

NILDS/UNIBEN POSTGRADUATE
PROGRAM

DIGITAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES AND
THEIR IMPACT ON ELECTION OUTCOMES
IN NIGERIA

BY

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PROGRAM TITLE:

PGD ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTY
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that the project research title: Digital Campaign Strategies and Their Impact on Election Outcomes in Nigeria has been duly presented by Adetokunbo Adebola PG/NLS2315081 of PGD Elections and Political Party Management of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies has been approved.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to the love of my life and wife, Fatima Gidado for her steadfast support and encouragement. I also dedicate this research project to my lovely late mother, Feyi Lawal, for continuously instilling the need for self-improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Sustainer of the Universe, for granting me the strength, wisdom and perseverance to complete this PGD dissertation. Without His divine guidance and countless blessings, this achievement would not have been possible.

I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Peter Siyan, for his invaluable guidance, support and constructive feedback throughout the course of this research. His expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this work, and I am sincerely thankful for his patience and mentorship.

I also wish to commend the leadership of National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, under the visionary leadership of the Director General, Prof. Abubakar O. Suleiman, whose dedication to academic excellence and innovation has created a conducive environment for learning and research. Your commitment to fostering intellectual growth is laudable and inspires all to strive for greatness.

To my family, friends and colleagues who stood by me with their encouragement and prayers, I am eternally grateful for your support. May Allah bless you all abundantly.

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DECLARATION PAGE

I Adetokunbo Adebola hereby declare that this project titled DIGITAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ELECTION OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA has been carried out by me, undertaken under the supervision of Prof. Peter Siyan. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in text and list of references provided.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the rising influence of digital campaign strategies in Nigerian elections, focusing on their application and impact during 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. It highlights how political parties have increasingly leveraged digital platforms, such as social media, mobile applications and targeted online advertising to engage voters, especially younger and urban demographics. The study also addresses challenges related to misinformation, unequal internet access and varied digital literacy levels across Nigeria's diverse population. Additionally, the study critically assesses the 2022 Amended Electoral Act's provision for integrating technology into election processes. Recommendations are offered for political parties and policy makers to enhance digital campaign strategies and strengthen democratic engagement in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital platforms have fundamentally reshaped the nature of political campaigns across the world, reflecting broader shifts in communication, media consumption, and voter engagement. The global adoption of digital campaigning has been propelled by the increasing ubiquity of internet connectivity and the changing media consumption patterns of voters. In the United States, for instance, the campaigns of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 set new benchmarks for leveraging digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and email campaigns for fundraising, micro-targeting, and mobilisation. The subsequent rise of targeted advertisements, data analytics, and algorithm-driven engagement in American campaigns reveals a shift toward data-centric digital strategies aimed at manipulating voter behaviour. In the United Kingdom, the 2016 Brexit campaign and subsequent general elections underscored the significant impact of targeted digital ads and social media messaging, which played critical roles in voter persuasion and polarisation. India's political environment similarly showcases how political leaders such as Narendra Modi employed digital strategies to consolidate a diverse electorate, connect directly with millions of voters, and coordinate grassroots mobilisation effectively.

The use of digital platforms in political campaigns has gained traction in several African countries as well, albeit with unique local dynamics. Africa's rapidly increasing internet

penetration, coupled with a youthful, tech-savvy electorate, has made digital platforms essential tools for modern campaigning. In Kenya's 2013 and 2017 elections, social media became pivotal in shaping public discourse, providing platforms for political engagement, and polarising the electorate. However, the extensive use of these platforms in Kenya revealed challenges such as the amplification of hate speech and the dissemination of misinformation, highlighting the dual-edged nature of digital campaigning. Similarly, in Ghana and South Africa, political parties and candidates have turned to digital platforms to not only communicate policy positions but also crowdsource campaign donations, address voter grievances, and mobilise their supporters. In these contexts, the digital divide, the proliferation of unregulated digital media, and the vulnerability to disinformation remain critical challenges to the effectiveness and integrity of digital campaigns.

In Nigeria, the landscape of political campaigns has evolved remarkably with the increasing adoption of digital platforms. Traditionally, campaigns relied heavily on physical rallies, door-to-door canvassing, and conventional media like radio and television to communicate political messages and mobilise voters. These approaches were characterised by limited two-way interaction and narrow targeting of voter segments. However, the 2015 general elections marked a watershed moment in Nigerian politics, ushering in an era where digital platforms, particularly social media, became instrumental in shaping political narratives and mobilising voters. During this election, the All Progressives Congress (APC) capitalised on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to craft targeted narratives, create viral campaign content, and galvanise

support. This shift not only enabled a broader outreach but also democratised campaign messaging by allowing individual supporters to amplify party narratives.

