows, and documentaries, citizens can learn about their rights, duties, and how democratic institutions work.
- iv. **Political Socialisation and Public Opinion Formation:** The media have significant impact on citizens' political socialisation, especially when it comes to forming young people's political

identities (Türkmenoğlu, 2023). Cultivating civic knowledge and ideals is greatly aided by exposure to a variety of political arguments, points of view, and policies (Türkmenoğlu, 2023).

- v. **Public Opinion Formation:** By highlighting particular elements of stories and phrasing issues, media outlets can have a significant impact on how the public feels about things (Ballan, 2023). Journalists, specialists, and pundits' opinions can influence citizens' perceptions and interpretations of events, hence influencing their attitudes and views (Ballan, 2023). In spite of the plaudits heaped on the Nigerian media landscape, the media are sometimes used as proxies in the battle between rival political groups, in the process sowing divisiveness rather than consensus, hate speech instead of sober debate, and suspicion rather than social trust. In these cases, the media contribute to public cynicism and democratic decay (Kperogi, F. A., & Ishiekwene, A., 2025).

### **Social Media and Political Participation**

Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media enables users to create, share, and consume various types of content, such as text, images, videos, and audio, through interactive and networked platforms (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media also facilitates social interaction, collaboration, and participation among users, who can form online communities and networks based on their interests, preferences, and identities (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

In democracies, political engagement is essential because it gives people a way to hold elected officials responsible and actively participate in national governance. Voting, joining political parties,



going to rallies, and getting in touch with elected officials are examples of traditional political engagement that have long been considered necessary for democratic regimes (Ahmad and Fadi, 2019; Kaskazi and Kitzie, 2023). Unfortunately, there is a current downturn in the acceptance of these traditional forms, especially among young people, which is ascribed to elements such as mistrust of political parties, disenchantment with political institutions, and a sense of alienation from the political process (Zagidullin, M., Nergis, A. and Sanat, K. (2021)).

Social media has become a unique instrument in reaction to this trend, encouraging young people to get involved in politics and take action (Kenna and Hensley, 2019). Social media platforms give young people access to political ideas, like-minded people to interact with, and public discussion opportunities that were not available to them before (Omotayo and Folorunso, 2020). Furthermore, social media has the ability to dismantle conventional barriers to political engagement by giving people who might otherwise feel excluded from traditional political activities a voice (Moon and Bai, 2020). Additionally, it has been crucial in getting young people involved in demonstrations and marches led by social media platforms.

Social media has been widely used for political purposes in various contexts and countries, such as the Arab Spring, the Brexit referendum, the US presidential elections, and the Nigerian general elections (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Lilleker et al., 2017; Enli, 2017; Ojebuyi et al., 2019). Social media can serve as a platform for political information, communication, mobilisation, participation, and deliberation (Enli, 2017). Social media can also be used for political propaganda, manipulation, polarisation, and misinformation (Woolley & Howard, 2016; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Kperogi, F. A., & Ishiekwe, A., 2025).

The use of social media for political campaigns in Nigeria dates back to the 2011 general elections, when the then incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, launched his Facebook page and Twitter account to connect with the electorate, especially the youth (Ojebuyi et al., 2019). Since then, social media has become an integral part of the Nigerian political landscape, with candidates and parties using various platforms to disseminate their messages, manifestos, and achievements, as well as to counter the narratives and attacks of their opponents (Ojebuyi et al., 2019).

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria witnessed an unprecedented level of social media activity and engagement, as the four major candidates and their supporters used various platforms to campaign, persuade, and mobilise the voters. According to the EU Election Observation Mission, there were over 100 million social media posts related to the election between January and March 2023, with Twitter being the most dominant platform, followed by *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *WhatsApp*. The social media campaigns of the four candidates were characterised by different themes, strategies, and tactics, as well as by various forms of misinformation, hate speech, and fake news (Techpoint Africa, 2023:7; BBC, 2023:10).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts two theories - uses and gratification and mobilisation - to underpin the examination of the exercise of citizenship by people in Nigeria in relation to their engagement and interventions in the 2023 presidential elections. The UGT, developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, explores how individuals actively engage with media to satisfy specific needs, such as information, entertainment, or social connection.

