
DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE ELECTORATE: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF TWITTER AND CAMPAIGN PLEDGES ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIA'S 2023 ELECTION

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Abstract

This study analyses the influence of digital campaigns on the electorate during the 2023 Nigeria general election, looking directly into twitter usage, campaign pledges and subsequent voting behaviour. It looked inward to determine the level of microblogging engagement, and how online political messaging shaped individual electoral choices and democratic participation nationally. Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey and quantity approach, the study tried to sample $n = 400$ eligible voters across the 36 states of the federation and the federal capital territory via an online means. The sample size was statistically established by the use of Yamane formula which was based on the national eligible voting population. Data was analysed using SPSS. The results revealed that digital engagements on twitter significantly influenced voters' attitude, choices, and finally their decision-making during elections ($\bar{X} = 2.727$, $SD = 0.94$). Also, the believe of campaign pledges and digital policy proposals posted by candidate has a substantial influence on the electorates decisions during elections ($\bar{X} = 2.569$, $SD = 0.87$). Demographic analysis pointed out that the

active digital electorate were predominantly male with 71.8%, young adults within the age range of 28 to 37 has 62.0 %, and highly educated, with 52.8% holding higher education degrees. The study concludes that political Strategists in Nigeria should focus more on the core themes to align with the intellectual and socio-economic priorities of the electorates such as employment generation, digital economic policies and institutional governance.

Keywords: Campaign pledges, Electorates, General election, Voting behaviour, Nigeria

Introduction

The problem of democratic elections in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria, is increasingly dictated by the increase in political communication channels and the strategic positioning of political actors and active media users. As the core of this democratic structure is voting behaviour, conceptualised as the distinct patterns, actions and inactions respectively, expression of alignment by the electorate in support of a candidate during an electoral cycle and vice versa (Tom, 2022). In a complex democratic framework like Nigeria, voting behaviour is the main determinant of democratic alignment, voter engagement, civic participation and the eventual legitimacy of elected office holders and leaders. Historically, shaped by ethno-religious and regional alignments, voting behaviour in Nigeria is passing through a behavioural shift which is driven by pervasive digital media and mending the expectation of citizens regarding political summary and a countability.

Since the emergence of social media platforms, they were been championed as democratic equalizers capable of decentralizing information access and breaking traditional political discourse within states (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In modern day politics, these platforms stand as dynamic system for mobilisation, information diffusion and real time political engagement (Stieglitz & Dang Xuan, 2020). During electoral moments, virtually all political parties across board leveraged on digital architectures to broadcast manifestos,

execute micro targeted advertising, coordinate grassroots mobilisation and fundraising initiative strategies. (Sulaiman et al., 2023). Among these platforms, most notably twitter (*now X*) have emerged as the primary digital arenas where candidate articulate their stance on critical national issues, including national security, economic stabilisation, and infrastructure development. Going forward, digital spaces have really acquired the strength to alter electoral calculus. Voters who previously held rigid partisan allegiances frequently experience shifts based on cognitive data, counter narratives, and political discussions encountered online (Sulaiman et al., 2023).

With the growing section of Nigeria population gaining digital access, the strength for microblogging to shape political discussion and determine the aftermath of elections has become a subject of interest for scholarly investigation (Sulaiman, et al., 2023). Despite this, the identified structural boundaries of digital influence, alongside with its long-term effects on the integrity of democratic mechanisms remain heavily discussed in Nigeria (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). These inconsistencies create an urgent demand for empirical analysis focusing on capturing the interplay between digital media usage and voters' behaviour, essentially within the context of the 2023 Nigerian general election.

Alongside digital communication is the election campaign pledges which is defined as a formal, public guarantee articulated by a political candidate intending to secure executive office (Thomson et al., 2017). Marketing political literature implies that when candidates highlight political campaign promises that will offer tangible improvement to human capital and societal welfare, that backed by perceived personal integrity, voters exhibit higher levels of credibility allocation and electoral support (Feyipitan, 2015). In an environment that is marked by economic vulnerability, electorates gravitate towards political stalwarts whose campaign promises addresses basic socio-economic deficiencies rather than superficial personal accolades. The weight of policy-oriented campaign pledges versus cosmetic candidate attributes in determining the need for a detailed investigation into how these promises are mediated and consumed in this digital age.

The scientific usage of the determinant governing voting system is traditionally anchored in some academic paradigms which includes: Psychological model, sociological model, and the rational choice theoretical model. The psychological model argues that deep-seated partisan identification is the primary engine of electoral choice, while the rational choice model applies an economic lens, viewing voting behaviour as a calculated decision maximized by utility and performance evaluations. The sociological model stresses that there is need for structural influence of socio demographic variables and environmental media awareness on political orientation. Lazarsfeld et.al., (1944) in *The People's Choice* and then expanded in *Voting* (Berelson et al., 1954) and *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), serves as the foundation for this study.