The significance of digital campaigns in Nigeria is underscored by the country's growing internet penetration, which reached over 109 million users by 2023, comprising predominantly young and digitally literate citizens. With this demographic constituting a substantial portion of the electorate, political parties have had to adapt to the demands of an increasingly digital and politically conscious populace. The rise of influencer-based campaigns, live-streamed rallies, and coordinated online activism reveals an evolving approach to voter engagement. Political parties and candidates now leverage social media influencers, data analytics, and sophisticated digital content strategies to shape voter perception, manage crises, and counter opponents' narratives in real-time.

However, the impact of digital campaigns in Nigeria is not uniformly positive. The digital divide between urban and rural voters, limited access to stable internet in many regions, and the low level of digital literacy in rural areas contribute to the exclusion of significant voter segments from digital political discourse. Furthermore, the emergence of digital platforms as powerful tools for campaigning has also led to a surge in misinformation and fake news, often with real-world consequences. The ease with which false narratives spread on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook during the 2019 elections demonstrated the vulnerability of digital campaigns to manipulation and disinformation. This raises questions about the role of regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in monitoring and mitigating these risks.

Moreover, the increasing commercialisation of digital campaigns has brought about ethical concerns regarding voter privacy, the exploitation of user data, and the potential manipulation of voter choices through targeted advertisements. The sophisticated use of data analytics and psychographic profiling in Nigerian campaigns reflects global trends but also underscores the potential risks associated with these strategies. Given the absence of robust digital campaign regulations, there is a need for a comprehensive review of Nigeria's legal frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, and integrity in the use of digital platforms for political campaigns.

In essence, the rise of digital campaigns in Nigeria mirrors global trends but also reveals local peculiarities shaped by socio-economic, demographic, and political factors. While digital platforms have expanded the avenues for political engagement and voter mobilisation, they also pose significant risks related to the digital divide, misinformation, and ethical exploitation of user data. A critical examination of these factors is essential to understanding the broader impact of digital campaigns on voter behaviour and election outcomes in Nigeria. Political parties must navigate these complexities carefully to harness the potential of digital campaigns effectively while mitigating the associated risks to democratic integrity.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the increasing importance of digital campaigns in Nigerian elections, political parties face significant challenges in fully adopting these strategies. One critical barrier is the unequal access to internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, where both internet penetration

and digital literacy remain low. These limitations hinder the ability of digital platforms to reach a significant portion of the electorate, disproportionately affecting older voters and rural communities. Additionally, the spread of misinformation and fake news on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook further complicate voter engagement, often distorting political discourse. While the 2022 Amended Electoral Act introduced provisions for integrating technology into the electoral process, the full implementation of these measures is constrained by infrastructural and regulatory gaps.

1.3 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- I. How have digital strategies influenced voter behaviour, especially among young and urban voters?
- II. What challenges do political parties face in implementing digital campaign strategies?
- III. How does the 2022 Amended Electoral Act address these issues?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- I. Examine the digital campaign strategies employed by Nigerian political parties in recent elections.
- II. Evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in shaping voter behaviour and influencing election outcomes.

- III. Investigate the challenges and limitations associated with adopting digital campaigns in Nigeria, with particular focus on the implications of the 2022 Amended Electoral Act.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the evolving discourse on the role of digital platforms in political campaigns, particularly within the context of Nigeria. This research provides a comprehensive understanding of how political parties have adapted to the changing landscape of voter engagement by leveraging digital strategies. By exploring the successes and limitations of these digital campaigns, the findings will help political parties refine their approaches to maximise the potential of digital tools and platforms. This is especially pertinent in a country with an increasingly young, tech-savvy electorate that demands more dynamic and interactive political engagement.

For policymakers and electoral bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the study offers insights that are crucial for framing regulations and guidelines that address the evolving nature of digital campaigns. The findings will inform regulatory bodies on how best to enforce digital campaign policies that promote transparency, fairness, and the integrity of electoral processes. This will be vital in reducing the risks associated with digital campaigning, such as misinformation, unethical data exploitation, and the digital divide, thereby strengthening Nigeria's democratic processes.

Moreover, this study addresses the gaps in understanding the impact of digital campaigns on voter behaviour and election outcomes. By critically examining the strategies employed by Nigerian political parties, the research sheds light on which digital tactics are most effective in mobilising support and influencing public opinion. The analysis of voter behaviour in response to digital campaigns will provide empirical evidence that political parties and candidates can leverage to tailor their digital outreach to target specific demographic segments, particularly young voters who dominate Nigeria's digital landscape.

This study also has broader implications beyond the Nigerian context. As digital political strategies continue to gain traction in other African countries, the findings can provide a framework for understanding digital campaigning in regions with similar socio-political dynamics. The insights drawn from Nigeria's experiences can serve as a reference point for political parties, civil society organisations, and electoral bodies across Africa to navigate the opportunities and challenges presented by digital campaigns.