This is a psychological communication perspective that examines how individuals use mass media. As an audience based theoretical

framework it is grounded on the assumption that individuals select media content to fulfill felt needs and wants. These needs are expressed as motives for adopting particular medium use, and are connected to the social psychological makeup of the individual. Based on perceived needs, social and psychological characteristics, and media attributes, individuals use media and experience related gratifications. It is to this end that UGT has found favourable alignment with communication scholars seeking explication for youth attachment to social media apps such as *Twitter (now X)*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and micro-blogs. Since these channels of social media and outlets are used by youth the audiences more to fulfill specific gratifications, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) argue that it is because they favour utility, passing time, seeking information, convenience, and entertainment that they are amenable to the youths. Studies have established empirical relationships between social media and the other tools of technological devices, especially internet-enabled ones as being UGT compliant as a framework for explicating political or economic socialisation. It has been widely used to explore new media and communication technologies such as Social Network Service (Al Jabri, 2015), online games, virtual communities (Cheung and Lee, 2021). The UGT approach facilitates a homological network for research rather than providing a predefined set of construct often targeting to meet certain personal and social needs such as information seeking, social interaction, freedom of expression, enjoyment, social presence and belongingness and social identity (Agojo, K. N. M *et al*, 2023).

The Mobilisation Theory, on the other hand, is rooted in the work of John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald, also introduced in the 1970s, it focuses on how media facilitates collective action and political participation by activating individuals and organising resources for social movements causes (Dunu and Uzochukwu 2015). Social media exemplifies this by quickly spreading information, rallying people for protests or campaigns, and encouraging voter turnout. It empowers

citizens to unite for causes, hold leaders accountable, and drive societal and political change. The transformative power of social media in inspiring individuals to take collective action is highlighted by the application of mobilisation theory to the usage of digital platforms for political participation (Casteltrione 2016).

According to Onigbo, Innocent and Ikechukwu (2018) citing Dalton (2002), this framework can be applied in developments in technology; education and mass media because it is sensitive to increased public's political abilities and availed electorates greater resources of information consequently increasing their overall political sophistication that prepares them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions. Particularly in the context of social movements and political conduct, mobilisation theory emphasises the process by which people are inspired and arranged to engage in collective action. The theory acknowledges social media as a potent instrument for quickly and widely distributing information and its critical role in motivating and uniting people to participate in politics. The emphasis on social media's ability to facilitate networks and connectivity highlights the importance of social relationships in organising people. The platforms facilitate the rapid growth of networks, increasing the number of people who participate in political activities. The use of social media in political discourse helps to mobilise people and raise awareness (Agojo, K. N. M., *et al*, 2023). The theory acknowledges the success of online activism made possible by social media platforms as it adjust to the digital age. These platforms facilitate digital activism by giving people the means to voice their opinions, plan campaigns, and rally support for a range of issues (Vraga and Tully, 2021).

In the context of social media, this theory explains why citizens turn to platforms like Facebook or Twitter to gain political knowledge, connect with like-minded individuals, and engage in discussions. It positions

social media as a tool that fosters active participation in political engineering, allowing citizens to contribute to public opinion and governance. Together, these theories underscore how social media enables citizens to become informed, engaged, and mobilised participants in the processes of political engineering, transforming their roles from passive observers to active contributors.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing secondary data and the case study method. As Wimmer and Dominick (2006) cited Yin (1994), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.” This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, focusing on social media's role in citizens' engagement. It facilitated the analysis of diverse sources, including election monitoring reports, expert analyses, and historical records, categorised into social capital, civic engagement, and political participation.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **The Main Issues, Candidates, and Elections**

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was a highly contested and polarized one, with four major candidates vying for the highest office in the land: Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Rabi'u Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP). The election was also marked by the unprecedented use of social media for campaigns, propaganda, and misinformation by the candidates and their supporters (EU, 2023). They were front runners in a race that had 14 other candidates.

The previous administration of Muhammadu Buhari promised to solve insecurity, corruption, and economic problems when he took office, but

did not lived up to the hype, even APC national leader Bola Tinubu distanced himself from the government's failings (Adetayo, Chughtai and Egbejule (2023). The economy had had two recessions in the last five years, and the value of the naira dropped by two-thirds before the February 25, 2023 presidential election. A great deal of insecurity, especially in the northeast, northwest, and southeast persisted. There are a lot of armed organisations who have grudges against the government and, hence, often commit violent crimes, murders, and kidnappings (Adetayo, Chughtai and Egbejule (2023).

The rise of social media, however fundamentally reshaped communication the nation's landscapes, impacting various aspects of human interaction, including the socio-political sphere (Ojebuyi et Al, 2019). This impact is self-evident in the 2023 elections circle, where platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp emerged as powerful tools for political mobilisation, information dissemination, and opinion formation. According to Statista, there are 32.9 million active social media users in Nigeria, representing 15.8% of the total population. The most popular platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X). These platforms enabled candidates and parties to reach out to a large and diverse audience, especially the youth, who constitute 71% of the registered voters.