The primary basis of sociological model is that political choices are not a detached psychological development, but a social act that is heavily dependent on individual's social characteristics and media exposure matrices. Applying this to contemporary political communication, this model posits that an electorate's choices are actively structured by the volume, nature, and frequency of digital media messages to which they are exposed (Ojekwe, 2016). Regarding the 2023 elections, the sociological model accounts for how continuous exposure to digital political network and viral hashtags determines shared political attitudes and choices.

Going forward, when digital campaign pledges align with the socio-demographic realities and priorities of the online collective, a social agreement is formed, converting online alignment into tangible electoral steps. To account for the multidimensional nature of digital media campaigns, this sociological framework integrates with complementary communicative models, including Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which states that digital media platforms influence political reality by bringing specific issues to public prominence, and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et.al., 1973), which accounts for how voters select specific microblogging environments to source political information or engage in civic self-expression. Similarly, Social Influence Theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) highlights how digital networks function as hyper-efficient

pipelines for interpersonal persuasion, while Selective Exposure Theory (Stroud, 2008) details the formation of online filter bubbles that anchor ideological bias.

This study looked into these gaps by evaluating the empirical intersection of using twitter, campaign promises, and voting behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. By adopting a quantitative approach, this study avails actionable empirical insights for communication strategist, policy makers, Political parties and civil society organisations, dedicated to cultivating an inclusive media education and transparent democratic culture in Nigeria. The study investigated the following specific objectives:

- i. To analyse the influence of digital campaigns on the electorate during the 2023 Nigeria general election.
- ii. To determine the level of microblogging engagement, and how online political messaging shaped individual electoral choices and democratic participation nationally.

Research Questions

This research is centred around these two research questions:

1. In what way did social media usage influence voters' behaviour in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?
2. To what extent did digital campaign promises/manifestos influence voters' behaviour in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Methods

The "cross-sectional design" used in this quantitative study allowed the researcher to record the attitudes, behaviours, and opinions of a geographically dispersed electorate at a specific point in time, immediately following the conclusion of the electioneering processes. The study's independent variables, social media usage and election campaign pledges, were neither altered or exposed to experimental controls in this research design. All 93,460,000 officially registered and eligible voters in the Federation during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election cycle made up the study's target population (Amata, 2023). To derive a statistically reliable and representative

sample from this large population, the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula was implemented:

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

where N is the population size, e is the significance threshold of 0.05, and n is the required sample size. Thus, the following formula is used to determine the sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{93,460,000}{1+93,460,000 (0.05)^2} = \frac{93,460,000}{1+233,650}$$

$$n = \frac{93,460,000}{1+233,650} = \frac{93,460,000}{233,651} = 400$$

For this study, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. Ogunleye (2024) created the methodological framework for this sampling methodology, which was scaled from the localized quantitative survey. A self-structured digital questionnaire called the social media, Campaign Promises and Voters' Behaviour Questionnaire (SM-CPVBQ) was used to collect data. To ensure instruments measured intended behavioural variables accurately, items were placed under rigorous validity evaluations by authorities in political science and development communication. The final validated instrument was hosted digitally and distributed using simple random sampling techniques across online civic forums and political discussion networks representing the residents of all thirty-six states of Nigeria and the FCT. Strict ethical procedures were maintained throughout the fieldwork, involvement was outrightly voluntary, an informed consent brief prefaced the survey, and participant anonymity was protected by excluding personal identification data, satisfying standard data confidentiality rules. Retrieved survey data were cleaned, coded, and analysed via SPSS using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, simple percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations.

Results

Research Question 1: In what way did social media usage influence voters' behaviour in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

To ascertain the degree to which digital engagement, especially on Twitter, affected the electorate's choices, reactions, and decisions, the responses to the nine items were examined using mean score and standard deviations. The data was arranged using a four-point answer matrix with a decision threshold. Strongly disagree is indicated by mean values between 1.000 and 1.750, disagree is shown by mean values between 1.751 and 2.500, agree is indicated by mean values between 2.501 and 3.250, and extremely agree is indicated by mean values between 3.251 and 4.000.

Table 1: Influence of Social Media Usage on Voters' Behaviour (n = 400)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev.
1.	Political news monitoring/tracking	59 (14.8%)	155 (38.8%)	150 (37.5%)	36 (9.0%)	2.593	.85
2.	Information awareness acquisition	129 (32.3%)	150 (37.5%)	85 (21.3%)	36 (9.0%)	2.930	.94
3.	Political content sharing behaviours	51 (12.8%)	175 (43.8%)	143 (35.8%)	31 (7.8%)	2.615	.81
4.	Discursive comment Participation	43 (10.8%)	163 (40.8%)	146 (36.5%)	48 (12.0%)	2.503	.84
5.	Perceived civic activation effects	46 (11.5%)	157 (39.3%)	140 (35.0%)	57 (14.2%)	2.480	.88
6.	Candidate selection influence	150 (37.5%)	120 (30.0%)	66 (16.5%)	64 (16.0%)	2.890	1.08
7.	Partisan alignment influence	151 (37.8%)	104 (26.0%)	79 (19.8%)	66 (16.5%)	2.850	1.10
8.	Turnout/voting choice influence	150 (37.5%)	107 (26.8%)	75 (18.8%)	68 (17.0%)	2.848	1.11
9.	Preference for digitally active candidates	84 (21.0%)	192 (48.0%)	96 (24.0%)	28 (7.0%)	2.830	.84
Average $\bar{x}$ (Std. Dev.) = 2.727 (0.94)							