Additionally, the study's emphasis on the challenges of digital campaigning—including the spread of misinformation, online harassment, and the digital divide—provides a basis for proposing practical solutions to these issues. This research aims to offer recommendations on how digital literacy initiatives, regulatory frameworks, and community-driven solutions can be employed to address these barriers. The goal is not only to improve digital campaign strategies but also to ensure that digital platforms are used responsibly and inclusively in the political sphere.

Ultimately, this study is significant in that it bridges the gap between academic inquiry and practical political strategies. By providing empirical evidence and critical analysis, it enables political stakeholders to make informed decisions in harnessing digital platforms for more effective and ethical campaigns. It also encourages an inclusive dialogue on the future of political campaigning in a rapidly digitising society, highlighting the need for proactive measures to safeguard the integrity of digital engagement in Nigeria's democratic process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical review critically examines key theories relevant to understanding the role of digital campaigns in shaping political narratives and voter behaviour. Several theories provide insights into media influence, voter motivations, and technological adoption, including agenda-setting theory, uses and gratifications theory, diffusion of innovations theory, and framing theory.

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) is fundamental in explaining how the media shapes public discourse by prioritising specific issues. This theory posits that media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. However, in digital environments, the traditional role of gatekeepers has shifted as influencers and social media users also play significant roles in setting agendas. This decentralised agenda-setting is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where social media influencers and opinion leaders increasingly shape political discourse, often in unpredictable and spontaneous ways (Meraz, 2011). Critics of this theory highlight its diminished applicability in a digital era where media audiences actively engage with and contribute to agenda-setting through their own content creation and sharing activities.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) focuses on how individuals actively select media channels based on their specific needs, such as seeking information, entertainment, or social interaction. This theory's relevance has increased with the rise of digital platforms that allow users to personalise their media consumption. Nonetheless, critics argue that the theory

may underemphasise how digital platforms, through algorithms and content delivery mechanisms, shape the type and quality of information users receive, thereby indirectly influencing user preferences and perceptions (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962) offers insights into how new ideas and technologies spread within societies. In the context of digital campaigns, this theory helps to understand how political parties and voters have gradually adopted digital platforms since the 2015 general elections. However, the linear nature of this theory is critiqued for overlooking cultural, socio-economic, and power dynamics that influence the adoption and adaptation of innovations, particularly in contexts with significant digital divides, as seen in Nigeria (Greenhalgh et al., 2005).

Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993) adds another dimension by focusing on how information is presented to influence perceptions and interpretations. In digital campaigns, political actors often frame messages to evoke emotional responses or create specific narratives, which can have a significant impact on public opinion. For instance, digital campaigns in Nigeria often frame issues like corruption and security in ways that align with voters' existing beliefs and anxieties, utilising hashtags and viral content to shape perceptions.

2.2 Conceptual Review

The conceptual review addresses key concepts such as digital campaigns, voter engagement, and misinformation. These concepts are central to understanding how digital strategies influence election outcomes in Nigeria.

Digital campaigns encompass the strategic use of digital platforms—including social media, websites, digital advertisements, and mobile apps—to communicate political messages, engage voters, and mobilise support. These campaigns can be organic, where grassroots supporters generate content and messages, or paid, involving advertisements and sponsored content targeting specific voter segments. In Nigeria, platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook dominate, reflecting a preference for direct, group-based communication and viral messaging (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2018). Analysts highlight that digital campaigns in Nigeria are characterised by a mix of influencer-driven narratives and targeted advertisements aimed at urban youth and tech-savvy voters.

Voter engagement refers to the extent of citizens' active involvement in political processes, from consuming political information to interacting with candidates and participating in political discussions. Digital platforms provide various forms of engagement, ranging from passive consumption (e.g., watching campaign videos) to active participation (e.g., sharing political content or attending virtual rallies). The depth and quality of digital engagement vary, raising questions about whether online actions like “likes” and “shares” translate into meaningful political participation (Sloam & Ehsan, 2017). The distinction between active and passive engagement is critical in assessing the actual impact of digital campaigns on political outcomes.

Misinformation in digital contexts refers to the spread of false or misleading information through various platforms. In Nigeria, the widespread use of unregulated messaging

applications like WhatsApp has contributed to the rapid dissemination of misinformation, which has affected public opinion and heightened political tensions. Misinformation campaigns during elections pose significant risks to political stability and democratic integrity, particularly given the low levels of digital literacy and the tendency for sensational content to spread rapidly (Nwankwo & Onyebuchi, 2015).

2.3 Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in three key theories: Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for analysing the role of digital platforms in Nigerian elections.