Investigation by this researcher revealed that the 2023 presidential election witnessed a historic phenomenon: the unprecedented influence of social media on influencing voter opinion and shaping campaign strategies. From mobilisation to messaging, digital platforms played a crucial role in the electoral process, leaving an undeniable mark on the democratic landscape. The following are the main findings on how social media affected the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria:

**The Power of Online Conversations:** Online conversations can reveal important insights. According to a study by Techpoint Africa (2023) the three main candidates, Bola Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi, received over 60 million social media mentions in the months of the campaign. Obi, who had fewer resources than his rivals, had the most online engagement (35%), showing how digital platforms can create a more level playing field.

**Engagement Beyond Numbers:** The number of mentions is not enough to measure the impact of social media. Chukwu (2023)

**Voter mobilisation:** Twitter and Facebook were essential for spreading information, providing resources, and arranging rallies, which increased voter turnout, especially among young people.

**Policy discussions:** Online platforms allowed voters to have debates and discussions on issues, which helped them evaluate the candidates' policy positions.

**Community building:** Social media created online communities around each candidate, which strengthened their support base and promoted peer-to-peer engagement.

**The Influence on Votes:** It is difficult to link individual votes to social media influence. However, there was a clear correlation. The European Union (2023) estimated that more than 60% of voters used social media for election-related information, which indicated its important role in influencing voting choices. Moreover, the regional distribution of online engagement matched the final election results, with Obi's high online support leading to more votes in certain regions. The actual turnout for the presidential election was somewhat over 25 million despite the fact that there were over 93 million voter registrations (Ibeabuchi, 2023). The outcome of the election demonstrated that

merely implementing technology is not enough (Ibeabuchi, 2023). Furthermore, there was a noticeable increase in ethnic animosity and tensions following the elections, especially in Lagos State. Violent incidents were intimately linked to voter suppression (Ibeabuchi, 2023).

Also, this study found out that in Nigeria, social media reportage has been largely influenced by internal and external realities, including parochial interests like ethnicity, religion, social status/class, party affiliations, and other centrifugal and centripetal contrivances of the Nigerian nation-state. Despite the elaborate Guidelines that have been put in place in the new Electoral Reforms of 2022 and the New Broadcasting Codes that were recently enacted to act as a check against hate and dangerous political campaigns. During the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, there were various manifestations of anti-democratic elements that could incite violence, and mislead the public, including

- **Hate Speech:** that is speech that promotes violence, discrimination, or hostility towards individuals or groups based on attributes such as their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. The spread like wildfire in harmattan through various channels, including speeches, online social media posts, and campaign rallies. A couple of examples will suffice as experienced during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. One was the ethnic profiling and inflammatory remarks. For example, Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, a Lagos State governorship candidate, faced hate campaigns targeting his Igbo heritage, portraying him as sympathetic to separatist movements. Similarly, a senator-elect in Enugu State incited ethnic hate by urging supporters to prepare for a "war" during the elections (Premium Times, 2023).

- **Misinformation:** this revolves around inaccurately shared information, which may be unintentionally or inaccurately



communicated. Such misinformation could involve false claims about candidates, their policies, or the expectations of the election process itself. It is crucial to verify information before sharing, rely on credible sources, and check for fact-checking verification from reputable organisations. During the 2023 election circle, misinformation was rampant, with false claims about candidates and election results. For instance, viral claims suggested that Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, had won Anambra State by a significant margin before official results were announced, creating confusion among voters (Vanguard, 2023).

- **Disinformation:** In contrast to misinformation, disinformation is misleading information shared deliberately to deceive or manipulate public opinion. During the 2023 election, there were attempts to spread disinformation, such as fake news stories or manipulated images, to influence voter behavior or undermine candidates. For instance, quotes falsely attributed to former President Olusegun Obasanjo claimed he endorsed Peter Obi to reduce violence in Nigeria. Manipulated images and fake endorsements also circulated widely to mislead voters (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023).

