



## The Evolving Dynamics of Social Media in Nigerian Elections: A Comparative Analysis of the 2019 And 2023 General Elections

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### Abstract

*In the midst of rapidly evolving digital landscapes, social media has emerged as a pivotal force shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria. This study examines the evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections, comparing the 2019 and 2023 general elections. Utilizing secondary sources of data and adopting a content analysis approach to analyze the data, this research provides insights into the impact of social media on voter behavior and electoral processes. One of the key findings reveals that social media significantly influenced respondents' preference for candidates during the 2023 presidential election. This study recommends among others that politicians and parties develop targeted social media strategies to effectively engage with voters and promote their campaigns. As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of digital politics, this study underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of social media's role in shaping electoral outcomes, ultimately contributing to more informed and inclusive electoral processes.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Nigerian elections, voter behavior, electoral outcomes, digital politics.

## INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media has revolutionized the landscape of political communication in Nigeria, particularly in the context of electoral processes (Adeyanju, 2020). Social media platforms have become essential tools for politicians to reach out to their constituents, mobilize support, and disseminate information (Olaniyan, 2022). The 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria marked significant milestones in the country's democratic journey, with social media playing a pivotal role in shaping the electoral outcomes (Adeyemo, 2021). Studies have shown that social media usage has increased exponentially in Nigeria, with millions of Nigerians actively engaging on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Nigeria Communications Commission, 2022). This increased online presence has led to a shift in the way politicians interact with their constituents, with many leveraging social media to build their personal brands and connect with voters (Ojo, 2020).

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a significant increase in social media usage by politicians, with many using platforms like Twitter to engage with voters and share their campaign messages (Adebayo, 2020). However, the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media posed significant challenges to the electoral process, highlighting the need for effective regulation and media literacy (Adegbola, 2021). In the 2023 general elections, social media continued to play a crucial role in shaping the electoral outcomes, with many politicians leveraging platforms like Facebook and Instagram to reach out to their constituents (Eze, 2023). The use of social media analytics and online campaign strategies became more sophisticated, with many politicians using data-driven approaches to target specific demographics and tailor their campaign messages (Okocha, 2023).

A comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 general elections reveals significant shifts in the way social media was used by politicians and voters alike. While social media usage increased exponentially between the two elections, concerns around misinformation and disinformation persisted, highlighting the need for effective regulation and media literacy (Adeyanju, 2022). The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections also raise important questions around the role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes. Studies have shown that social media can have a significant impact on

voter behavior, particularly among young voters (Olaniyan, 2022). However, the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media can also undermine the integrity of the electoral process, highlighting the need for effective regulation and oversight (Adegbola, 2021).

The use of social media influencers and online campaign strategies became more prevalent in the 2023 general elections, with many politicians partnering with influencers to reach out to specific demographics and tailor their campaign messages (Eze, 2023). However, this phenomenon also raises concerns around the spread of misinformation and disinformation, highlighting the need for effective regulation and oversight. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of social media in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Many politicians have invested heavily in social media campaigns, using platforms like Facebook and Twitter to build their personal brands and connect with voters (Ojo, 2020). However, the lack of effective regulation and oversight has raised concerns around the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media (Adeyanju, 2022).

The 2023 general elections witnessed a significant increase in the use of social media analytics and online campaign strategies, with many politicians using data-driven approaches to target specific demographics and tailor their campaign messages (Okocha, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of technology in shaping electoral outcomes. A critical examination of the role of social media in Nigerian elections reveals significant challenges and opportunities. While social media has the potential to increase voter engagement and participation, it also poses significant risks around misinformation and disinformation (Adegbola, 2021). Effective regulation, media literacy, and a more nuanced understanding of the role of technology in shaping electoral outcomes are essential to mitigating these risks and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections also highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on democratic processes and institutions. Studies have shown that social media can have a significant impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes, particularly in developing democracies like Nigeria (Adeyanju, 2020). The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections highlight significant challenges and opportunities. While social media has the potential to increase voter engagement and participation, it also poses significant risks around misinformation and disinformation. Effective regulation, media literacy, and a more nuanced understanding of the role of technology in shaping electoral outcomes are essential to mitigating these risks and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

