

OBIDIENTS SOCIAL MEDIA USRS AND ELECTIONEERING PATTERN CHANGE IN NIGERIA

Ofodile, Anthony O., PhD

Department Of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Oko

Email: aobiajuluofodile@gmail.com

Phone Number: 07037219044

Abstract

The study centred at ascertaining how social media has become a powerful platform for political mobilization, with X previously known as Twitter as one of many channels for engaging with voters. The objectives of the study includes to determine the use of social media and process of electioneering campaign in Nigeria, strategies employed during election on social media and effectiveness of voter mobilization on Twitter. The study adopted the secondary data as its research method. It was concluded that the Obidient Movement's impact through the use of social media on voter behaviour has the potential to produce unexpected future results in elections. Based on this assertion it was recommended that since there is greater motivation from the Obidient movement in 2023 election, those in charge of electoral process in Nigeria must ensure readiness as there will be improved voter participation in subsequent election in the country and that social media has been seen to be a veritable tool in enlighten citizens on political movements, more messages and campaign awareness programmes should be channelled towards social media especially Twitter.

Keywords: Obedient Movement, election, Twitter, campaigns, candidates, Digital Media

Introduction

Digital media have assumed an important position in electioneering campaign activities of political parties and candidates in most societies in the world including Nigeria. These online media have rapidly grown in importance as for political activism in their different forms (Tenhunen, & Karveltye, 2015). General Elections in Nigeria in contemporary times have been remarkable for using social media as a political socialization tool. The use of social media in election reflects a global trend towards the internet or e-electioneering (Macna – Mara, 2008).

There has been a rapid expansion in internet access around the world which is as a result of increased availability of service providers, smart phones and verbal communication as well as the evolution of web-based new media –personal websites, social-networking sites, blogs ,e-newsletters. These have helped to redefine methods of political socialization. Some Nigerian politicians utilize the opportunities offered by the digital media for online campaigning. This is evident in the use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms for soliciting for votes from eligible voters.

According to Assibong and Oshanisi (2018), while Nigeria and other countries have recently incorporated technology into their voting procedures, especially in the just concluded 2023 elections, there is still a chance that Nigerian elections might have errors. The introduction of social media has resulted in a new type of political process and campaign, which calls for candidates to be familiar with social media strategy in order to connect electorate. In reality, it has exacerbated ethnic and religious divisions in Nigeria while perplexing the populace, especially during the election season when misinformation, or the purposeful dissemination of accurate information with the aim to do damage, is so prevalent.

The Obedient movement is a social media campaign awareness on various media platforms for the political aspiration of Peter Obi, the Labour Party Presidential candidate in the 2023 Nigeria election. The youngest and presently most well-liked candidate in the race was Peter Obi. According to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 71% of those who completed their voter registration were between the ages of 18 and 34, indicating that young Nigerians were yearning for a new era and are set to demonstrate that (Chukwurah, 2022). Young individuals who are seen to be particularly independent-minded, strong-willed, and disdainful of elder politicians who they claim have done nothing for them are the originators of the "Obedient" movement, as it has been dubbed by many. The "Obedient" movement lacks a clear leader and is

decentralised with community funding. It is organised by several tiny organisations with the aim of overthrowing the status quo. Young people in Nigeria have started organising peace walks and running campaigns online, particularly on Twitter, using Obi as a platform to express their aspirations and wrath. The research is therefore aimed at looking the tweets on Obidient movement during the last election in order to make inferences on what holds for the future in Nigeria elections.

Electioneering Campaign

For political parties to realise their goals, they must advertise their principles and ideology, mission and vision, as well as policy framework for actualizing these goals. This can be done by convincing the electorate on how best to achieve their goals, why they want to be in power and the kind of policies to pursue in order to make changes possible once they get power (Uzonwanne, et al., 2016).). These functions are obviously discharged by political parties mostly during the conduct of electioneering campaigns. In developed and developing democracies have become the main instrument of communication between the electorate and the contestants. However, issues involved in electioneering campaigns differ from one country to another (Jumbo, et al., 2022). In developed democracies, campaign activities are primarily issue-based and well-focused on what is important and desirable for the electorate.