- **Fake News:** which generally refers to misinformation presented as legitimate news, often designed to mislead readers and discredit targeted individuals or groups. It can be shared through various mediums. Fake news stories were prevalent around the 2023 election circles, often designed to discredit candidates. One example involved accusations that Rabiú Kwankwaso, a presidential candidate, falsely claimed to hold an academic doctorate. These stories were amplified on social media platforms, further polarising the electorate (Channels Television, 2023)

Furthermore, some politicians and their supporters used divisive language to mobilise voters along ethnic or religious lines, exacerbating

tensions. Misinformation held sway with false rumours about candidates' personal lives, health, or political affiliations circulated widely on social media, aimed at influencing voter perceptions. While misleading information about voting procedures, polling locations, and eligibility requirements misled voters and undermined the electoral process. Ditto for disinformation in form of malicious actors spreading fabricated stories and doctored images or videos to discredit opposing candidates and manipulate public opinion with fake endorsements from prominent figures or organisations circulated to lend credibility to false narratives and sway voter sentiment. Even at that numerous sensationalised headlines and misleading articles were published on websites and shared on social media platforms to garner clicks and engagement, without regard for accuracy or journalistic ethics. After the elections, fake news stories about alleged election rigging, violence, or political conspiracies contributed to a climate of uncertainty and distrust surrounding the electoral process.

For instance, at an interactive session with a Northern Nigerian sociocultural group, the Northern Elders Forum, the PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar was quoted as saying that “Northerners would reject Yoruba and Igbo contestants for the presidency of 2023 elections because he is the only pan - Nigerian deserving Northern votes.”

Also, the presidential aspirants of the Labour Party, Peter Obi, decidedly used religion to campaign. He toured churches and got church leaders, particularly, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) endorsement. These religious bodies lampooned the same faith ticket of the APC and campaigned for the replacement of Buhari, a Muslim by a Christian. The youth constituency (demographic) was fanatical, mostly from the South East and South West regions and the Federal Capital Territory on the social media, especially Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram and blogs. They used the platforms to hurl abuses and insults and promoted

divisive tendencies. Indeed, at the height of campaign some of them claimed to belong to the separatist groups of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). They call themselves OBI'DIENT (Jimanda, 2023). For the APC candidate, Bola Tinubu, it was a period of self-proclamation as the next-in-line for the Presidency with his Renewed Hope Agenda (manifesto) taking a subsidiary status to *Emilokan* (it is my turn) and no one else.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Based on the discussions in this work, it is evident that the 2023 Nigerian presidential election witnessed a significant and multifaceted impact of social media. While quantifying its precise influence remains complex, findings made it clear that there is a correlation between online engagement and voter behavior. Social media served as a platform for mobilisation, facilitated policy discussions, and fostered community building around candidates. However, challenges like misinformation and hate speech warrant attention to ensure responsible online engagement in future election campaigns. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with individuals to be cautious and critical consumers of media, verifying information before sharing, and promoting a healthy online discourse during the election period.

Moving forward, it is crucial to develop strategies to address these challenges and leverage the potential of social media to empower informed and inclusive democratic participation in Nigeria and beyond (Akporue, C. V. E., & Efebeh, E., 2025). These manifestations of hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news had significant consequences, including heightened social tensions, erosion of trust in democratic institutions, and potential threats to electoral integrity and political stability. Efforts to combat these challenges require a multi-stakeholder approach involving government regulation, media literacy initiatives, and responsible behaviour by political actors and online

platforms. Regulation and awareness campaigns can be implemented to educate the public about responsible media consumption and reporting mechanisms. This includes flagging or removing harmful content and promoting transparency in political advertising (Persily & Tucker, 2020). Independent fact-checking organizations play a vital role in verifying claims during election campaigns and should collaborate with media outlets to ensure accurate information dissemination (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Ethical journalism, supported by training programs, is essential for unbiased reporting and countering misinformation (UNESCO, 2018). Additionally, enforcing balanced legal frameworks against hate speech and disinformation, alongside community engagement by leaders and influencers, can foster accountability and inclusivity (IFES, 2018; Roberts, 2024). Additionally, platforms may employ artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and human moderators to detect and remove hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

### **Recommendations for further studies**

For further studies on the topic of social media misuse during elections, analysts may consider exploring the following areas:

1. **Comparative Studies:** Analyse the role of social media in elections across multiple countries to identify universal and region-specific trends in hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda.
2. **Impact Assessment:** Study the long-term effects of social media misinformation on voter behaviour, trust in electoral systems, and democratic processes.
3. **Role of Artificial Intelligence:** Investigate how AI and algorithms contribute to amplifying or mitigating the spread of false information during elections.
4. **Policy and Regulation:** Examine the effectiveness of existing social media regulations and policies on curbing electoral

- misinformation, and propose innovative frameworks for future elections.
5. **Media Literacy and Public Awareness:** Assess the impact of media literacy campaigns on reducing the spread of misinformation during elections, particularly in underrepresented communities.
  6. **Influence of Digital Influencers:** Study how digital influencers, including celebrities and political activists, shape narratives during elections and their role in propagating or countering misinformation.

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