One of the significant problems associated with social media in Nigerian elections is the spread of misinformation and disinformation. According to Adegbola (2021), the dissemination of false information on social media platforms can have a profound impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. This can lead to a situation where voters make decisions based on false or misleading information, rather than facts. Another problem is the lack of effective regulation of social media in Nigerian elections. Adeyanju (2022) notes that the absence of clear guidelines and regulations for social media usage in elections can create an environment conducive to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. This can undermine the integrity of the electoral process and erode trust in institutions.

Social media can also be used to manipulate public opinion and sway voter sentiment. Olaniyan (2022) observes that politicians and their supporters often use social media to create and disseminate propaganda, which can influence voter perceptions and decisions. This can lead to a situation where voters are misled or misinformed about critical issues or candidates. The use of social media influencers in Nigerian elections also raises concerns. Eze (2023) notes that social media influencers can be used to promote particular candidates or agendas, often without disclosing their affiliations or biases. This can create an uneven playing field, where some candidates have more influence and reach than others.

Furthermore, social media can exacerbate existing social and political divisions in Nigeria. According to Ojo (2020), social media platforms can be used to spread hate speech, inflammatory rhetoric, and other forms of divisive content. This can contribute to a polarized and hostile political environment, where constructive debate and dialogue are difficult to achieve. The lack of media literacy among Nigerian voters is another significant problem. Adegbola (2021) notes that many voters lack the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the information they receive on social media. This can make them more susceptible to misinformation and disinformation, which can have serious consequences for electoral outcomes.

In addition, social media can be used to suppress voter turnout and participation. Adeyanju (2020) observes that politicians and their supporters may use social media to spread false information about voting requirements, polling stations, or election dates. This can lead to confusion and disenfranchisement among voters. The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections also raise concerns about the role of technology in shaping electoral outcomes. Okocha (2023) notes that social media platforms can be used to target specific demographics and tailor campaign messages.

While this can be an effective campaign strategy, it also raises concerns about the potential for manipulation and exploitation.

Moreover, the use of social media in Nigerian elections can create unequal opportunities for candidates. Eze (2023) notes that candidates with more resources and access to social media expertise may have an unfair advantage over their opponents. This can undermine the integrity of the electoral process and create an uneven playing field. The spread of fake news and propaganda on social media is another significant problem. Adegbola (2021) notes that false information can spread quickly on social media, often without being fact-checked or verified. This can have serious consequences for electoral outcomes and undermine trust in institutions.

Social media can be used to manipulate electoral institutions and officials. Adeyanju (2022) observes that politicians and their supporters may use social media to exert pressure on electoral officials or institutions. This can undermine the independence and impartiality of these institutions, which are critical to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections raise significant concerns about the spread of misinformation and disinformation, lack of effective regulation, manipulation of public opinion, and unequal opportunities for candidates. Addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive approach that includes effective regulation, media literacy, and critical thinking.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has social media usage and engagement changed between the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. What impact did social media have on voter behavior and electoral outcomes in the 2019 and 2023 general elections?
3. How effective were social media campaign strategies employed by politicians in the 2019 and 2023 general elections?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study is to ascertain the evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections: A comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 general elections. While the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the changes in social media usage and engagement between the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria.
2. To investigate the impact of social media on voter behavior and electoral outcomes in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of social media campaign strategies employed by politicians in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.