The reverse is the case in developing democracies, particularly in Nigeria, where poverty, ethnicity and the unequal distribution

of scarce resources are some of the manifesting tendencies that disrupting peace during election conduct (Opeyemi, et al., (2018). Most times, speeches and campaign rallies are bastardised with disarticulated campaign speeches from the mainstream concerns relating to what really can promote sustainable economic, political and social developments are overlooked (Gambo, 2021).

Campaigns are a distinguishing feature worldwide, of modern representative democracies. For most citizens in most polities, campaigns provide a compelling incentive to think about government. So, campaigns thus are perhaps the main point of contact between officials and the populace over matters of public policy. Campaigning encompasses political advocacy, lobbying, and communication (Idasa as cited in Albert, 2011).

Political parties play a central role in electioneering campaigns. Parties are responsible for articulating their ideologies, policy positions, and goals through party manifestos. These manifestos outline the party's vision and plans if elected into office, serving as a blueprint for their campaign messages. Additionally, Baron as cited in Albert (2011) demonstrates that there are four potential motivations for running for office: First, an unpopular candidate could draw attention to themselves during the campaign time and procedure. Second, an unpopular but public-spirited candidate could run, not necessarily with the goal of winning, but rather in order to inform voters about strategically crucial public policy concerns that should be emphasised

during an election year. The candidate's third objective may be to create a group of like-minded individuals for tactical social and political action. The ultimate objective may be to win the election and become president or governor, depending on the position being contested.

Campaign strategies in Nigeria typically involve a mix of traditional and modern approaches. Traditional methods include rallies, town hall meetings, door-to-door campaigns, and engaging local community leaders. In recent years, digital platforms and social media have become crucial for reaching a wider audience, with candidates utilising online platforms to disseminate campaign messages, share videos, and engage with voters (Okoro et al., 2019).

Social Media and Electioneering Campaign in Nigeria

In Nigeria, social media has grown to be a potent platform for electoral campaigns, giving politicians and political parties new ways to connect with voters, sway public opinion, and rally support. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp allow political candidates and parties to directly communicate with a large audience (Shadrach & Apuke, 2020). Candidates can share their campaign messages, policy positions, and engage with voters in real-time. The viral nature of social media enables messages to spread rapidly, amplifying their reach and impact. Social media, unlike conventional mass media, is democratic and unrestricted, therefore politicians may use it to disseminate

disinformation about actual or hypothetical opponents in an effort to win people's favour (Alegu, et al., 2020).

Social media platforms facilitate two-way communication between candidates and voters. Citizens can interact with candidates, ask questions, express their concerns, and provide feedback. This engagement fosters a sense of inclusivity and empowers voters to actively participate in the political process. Social media platforms offer sophisticated targeting options, allowing candidates to tailor their campaign messages to specific demographics, locations, or interests (Stier, et al., 2018). This targeting capability enables more effective communication with key voter segments, maximising the impact of campaign efforts. Orji (2014) claims that since 2007, social media in Nigeria has grown to be a significant instrument for political communication. However, the 2011 general elections in Nigeria were the country's first actual test of the use of social media for political involvement (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Social media has become instrumental in grassroots mobilisation efforts during election campaigns.

Political parties and candidates utilise online platforms to organise volunteers, coordinate campaign activities, and rally supporters for events, rallies, and door-to-door campaigns. Real-time monitoring of public opinion and responses to political campaigns is made possible by social media (Okoro & Santos, 2017). Candidates and parties can monitor how the public responds to their messaging, policies, and campaign activities in order to modify their

tactics as necessary. Social media platforms offer the opportunity for alternative narratives and perspectives to be shared. Citizens, activists, and non-mainstream candidates can use social media to raise awareness about important issues, challenge dominant narratives, and influence public discourse (Mamman, 2019).