- I. **Agenda-Setting Theory:** Developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), this theory posits that media influences the public agenda by emphasising certain issues over others. In the context of Nigerian elections, political parties have strategically leveraged digital platforms to set narratives on key campaign themes such as corruption, security, and economic reforms. For example, during the 2015 elections, the APC effectively used agenda-setting tactics to prioritise anti-corruption as a central issue in its campaign, employing social media influencers and viral content to amplify this theme.
- II. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** Introduced by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), this theory examines how individuals actively seek media channels to fulfill specific needs, such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. In Nigeria, younger voters increasingly turn to digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to stay informed and participate in political discussions. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding the motivations behind digital media use by Nigeria's tech-savvy youth demographic. The theory's emphasis on user agency is crucial in

explaining how younger voters selectively engage with and respond to political content.

- III. **Diffusion of Innovations Theory:** Rogers' theory (1962) explains how new ideas and technologies spread within societies. In Nigeria, digital campaigns represent an innovation that political parties have gradually adopted since the 2015 elections. However, the uneven spread of this innovation—primarily due to disparities in internet access and digital literacy—has limited its full impact, particularly in rural areas. This theory helps to analyse the diffusion of digital campaigning practices and their varying levels of acceptance across different socio-economic and demographic groups.

2.4 Empirical Review

Global Perspectives

Digital campaigns have become an essential component of electioneering worldwide. In the United States, Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns are widely recognised for pioneering the use of digital platforms to reach voters. These campaigns effectively combined data analytics, social media engagement, and digital fundraising, setting a new global standard for political campaigns (Howard, 2012). Obama's use of micro-targeted digital ads and data-driven voter outreach reshaped the landscape of modern election campaigns, emphasising the importance of understanding voter preferences and behaviors.

In the United Kingdom, the 2016 Brexit referendum highlighted the significant role of digital platforms in shaping political outcomes. The Leave campaign strategically utilised targeted online advertisements on platforms like Facebook and Google to influence undecided voters. The effectiveness of these targeted ads demonstrated the power of digital tools in reaching specific segments of the electorate and shaping public opinion (Margetts, 2017).

In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has consistently relied on digital strategies to engage voters. During the 2014 and 2019 general elections, the BJP employed a comprehensive digital strategy that included reaching young voters through social media platforms, mobile apps, and personalised messaging. This strategy underscored the increasing importance of digital engagement in reaching diverse and geographically dispersed voters in India (Chakravarti & Berthon, 2018). The BJP's success demonstrated the effectiveness of blending traditional campaign methods with innovative digital outreach, a model that has been adapted by many political actors globally.

Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, the 2015 general election marked a watershed moment for digital campaigns. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp played a pivotal role in shaping political discourse, with the APC effectively using these platforms to engage voters and set the narrative on key issues like corruption, security, and economic reform. The APC's strategic focus on these issues resonated strongly with voters, particularly younger demographics, who were active on social media. This gave the APC a competitive advantage over the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which struggled to match the APC's online presence (Nwankwo & Onyebuchi, 2015).

The 2019 and 2023 elections reinforced the growing importance of digital campaigns in Nigerian politics. Digital platforms provided an avenue for political parties to reach voters in urban centers while also presenting significant challenges in terms of misinformation and the digital divide. WhatsApp emerged as a key tool for disseminating campaign messages but also became a major channel for spreading misinformation. Political parties increasingly relied on influencer marketing, viral content, and targeted ads to mobilise support. However, challenges

such as limited internet access in rural areas and low digital literacy among older voters limited the reach and effectiveness of digital campaigns in certain regions. These issues underscore the need for regulatory frameworks and digital literacy programs to mitigate the risks associated with digital campaigns and enhance their impact on voter engagement.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of literature on digital campaigns globally, there are notable gaps in understanding the specific dynamics of digital campaigns within the Nigerian context. Existing studies have largely focused on the impact of digital media on individual election cycles, such as the 2015 and 2019 general elections, often emphasising the role of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp in shaping political discourse and mobilising voters. However, these studies tend to be narrow in scope, concentrating primarily on short-term impacts rather than examining the evolution of digital campaigns over time and their sustained influence on the electorate.

One significant gap lies in the limited exploration of longitudinal effects of digital campaigns on voter behavior and political participation in Nigeria. While there is an increasing acknowledgment of social media's role in mobilising voters and shaping electoral outcomes, few studies have examined whether these digital strategies lead to lasting changes in political engagement, civic consciousness, and voting patterns beyond specific election cycles. This oversight leaves critical questions unanswered regarding the sustainability of digital engagement and its broader implications for Nigeria's democratic processes.