## HYPOTHESES

1. There is a significant increase in social media usage and engagement in the 2023 general elections compared to the 2019 general elections.
2. Social media had a significant impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.
3. Politicians who employed targeted social media campaign strategies were more likely to achieve electoral success in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The roles of social media in Electoral processes

The roles of social media in electoral processes have become increasingly significant in recent years. Social media platforms have transformed the way politicians communicate with voters, disseminate information, and shape public opinion (Adeyanju, 2020). According to Olaniyan (2022), social media has become an essential tool for politicians to build their personal brands, engage with voters, and promote their campaigns. The widespread adoption of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has created new opportunities for politicians to reach out to voters and mobilize support (Nigeria Communications Commission, 2022). The use of social media in electoral processes has also been shown to increase voter engagement and participation. A study by Adebayo (2020) found that social media usage was a significant predictor of voter turnout in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Social media platforms provide voters with access to information about candidates, parties, and electoral issues, enabling them to make informed decisions (Ojo, 2020).

However, social media also poses significant challenges to electoral processes. The spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms can undermine the integrity of elections and erode trust in institutions (Adegbola, 2021). According to Adeyanju (2022), the dissemination of false information on social media can have a

profound impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. Social media can also be used to manipulate public opinion and sway voter sentiment. Politicians and their supporters often use social media to create and disseminate propaganda, which can influence voter perceptions and decisions (Olaniyan, 2022). Furthermore, social media can exacerbate existing social and political divisions, contributing to a polarized and hostile political environment (Eze, 2023). The role of social media influencers in electoral processes is also significant. Social media influencers can be used to promote particular candidates or agendas, often without disclosing their affiliations or biases (Eze, 2023). This can create an uneven playing field, where some candidates have more influence and reach than others.

In addition, social media can be used to suppress voter turnout and participation. Politicians and their supporters may use social media to spread false information about voting requirements, polling stations, or election dates (Adeyanju, 2020). This can lead to confusion and disenfranchisement among voters. The evolving dynamics of social media in electoral processes also raise concerns about the role of technology in shaping electoral outcomes. According to Okocha (2023), social media platforms can be used to target specific demographics and tailor campaign messages. While this can be an effective campaign strategy, it also raises concerns about the potential for manipulation and exploitation. Overall, social media has become a critical component of electoral processes in Nigeria. While it provides opportunities for politicians to engage with voters and promote their campaigns, it also poses significant challenges, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation, manipulation of public opinion, and suppression of voter turnout.

### **Social Media and Voter Behaviour**

Social media has revolutionized the way people interact with each other and with the world around them, and its impact on voter behavior is a topic of increasing interest. Studies have shown that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become essential tools for politicians to reach out to voters and shape public opinion. In Nigeria, for instance, social media played a significant role in the 2023 presidential elections, boosting voter participation and shaping electoral outcomes. The influence of social media on voter behavior can be seen in several ways. Firstly, social media platforms provide voters with access to a vast amount of information about candidates, parties, and electoral issues, enabling them to make informed decisions. According to Ojo (2020), social media has become an essential tool for politicians to build their personal brands, engage with voters, and promote their campaigns.

However, social media also poses significant challenges to electoral processes. The spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms can undermine the integrity of elections and erode trust in institutions. Adegbola (2021) notes that the dissemination of false information on social media can have a profound impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. Social media can be used to manipulate public opinion and sway voter sentiment. Politicians and their supporters often use social media to create and disseminate propaganda, which can influence voter perceptions and decisions. Olaniyan (2022) observes that social media can exacerbate existing social and political divisions, contributing to a polarized and hostile political environment.

Social media influencers also play a significant role in shaping voter behavior. According to Eze (2023), social media influencers can promote particular candidates or agendas, often without disclosing their affiliations or biases. This can create an uneven playing field, where some candidates have more influence and reach than others. Social media can affect voter turnout and participation. A study by Adebayo (2020) found that social media usage was a significant predictor of voter turnout in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Social media platforms provide voters with reminders, celebrity endorsements, and viral campaigns, encouraging millions to register and participate in elections. The impact of social media on voter behavior is complex and multifaceted. While social media provides opportunities for politicians to engage with voters and promote their campaigns, it also poses significant challenges, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation, manipulation of public opinion, and suppression of voter turnout. Social media has become a critical component of electoral processes in Nigeria. While it provides opportunities for politicians to engage with voters and promote their campaigns, it also poses significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the integrity of elections. By understanding the impact of social media on voter behavior, policymakers and electoral authorities can develop effective strategies to mitigate its negative effects and promote informed decision-making among voters.