Social Media and Campaign Strategies in Nigeria

Since the introduction of online social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, social interactions between members of the public have undergone a significant transformation. Numerous areas have seen the value of these platforms in promoting change and earning competitive advantages. The use of online social media platforms for the orchestration of propaganda and campaign techniques has been crucial (Bello, et al., 2019). These platforms are crucial in gaining support from the voters in the political sphere. The social media site Twitter has a growing impact on how social phenomena are shaped. Users freely share their thoughts and participate in debates that have a big influence on society. Twitter makes it simple for people to have discussions with one another and create a narrative regarding political and policy concerns (Adam, et al., 2018). Social media have become powerful tools for political campaigns in Nigeria, allowing candidates and parties to reach a wide audience, engage with voters, and shape public opinion. Effective campaign strategies on social media involve

creating compelling and shareable content. This includes well-designed graphics, videos, and written posts that communicate the candidate's vision, policies, and achievements. It's essential to tailor messages to resonate with specific target audiences and address their concerns. Candidates' use of social media has also been taken into account. When Robin, et al. (2011) examined how social media affected the Dutch election, they discovered that while voting patterns in the local elections of 2010 were unaffected, candidates who were more active on social media received more support from voters within the majority of political parties during the national election. Similarly, (Sanne, 2014) examined how candidates used social media during the 2010 Dutch national election and found that those who used Twitter won more votes than those who did not (Sanne, 2014). While social media may be an effective campaign tool, it shouldn't be used in place of tried-and-true campaign tactics. An all-encompassing campaign should include conventional media involvement, ground-level mobilisation, social media outreach, and direct voter encounters. To maximize their impact, effective campaigns in Nigeria frequently combine online and offline tactics.

Twitter and Political Mobilization

Twitter allows political candidates, parties, and activists to disseminate information about their platforms, policies, campaign events, and achievements. It provides a platform for spreading awareness about political issues, mobilizing support, and engaging with a wide

audience. Twitter is increasingly shaping the political agenda, a role that was formerly dominated by television. Twitter is now followed by television, or at the very least, broadcast news (Ott, 2017). Twitter serves as a medium for micro blogging, and its narrative and interactive design encourage user interaction. It is a social network distinguished for its ease of content generation. A Tweet can be funny or intelligent, but it cannot be sophisticated. On Twitter, hashtags are used to group conversations around particular themes.

Campaign-specific hashtags can be developed and used by political campaigns to rally supporters, boost engagement, and magnify their messaging (Opeyemi, et al., 2018). Campaigns using hashtags may spark discussions online, boost exposure, and mobilise support for certain politicians or causes (Hadma, & Anggoro, 2022). Political activists and supporters may connect, plan, and coordinate grassroots events via Twitter. It may be employed to organize volunteers, organize door-to-door campaigns, voter registration drives, or neighbourhood gatherings (Pérez-Martínez, et al., 2017). Twitter's networking features aid in forming groups of people with similar interests who may get together offline. In Nigeria, Political candidates can directly engage with their supporters and potential voters on Twitter. They can respond to queries, address concerns, and provide real-time updates (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016). Engaging with supporters helps in building trust, fostering loyalty, and creating a sense of inclusivity, which can contribute to political mobilisation. Voters' rights, voter registration, and the election

process may all be explained to them over Twitter. Election dates, polling places, and pertinent documentation requirements can all be shared by campaigns. Twitter can help boost political engagement and voting turnout by improving voter education and awareness (Carlos, et al., 2022).

Bello, et al (2019), online social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook provide a flexible and efficient way for people to communicate on a big scale, producing a huge variety of statistics. This skillenables the analysis of significant volumes of data from internet users on practically any subject. On the basis of the political parties' and candidates' Twitter usernames, the researchers gathered a sizable quantity of tweets. They evaluated users' opinions to comprehend their thoughts and measured political parties' and candidates' internet activity. According to the study, the main opposition party employs a two-pronged strategy, promoting its candidates while criticising the ruling party and its nominee, while both the ruling party and minority parties focus on supporting their candidates.