Source: Field Work, 2024

KEY: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1; Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation; $\bar{x}$ = Mean

Threshold: mean value of 1.000-1.750 = Strongly Disagree; 1.751-2.500 = Disagree; 2.501-3.250 = Agree; 3.251 - 4.000 = Strongly Agree

Research Question 2: To what extent did digital campaign promises/manifestos influence voters' behaviour in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

To get the behavioural impact of candidate blueprints, viral hashtags and campaign promises broadcast online, data from ten seven items campaign pledge were analysed using descriptive parameters. The structured results are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Influence of Digital Campaign Promises/Manifestos on Voters' Behaviour(n = 400)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev.
1.	Policy evaluation and search validation	94 (23.5%)	156 (39.0%)	100 (25.0%)	50 (12.5%)	2.735	.96
2.	Influence of digital metadata hooks/ hashtags	101 (25.3%)	176 (44.0%)	85 (21.3%)	38 (9.5%)	2.850	.91
3.	Perceived believability and credibility allocation	56 (14.0%)	161 (40.3%)	143 (35.8%)	40 (10.0%)	2.583	.85
4.	Candidate and partisan identity transformation	65 (16.3%)	167 (41.8%)	120 (30.0%)	48 (12.0%)	2.623	.90
5.	Cognitive insulation against opposing manifestos	30 (7.5%)	112 (28.0%)	199 (49.8%)	59 (14.8%)	2.283	.81
6.	Cross-partisan policy exposure incentives	57 (14.2%)	177 (44.3%)	122 (30.5%)	44 (11.0%)	2.618	.86
7.	Primacy of personal views over pledges	26 (6.5%)	117 (29.3%)	204 (51.0%)	53 (13.3%)	2.290	.78
Average $\bar{x}$ (Std. Dev.) = 2.569 (0.87)		Decision = Agree					

Source: Field Work, 2024

KEY: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1; Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation; $\bar{x}$ = Mean

Threshold: mean value of 1.000-1.750 = Strongly Disagree; 1.751-2.500 = Disagree; 2.501-3.250 = Agree; 3.251 - 4.000 = Strongly Agree

Discussions

Results generally showed that voters' behaviour (choice, decisions, and attitudes) in the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections was influenced by social media usage. Crucially, these empirical results effectively scale the investigation from localized institutional mechanisms to a nationwide scope by expanding and building upon the initial baseline data collected by Ogunleye (2024). The chart highlights the significance of social media on Nigerian political voters' attitudes, choices, and opinions by demonstrating that a significant percentage of voters "agreed" that social media platforms like Twitter had an impact on their voting preferences. This outcome is in keeping with Mustapha et al.'s (2022) findings that, based on the empirical perspectives in the literature study, social media political campaigns had positive connections with both online and offline political activity, with higher online participation. This outcome, however, runs counter to the results of Obiorah and Okafor (2023), who found that during the 2023 Nigerian general election, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter were unable to inform and organize Anambra state voters. Edeani et al. (2022) claim that although young people in Enugu are very active on social media, their voting decisions are unaffected by this.

The results also showed how election campaign promises affected voters' choices, decisions, and attitudes in the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections. According to the data, a sizable percentage of voters concurred that the presidential candidates' promises influenced their choice. Ojekwe (2016) discovered that during Akinwunmi Ambode's 2015 campaign in Lagos state, political advertising campaigns and messages had little effect on people's voting behaviour. Also, Sojobi (2021) discovered that women were more influenced by those with lower levels of education and false political promises in four cities in Southwest Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study avails the empirical evidence that digital spaces, especially twitter, alongside with strategic campaign promises, have moved into main instruments for moulding political consciousness and voting

awareness within the Nigerian political space. The data shows that the highly educated Nigerian electorate relies mainly on microblogging environments for political information tracking, candidate selection and evaluation. Also, candidate campaign manifestos when properly articulated through transparent and visible digital channels exert a substantial influence in electorates decisions, driving voters to look past strict partisan biases to engage in cross partisan policy evaluation. The pervasiveness of digital campaign environments introduces key implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It is expected to foster unprecedented administrative accountability, because manifestoes are achieved in the digital public space, citizens can question candidates directly without fear or barriers. This digital openness has stimulated political discourse and contributed significantly to the heightened political awareness observed among the youth during the 2023 electioneering period.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which is susceptible to bias based on social desirability. It's possible that respondents underreported their exposure to false information or overstated their political activity reports.

Recommendations

Firstly, political Strategists in Nigeria should focus more on the core themes to align with the intellectual and socio-economic priorities of the electorates such as employment generation, digital economic policies and institutional governance. Also, political candidates should stop using platforms like twitter to hype their image instead their posts should be double-checked through a detailed policy plan. Additionally, social media platforms should be use to educate and enlighten the people. Lastly, internet surveys should be enforced to make sure voices of people offline also count.

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