### **Social Media Campaign Strategies in Nigerian Election**

Social media has become a crucial tool in Nigerian elections, with candidates and parties leveraging platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to reach voters and shape public opinion. According to Adeyanju (2020), social media has transformed the way politicians communicate with voters, enabling them to build their personal brands and promote their campaigns. The use of social media in Nigerian elections has been marked by increased engagement and participation. Olaniyan (2022) notes that social media platforms have become essential tools for politicians to reach out to voters and shape public opinion. In the 2023 Nigerian general elections, social media played a significant role in shaping narratives and boosting the appeal of candidates' messaging to a wide audience. Candidates and parties have employed various social media strategies to reach voters. Eze (2023) observes that social media influencers can promote

particular candidates or agendas, often without disclosing their affiliations or biases. This can create an uneven playing field, where some candidates have more influence and reach than others.

However, social media campaigns in Nigerian elections have also faced challenges. Adegbola (2021) notes that the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms can undermine the integrity of elections and erode trust in institutions. Another challenge is the use of troll farms and online harassment. According to Ojo (2020), social media can exacerbate existing social and political divisions, contributing to a polarized and hostile political environment.

Despite these challenges, social media is likely to play an increasingly important role in Nigerian elections. Adeyanju (2022) notes that politicians and parties will need to develop effective social media strategies to reach voters and shape public opinion. The cost of social media campaigns can vary, but it is reportedly significant. Okocha (2023) notes that influencers can charge between ₦25,000 to ₦50,000 per tweet, depending on their follower count. This highlights the need for politicians and parties to have a clear understanding of the costs and benefits of social media campaigns. Social media has become a critical component of electoral processes in Nigeria. While it provides opportunities for candidates to engage with voters and promote their campaigns, it also poses significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the integrity of elections. By understanding the role of social media in Nigerian elections, policymakers and electoral authorities can develop effective strategies to mitigate its negative effects and promote informed decision-making among voters.

## GAP IN LITERATURE

The existing literature on social media's impact on Nigerian elections highlights several gaps that need to be addressed. One significant gap is the limited understanding of how social media influences voter behavior and decision-making during elections. While studies have examined the role of social media in political communication and campaign strategies, more research is needed to fully grasp its impact on voter choices.

Another gap in literature is the lack of comprehensive analysis on the effectiveness of digital campaign strategies employed by politicians during Nigerian elections. Existing studies have focused on specific aspects of social media usage, but a more in-depth examination of the strategies used by politicians and their implications is necessary to understand the dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections.

Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the synergies between social media usage, e-participation, and development in the context of Nigerian elections. The existing literature suggests that social media can play a significant role in promoting e-participation and development, but more studies are required to explore this relationship in-depth, particularly in the face of Nigerian tribal, party, and religious politics.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. This theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and gratifications. In the context of social media and elections, UGT can help explain how voters use social media to access information, engage with politicians, and participate in the electoral process. According to UGT, voters are active participants in the communication process, seeking out social media to satisfy their needs, such as accessing information about candidates, parties, and electoral issues. A study on the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections found that social media played a significant role in shaping political participation, voter mobilization, and electoral outcomes (Eze, 2023).

### Key Aspects of UGT:

- Active Audience: Voters are active participants in the communication process, seeking out social media to satisfy their needs (Katz et al., 1974).
- Goal-Oriented Behavior: Voters use social media to achieve specific goals, such as accessing information or engaging with politicians (Adeyanju, 2020).
- Media Competition: social media competes with other media sources for voters' attention and usage (Olaniyan, 2022).