Ahmad, Ersoy, and Dambo (2020), corroborated that the usage of Twitter by political players to communicate information and media coverage have been shown to be causally related by research, according to empirical data. This demonstrates how political tweets may be used to spread information. However, there are clearly no studies on this topic from Sub-Saharan Africa, notably Nigeria. This study aimed to close this gap by examining how media coverage of the Nigerian general

elections in 2019 was affected by the tweets of two well-known presidential contenders over the course of a four-month period; November 2018 to February 2019.

Nkiru and Augustine (2018), raised awareness of Twitter's efficacy in Southeast Nigeria in relation to the two main contenders' 2015 presidential campaigning. In order to determine whether the online platform used by the then President Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and challenger Muhammadu Buhari of the All-Progressive Congress (APC), as part of a complementary media strategy, was successful in influencing voter behaviour in that region of the country, research was required.

In 2023 elections, the Labour Party (LP) despite been looked down upon as a party with poor party structure through its flag bearer, Peter Obi stunned onlookers pulling in millions of votes and many even claiming that the disputed results was worn by Mr. Peter Obi but was rigged in favour of Bola Ahmed Tinubi. The Obedient movement has awakened the consciousness of a generation of young Nigerians who see hope in Peter Obi's candidacy for the Nigerian presidency. The movement will outlive the election regardless of the result (Aboh and Okoi, 2023). During the elections and after, abbreviations has been used to addressed the top candidates, with Mr. Peter Obi fondly referred to as PO, Bola Ahmed Tinubu known as BAT and Atiku Abubakar supporters referred to as Atikulates. All these ushered in a more modern form and youthful said to electioneering in the country.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Uses and gratification theory which was propounded by Katz Blumier and Gurevitch in 1974 (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). According to the notion, individuals choose which media to consume based on how it makes them feel. The theory specifically places direct authority in the users' hands. We may investigate the reasons and satisfactions people may seek via their participation in the movement by applying this theory to the Obedient Movement on Twitter in Nigeria. Information is one of the gratifications people could look for in the Obedient Movement on Twitter. Twitter is a forum for the exchange of information, updates, and viewpoints (Matyek, et al., 2022). Twitter may be used by movement supporters to learn about political problems, laws, or other events that are important to their cause. To keep informed and build their political ideas, they could rely on the movement's tweets and retweets. Twitter is a platform that Obedient

Movement supporters may use to express their political opinions, worries, and complaints. They may express their viewpoints with a larger audience and perhaps have an impact on public discourse and policy discussions by joining the movement on Twitter. People using Twitter may feel validated and receive encouragement from others who share their views. The supportive comments, retweets, and interaction they get from other followers may help members of the Obedient Movement feel that their political views and behaviour are justified. This affirmation can increase their dedication to the cause and give them a sense of community.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is the library research method. Here, the researcher made use of secondary research material relevant to this paper such as: books chapters, journals articles, newspapers, magazines to gather facts in discussing the subject matter.