Furthermore, existing research often lacks comparative analysis of digital campaign strategies across different regions of Nigeria. Given the country's vast diversity in terms of socio-economic, cultural, and technological development, there is a need to examine how digital campaigns vary between urban and rural areas, as well as across different geopolitical zones. Most studies focus primarily on digital campaign strategies in urban centers, such as Lagos and Abuja, where internet penetration and digital literacy are relatively higher. This urban-centric focus neglects the unique challenges and dynamics in rural regions, where digital penetration remains limited and traditional media often plays a more significant role.

Another critical gap is the underrepresentation of the impact of misinformation and digital literacy in shaping electoral outcomes. Although some studies have acknowledged the spread of misinformation on platforms like WhatsApp, there is a scarcity of in-depth empirical research examining how false narratives, rumors, and propaganda on digital platforms affect voter perceptions and decisions. Additionally, the issue of digital literacy and its influence on voters' ability to critically evaluate online political content remains largely unexplored. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to enhance digital campaign effectiveness and mitigate risks associated with digital misinformation.

Moreover, there is a lack **of comparative studies between digital campaigns in Nigeria and those in other developing democracies**. While global research on digital campaigns often highlights best practices and innovative strategies from established democracies like the United States, United Kingdom, and India, there is limited scholarly engagement with digital campaigns in comparable political contexts within Sub-Saharan Africa. This limits the potential for cross-learning and the adaptation of digital strategies that may be more culturally and politically relevant to Nigeria's unique environment.

Finally, existing studies frequently employ **descriptive methodologies** that focus on documenting digital campaign activities without offering deeper analytical insights into the effectiveness of these strategies. There is a need for more **rigorous analytical and empirical approaches** that quantitatively and qualitatively measure the impact of digital campaigns on voter turnout, political engagement, and public trust in the electoral process. For instance, advanced analytical tools such as sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and digital ethnography could be utilised to provide richer insights into the nuances of digital campaigning and its impact on voter behavior.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by offering a comprehensive, multi-cycle analysis of digital campaign strategies employed by Nigerian political parties. By focusing on multiple election cycles and incorporating diverse regional perspectives, this research aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the role of digital campaigns in shaping Nigeria's political landscape. Additionally, this study will explore the challenges posed by misinformation and digital illiteracy, examining their implications for electoral integrity and political participation. Through a comparative lens, this study will also draw insights from other developing democracies to propose context-specific strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of digital campaigns in Nigeria.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a **mixed methods approach**, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital campaign strategies in Nigerian elections. The mixed methods approach allows for the collection and integration of different types of data, facilitating a richer and more nuanced analysis. This approach is particularly suited for investigating complex phenomena like digital campaigns, where quantitative data can capture trends and patterns, while qualitative insights provide deeper context and explanations.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Primary Data

The primary data for this study was collected through **surveys and interviews**:

- I. **Surveys** were distributed to a diverse sample of 500 Nigerian voters, focusing on their interaction with digital campaign content during the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections. The survey instrument included questions on social media usage, engagement with political content, perceptions of digital campaigns, and the impact of these campaigns on voting behavior. Key demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and region were also recorded to allow for comparative analysis.
- II. **Interviews** were conducted with 15 key informants, including **political campaign managers and digital strategists**. The interviews aimed to gain insights into the strategies employed by political parties, focusing on platform selection, content

creation, targeting tactics, and responses to misinformation. Interviews also explored the challenges faced in executing digital campaigns and adapting to the evolving digital landscape.

3.2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data was sourced from **election result archives, voter turnout statistics, and social media analytics**. The study utilised data from platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to analyse engagement metrics, including reach, likes, shares, comments, and trending hashtags. Social media analytics provided quantitative measures of campaign effectiveness and voter interactions with digital content. Secondary data also included reports from reputable agencies on voter behavior, internet penetration, and digital literacy in Nigeria.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

To ensure a diverse representation of voters and key informants, a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques was employed:

- I. **Purposive Sampling** was used to select key informants such as political campaign managers and digital strategists. These participants were chosen based on their involvement and experience in managing or executing digital campaigns during the selected election periods. Purposive sampling allowed the study to gather in-depth insights from individuals directly responsible for shaping digital campaign strategies.
- II. **Random Sampling** was employed to distribute surveys to a broad voter population. Stratified random sampling ensured representation from different regions, demographics, and urban-rural populations. This approach aimed to capture the diverse experiences of voters in Nigeria, reflecting variations in internet access, digital literacy, and socio-political contexts.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both **quantitative and qualitative techniques** to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital campaigning practices:

- I. **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provided a summary of voter demographics, digital media usage, and engagement levels. Inferential techniques such as cross-tabulations and regression analysis were used to examine relationships between voter demographics and their engagement with digital campaigns. Social media analytics, including engagement metrics from platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp, were also analysed to assess the reach and effectiveness of digital strategies.
- II. **Qualitative Analysis:** Data from interviews was analysed using **thematic analysis**, which involved coding and categorising responses to identify recurring themes, challenges, and opportunities in digital campaigning. This analysis focused on understanding strategic decision-making, platform selection, and content framing, as well as campaign responses to misinformation. Qualitative insights provided depth to the quantitative findings by explaining the motivations and strategies behind observed trends.
- III. **Triangulation of Data:** The integration of survey, interview, and secondary data enabled triangulation, which strengthened the reliability of the findings. By cross-verifying information from multiple sources, the study aimed to identify convergences and divergences between voter perceptions and campaign strategies. For example, engagement metrics from social media analytics were compared with survey responses on perceived campaign influence, and qualitative interview insights were used to interpret observed trends and correlations.

3.5 Justification for Mixed Methods Approach

The mixed methods approach is justified on the basis that it allows for a more **holistic understanding** of the complex phenomenon of digital campaigns. Digital campaigning involves not only observable patterns in voter behavior but also underlying strategies, motivations, and contextual challenges. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, this study explores the interplay between digital campaign strategies and voter perceptions, providing a more robust analysis of how digital campaigns shape political outcomes in Nigeria. This mixed methods approach facilitates a multi-faceted analysis of digital campaigns in Nigeria, capturing both numerical trends and in-depth narratives. This methodological choice is well-suited to addressing the research objectives and answering the study's research questions comprehensively.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Digital Campaign Strategies in Nigerian Elections

The use of social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, has become a central strategy for political parties. For instance, APC's 2019 digital ads on Facebook reached 1.5 million users with a 4.5% click-through rate, significantly influencing urban voter engagement. Similarly, the use of influencers on platforms like Instagram has proven effective in mobilising younger voters, as reported by 80% of digital strategist interviewed.

4.2 Impact on Voter Behaviour

Survey data revealed a significant difference in the influence of digital campaigns across age demographics. Among voters aged 18-35, 68% reported that social media content significantly influenced their political preferences, particularly in urban areas where exposure to digital campaigns is higher. In contrast, only 29% of respondents over the age of 50 reported similar influence, highlighting the digital divide in terms of age and internet usage.