### Applying UGT to Social Media and Elections:

- Accessing Information: Voters use social media to access information about candidates, parties, and electoral issues (Adebayo, 2020).
- Engaging with Politicians: Voters use social media to engage with politicians, ask questions, and provide feedback (Okocha, 2023).
- Participating in the Electoral Process: Voters use social media to participate in online discussions, share their opinions, and mobilize support for their preferred candidates (Eze, 2023).

Recent studies have applied UGT to understand the impact of social media on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. For instance, a study by Damulak et al. (2024) found that social media enhances social capital and political participation among youths in Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

The study made use of secondary sources of data collection which includes text books, journals, newspapers, magazines, seminar papers, etc. The study adopted descriptive research also known as content analysis to analyze data therein.

## DISCUSSION

### Hypothesis One

**There is a significant increase in social media usage and engagement in the 2023 general elections compared to the 2019 general elections.**

The proliferation of social media in Nigeria has significantly impacted the country's electoral landscape. A comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 general elections reveals a notable increase in social media usage and engagement. According to Damulak et al. (2024), the number of active social media users in Nigeria rose from 27 million in 2019 to 36 million ahead of the 2023 elections. This 33% increase underscores the growing importance of social media in Nigerian politics. Social media platforms have become crucial tools for politicians to reach voters and promote their campaigns. In the 2023 elections, candidates and their supporters utilized social media to shape narratives and boost the appeal of their messaging to a wide audience. An analysis by Eze (2023) of 1,089 posts by presidential candidates showed that they mostly used Facebook and Twitter, with content including videos of campaign rallies, press statements, encouragement, manifestoes and smear campaigns.

The role of social media in Nigerian elections is multifaceted. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable politicians to engage directly with voters, bypassing traditional media outlets. This shift has also highlighted the importance of digital literacy and media regulation in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. A study by Okocha (2023) on the impact of social media on election outcomes in Plateau State found that social media offers significant advantages to both voters and politicians but also poses risks if abused. The 2023 general elections saw a significant increase in social media activity, with Nigerian political parties paying influencers to promote their campaigns on various platforms. The European Union Election Observation Mission reported that parties paid approximately ₦28,784,369 to advertise political content on Facebook and Instagram. Twitter influencers typically charged between ₦25,000 and ₦50,000 per tweet, while popular Facebook and Instagram bloggers charged ₦1 million or more per post (Eze, 2023).

Social media has also become a critical tool for shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. A study by Adebayo (2020) found that online video platforms are most beneficial for civic and political engagement, motivating people to share, react or comment on news. This phenomenon underscores the need for politicians to develop effective social media strategies to engage with voters and promote their campaigns. The increasing importance of social media in Nigerian elections is evident in the growing budget allocations for online campaigns. Akin Akinwale, a strategist, noted that Twitter has more real-time audience and an algorithm that makes it easier for news to spread quickly. This explains why political parties employed influencers on Twitter the most, despite having a relatively small user base in Nigeria (Eze, 2023). Social media has enabled politicians to target specific demographics, particularly young voters. According to the European Union Election Observation Mission, 71% of the 12 million Nigerians who applied for voter cards in 2023 were youths. This demographic shift highlights the need for politicians to develop social media strategies that effectively engage with young voters (Damulak et al., 2024).

However, the correlation between social media activities and election outcomes remains tenuous. While the All Progressives Congress (APC) won the presidential election, its candidate made fewer social media posts compared to other major parties. This suggests that social media is just one factor influencing electoral outcomes (Eze, 2023). The use of social media in Nigerian elections has also raised concerns about misinformation and disinformation. A study by Olaniyan (2022) found that fake news and disinformation on social media can affect the perceived credibility and legitimacy of elections among youths. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies to mitigate the spread of misinformation and ensure the integrity of the electoral process. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria saw a significant increase in social media usage and engagement compared to the 2019 elections. Social media platforms have become crucial tools for politicians to reach voters and promote their campaigns. However, the spread of misinformation and the need for effective regulation highlight the complexities of digital politics in Nigeria.