References

- Adam, B., Emilio, F., & Kristina, L. (2018). Analyzing the digital traces of political manipulation: The 2016 Russian interference Twitter campaign. 2018 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM), 258–265.
- Ahmad, M. A., Ersoy, M., & Dambo, T. H. (2020). Influence of Political Tweets on Campaign Coverage: Building the News Agenda in Twitter sphere. *Journalism Practice*, 1(3):1–19.
- Albert, I. O. (2011), A Review of the Campaign Strategies. *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 35-43.
- Alegu, J. C., Maku, B. S., Adelaja, K. I., & Raheed, A. A. (2020). Social media, propaganda and electioneering campaigns: The Nigerian experience (1999 – 2019). *International Journal of Sociology and Political Science*, 2(1), 4–13.
- Apuke, O., & Tunca, E. (2018). Understanding the Implications of Social Media Usage in the Electoral Processes and Campaigns in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*, 16(6), 3–8.
- Assibong, P. & Oshanisi, O. 2018. The Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the 2015 Presidential Election of Nigeria. *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*, 38: 1-7.
- Bello, B. S., Inuwa-Dutse, I., & Heckel, R. (2019). Social Media Campaign Strategies: Analysis of the 2019 Nigerian Elections. *IEEE Xplore*, 3(2):142–149.
- Carlos, K.A.L., Vargas D.S., Estigoy, M.A.S, & Hail, P.N. (2022). Effects of social media on political communication. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 8(2):88-97.
- Chinedu-Okeke, C.F. & Obi, I. (2016). Social media as a political platform in Nigeria: A focus on electorates in South-Eastern Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 21, (11), 06-22.
- Chukwurah, F. (2023). Peter Obi's "Obedient" movement ignites Nigeria's youth. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/peter-obi-obidient-movement-ignites-nigerias-youth/a-63375362>.
- Gambo, K. (2021). *Political Parties and Electioneering Campaigns: Patterns and Dynamics*. Bayero Press.
- Hadma, A. M & Anggoro, J.D. (2022). Political Communication in the Age of Social Media, *Commicast*, 3 (1), 1-7.
- Jumbo, N. C, Macaulay, S.U, Megwa, G.I.O., Okpongpong, G.I, Ukpong, E.N & Etumnu, E. W. (2022). Assessing the role of broadcast journalism in reshaping the political terrain in Nigeria fourth republic. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 28 (3), 9-18.
- Mamman, Y. (2019). The influence of social media on political culture in Nigeria: A political perception of state assembly members from 2015 elections to date. *The Beam: Journal Arts and Sciences*, 12(1), 66-70.
- Matyek, J.G., Kaze, S.Y., Ohaji, K.M. & Etumnu, E.W. (2022). An investigation of social media as a government digital public relations tool: The Nigerian experience. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 8(1), 1-13.
- Nkiru, C. E., & Augustine, G. M. (2018). Twitter and Election Campaigns: Measuring Usage in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election. *Covenant Journal of Communication*, 5(2), 44–65.
- Obob, A.B. and Okoi, O. (2023). The "Obedient Movement" will shape Nigerian politics beyond the 2023 presidential election. *I s e*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2023/02/23/the-obidient-movement-will-shape-nigerian-politics-beyond-the-2023-presidential-election/>.
- Okoro, N, & Nwafor K.A. (2013). Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: The lapses and lessons. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 29-46.

- Okoro, N. &Santas, T. (2017). An Appraisal of the Utilisation of Social Media for Political Communication in the2011 Nigerian Presidential Election. *African Research Review*, 11 (1), 115-
- Okoro, N.L., Etumnu, E.W. & Okoro, U.C. (2019). Social media as a modern platform for political discourse in Imo State. *IMSU Journal of Communication Studies*, 3(1), 24-36.
- Opeyemi, M., Dungse, Y., Mato, S., &Chidozie, F. (2018). *Social Media, Political Mobilisation and Participatory Politics in Nigeria. E-Government for Democratic Consolidation and Transformation: Agenda Setting forthe 2019 Elections and Transparency in Governance, (CUCEN, 2018).* Covenant University.
- Orji, N. (2014). Nigeria's 2015 election in perspective. *African Spectrum*, 49(3),121-133.
- Pérez-Martínez, V.M., Rodríguez, G., & M Tobajas Gracia. (2017). Mobilization and political participation on Twitter. Case study of the hashtag #Super Tuesday in the primaries of the presidential elections of the United States 2016. RLCS, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 72, 679–703.
- Robin, E., Jos V. H. & Theo, H. (2011). Social media and political participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and Youtube democratizing our political systems? *International conference on electronic participation*, 25–35.
- Sanne, K. (2014). How political candidates use twitter and the impact on votes. *C o m p u t e r s i n h u m a n behavior*,34:131–139.
- Shadrach, I & Apuke, O.D. (2020). Investigating the Effectiveness of Social Media Usage for Political Dialogue in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 39(4):26-37.
- Stier, S, Bleier, A, Lietz, H. & Strohmaier, M. (2018). Election Campaigning on social media: politicians, audiences, and the mediation of political communication on Facebook and Twitter. *Political Communication*, 35:1,34-39
- Uzonwanne, M.C., Ezenekwe, R.U. & Iregbenu, PC. (2016). Electioneering campaign and the Nigerian economy. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management, United Kingdom*, 4(3),650-662.