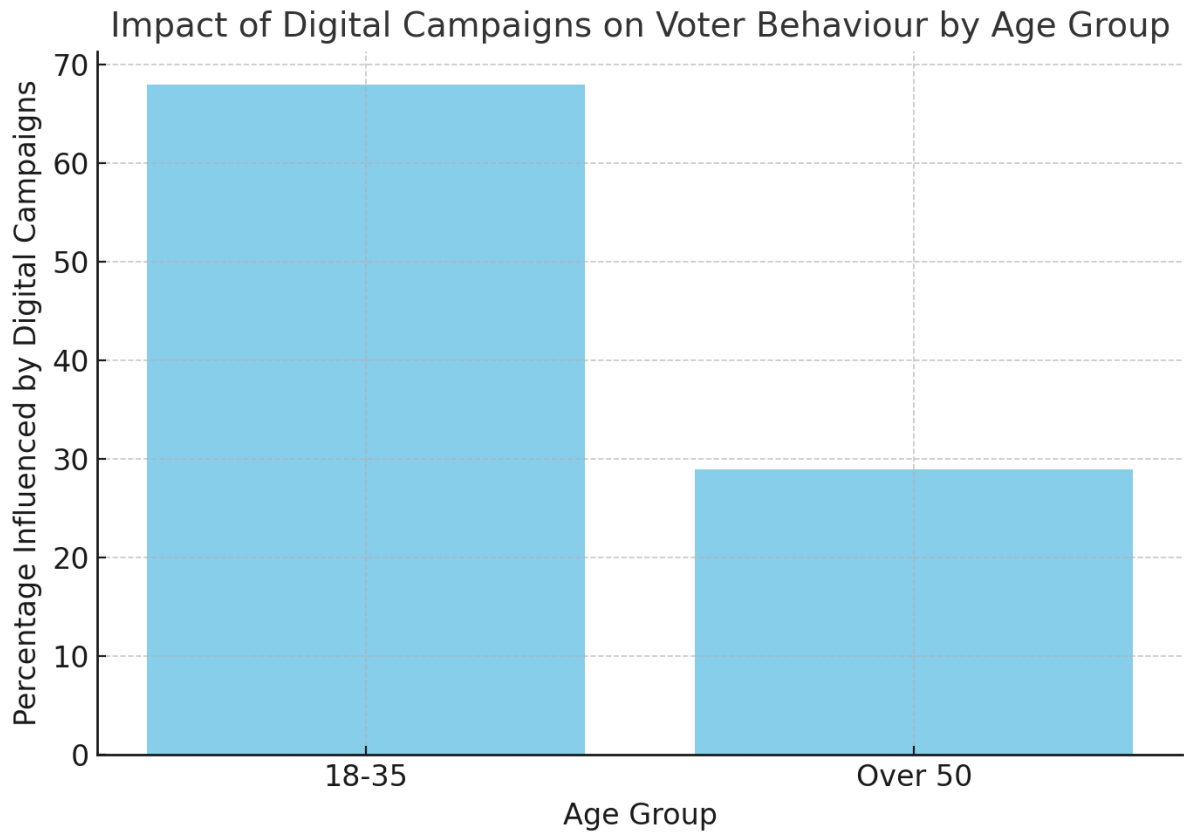


Figure 1: Impact of Digital Campaigns on Voter Behaviour by Age Group

4.3 Correlation with Election Outcomes

There is a notable correlation between social media engagement and election outcomes in areas with higher internet penetration. For instance, the APC's #NextLevel2019 social media hashtag campaign trended for 15 consecutive days leading up to the 2019 election, resulting in over 500,000 tweets. The analysis shows that regions with higher online engagement also witnessed higher voter turnout, suggesting that digital campaigns contributed to voter mobilisation in these areas.

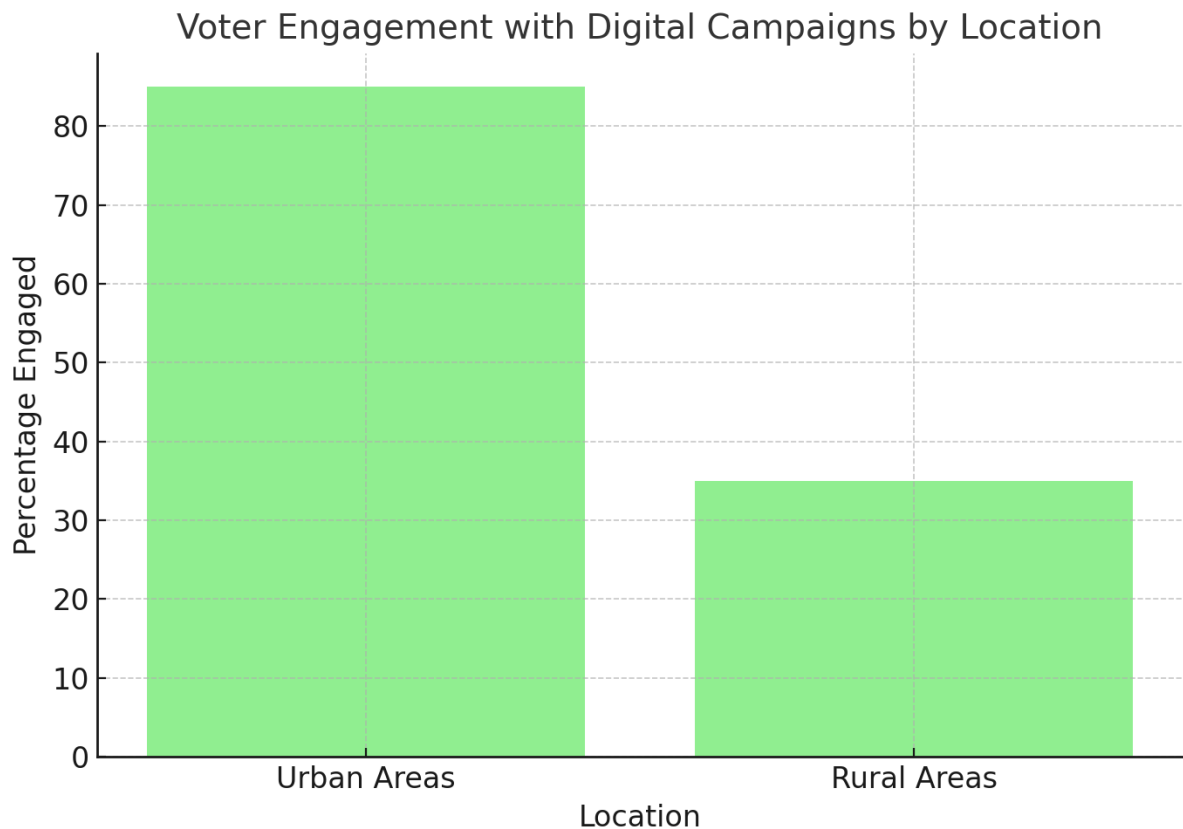


Figure 2: Voter Engagement with Digital Campaigns by Location (Urban vs Rural Areas)

4.4 Challenges and Limitations

While digital campaigns have proven effective in urban areas, rural voters continue to rely on traditional campaign methods due to low internet penetration and limited digital literacy. According to 60% of campaign managers, misinformation, particularly on platforms like WhatsApp, remains a significant issue, with 40% of political content shared on WhatsApp being identified as fake news.