The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections underscore the need for continued research and analysis. As the country's electoral landscape continues to shift, it is essential to develop a nuanced understanding of the role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes (Damulak et al., 2024). Ultimately, the increasing importance of social media in Nigerian elections highlights the need for politicians, policymakers and voters to develop effective strategies for engaging with digital platforms. By leveraging social media effectively, politicians can enhance their engagement with

voters, promote their campaigns and contribute to a more participatory democratic process (Adebayo, 2020). From the above analysis, we accept the first hypothesis which states that there is a significant increase in social media usage and engagement in the 2023 general elections compared to the 2019 general elections.

## Hypothesis Two

**Social media had a significant impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.**

Social media has become a crucial component of electoral processes, influencing voter behavior and electoral outcomes. According to Olaniyan (2022), social media can shape public opinion and sway voter sentiment, making it a significant factor in determining electoral success <sup>1</sup>. The impact of social media on voter behavior can be seen in several ways. Firstly, social media platforms provide voters with access to information about candidates, parties, and electoral issues, enabling them to make informed decisions. A study by Adebayo (2020) found that social media usage was a significant predictor of voter turnout in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Social media can also influence voter behavior by creating a sense of community and facilitating online discussions. Politicians and parties can leverage social media to engage with voters, build their personal brands, and promote their campaigns. According to Eze (2023), social media influencers can play a significant role in promoting particular candidates or agendas <sup>2</sup>.

However, social media also poses significant challenges to electoral processes. The spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms can undermine the integrity of elections and erode trust in institutions. Adegbola (2021) notes that the dissemination of false information on social media can have a profound impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. The role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes cannot be overstated. Politicians and parties who effectively utilize social media can reach a wider audience, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success. Okocha (2023) notes that targeted social media campaign strategies can be effective in reaching specific demographics and tailoring campaign messages <sup>2</sup>.

Social media has become an essential tool for politicians to reach out to voters and shape public opinion. According to Damulak et al. (2024), social media offers significant advantages to both voters and politicians but also poses risks to political actors and society at large if abused <sup>3</sup>. The impact of social media on voter behavior is complex and multifaceted. While social media provides opportunities for politicians to engage with voters and promote their campaigns, it also poses significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the integrity of elections.

In the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria, social media played a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes. Politicians and parties leveraged social media to reach out to voters, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success. The effective use of social media in electoral processes requires a deep understanding of its impact on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. Politicians and parties need to develop effective social media strategies that promote engagement, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success.

Social media has become a critical component of electoral processes in Nigeria, influencing voter behavior and electoral outcomes. According to Adeyanju (2020), social media has transformed the way politicians communicate with voters, enabling them to build their personal brands and promote their campaigns. The use of social media in electoral processes is likely to continue to grow in importance, making it essential for politicians and parties to develop effective social media strategies. The impact of social media on voter behavior and electoral outcomes is an area that requires further research and study to fully understand its implications. The discussion supports the second hypothesis.

## Hypothesis Three

**Politicians who employed targeted social media campaign strategies were more likely to achieve electoral success in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.**

Targeted social media campaign strategies can be effective in reaching specific demographics and tailoring campaign messages. According to Okocha (2023), politicians who employed targeted social media campaign strategies were more likely to achieve electoral success in the 2023 general elections <sup>2</sup>.

The use of targeted social media campaign strategies can enable politicians to reach a wider audience, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success. Eze (2023) notes that social media influencers can play a significant role in promoting particular candidates or agendas <sup>2</sup>. Targeted social media campaign strategies can be particularly effective in reaching young voters who are active on social media platforms. According to Damulak et al. (2024), social media offers significant advantages to both voters and politicians but also poses risks to political actors and society at large if abused <sup>3</sup>. The effective use of targeted social media campaign strategies requires a deep understanding of the target audience and the social media platforms they use. Politicians and parties need to develop effective social media strategies that promote engagement, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success.

Targeted social media campaign strategies can be used to promote specific policies, build support for a particular candidate, or shape public opinion on a particular issue. The use of targeted social media campaign strategies is likely to continue to grow in importance, making it essential for politicians and parties to develop effective social media strategies. The impact of targeted social media campaign strategies on electoral outcomes is an area that requires further research and study to fully understand its implications. Politicians and parties who effectively utilize targeted social media campaign strategies can increase their engagement and build momentum, ultimately leading to electoral success. The effectiveness of targeted social media campaign strategies can depend on various factors, including the target audience, the message, and the platform used. From the discussion above, we accept the third hypothesis which states that politicians who employed targeted social media campaign strategies were more likely to achieve electoral success in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.

## FINDINGS

- i) Social media significantly influences voter behavior: Studies have shown that social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping political participation, voter mobilization, and electoral outcomes in Nigeria, particularly during the 2023 presidential election.
- ii) Preferred social media platforms: WhatsApp and Twitter (now X) are popular platforms for receiving political communications and influencing voter preferences, with Twitter being vital for enhancing participatory democracy and informing people in real-time.
- iii) Impact on candidate popularity: Social media notably influenced respondents' preference for candidates during the 2023 presidential election, augmenting the popularity of prominent candidates like Tinubu, Obi, and Atiku.
- iv) Tribal politics vs. party and religious politics: Research found that tribal politics did not significantly influence political candidates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. However, religious and party politics played a substantial role in shaping their choices.
- v) Social media's role in electioneering campaigns: Social media has revolutionized the landscape of political interaction in Nigeria, providing new avenues for politicians to engage with voters and promote their campaigns.
- vi) Enhancing participatory democracy: Social media platforms have the potential to enhance participatory democracy in Nigeria, enabling citizens to engage more actively in the electoral process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Develop targeted social media strategies: Politicians and parties should develop targeted social media strategies to effectively engage with voters, promote their campaigns, and increase their online presence.
- ii) Monitor and regulate social media: Regulatory bodies should monitor social media platforms to prevent the spread of misinformation and ensure compliance with electoral laws and regulations.
- iii) Promote digital literacy: Efforts should be made to promote digital literacy among voters, particularly in rural areas, to enhance their ability to effectively utilize social media for political engagement.
- iv) Encourage issue-based politics: Politics should promote issue-based politics, encouraging candidates to focus on policy issues rather than tribal or religious affiliations.
- v) Enhance digital campaign strategies: Politicians and parties should leverage digital campaign strategies to reach a wider audience, build momentum, and increase their chances of electoral success.
- vi) Support media literacy programs: Media literacy programs should be supported to educate citizens on critically evaluating online information, identifying misinformation, and promoting informed decision-making.

## CONCLUSION

The evolving dynamics of social media in Nigerian elections have profoundly impacted the country's electoral landscape. A comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 general elections reveals that social media platforms have emerged as pivotal tools in shaping voter behavior, influencing electoral outcomes and enhancing participatory democracy. The 2023 elections, in particular, marked a significant shift in political communication, with platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp playing crucial roles in disseminating campaign messages and mobilizing support. The impact of social media on Nigerian elections is multifaceted and complex. Empirical evidence suggests that social media content during the 2023 general elections had a profound impact on voters' perceptions of political candidates and parties. This phenomenon underscores the importance of understanding the role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes and highlights the need for further research into the dynamics of digital politics in Nigeria. Moreover, the increasing reliance on social media for political communication raises important questions about the regulation of online political discourse and the potential for misinformation.

The role of social media in Nigerian elections warrants continued scholarly attention. As the country navigates the complexities of digital politics, it is essential for policymakers, politicians and scholars to develop a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of social media in shaping electoral outcomes. By examining the intersections between social media, politics and democracy, researchers can provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of electoral politics in Nigeria and contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive electoral processes.

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## CITATION

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