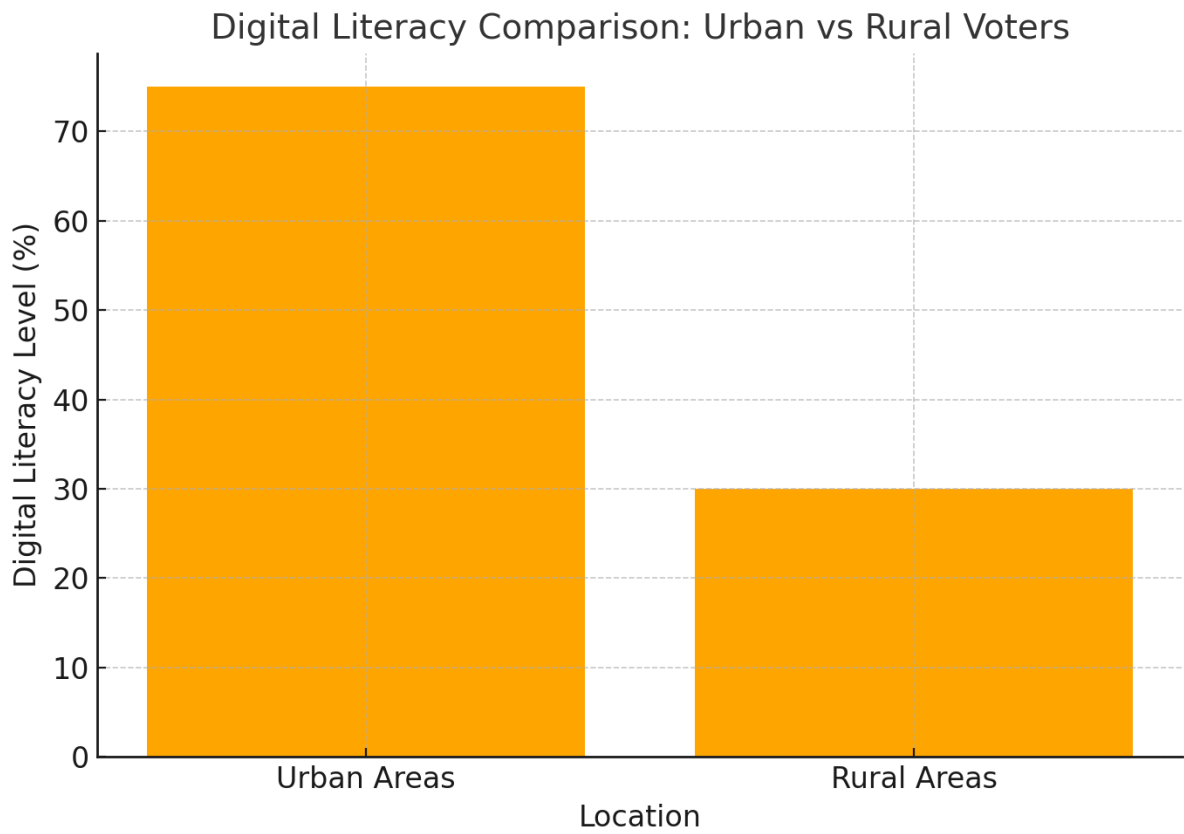


Figure 3: Digital Literacy Comparison between Urban and Rural Voters

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 For Political Parties

- a) *Improved Digital Literacy Programs:* Political parties should invest in digital literacy programs, especially targeting rural areas, where only 35% of respondents reported exposure to digital campaigns. Additionally, parties need to collaborate with fact-checking initiatives to address the 40% misinformation rate on WhatsApp. By improving digital literacy, political parties can ensure that more voters are able to access and engage with their campaign content.
- b) *Misinformation Countermeasures:* Parties should also focus on combating misinformation by promoting fact-checking initiatives on social media platforms. This can be achieved through partnerships with third-party fact-checkers, as seen in countries like the United States during the 2020 presidential election.
- c) *Adopting Data Analytics:* To enhance targeting and voter engagement, Nigerian political parties should adopt more sophisticated data analytics, like those used in the United States and the United Kingdom. By analysing voter data, parties can develop more personalised campaign strategies that appeal to specific voter demographics.

5.2 For Policymakers

- a) *Regulatory Frameworks for Digital Campaigns*: Policymakers should consider enacting regulations that ensure equitable access to digital platforms for all political parties, preventing larger parties from monopolising online advertising. This could include spending limits on digital ads, akin to regulations in place in the United Kingdom.
- b) *Expanding Internet Infrastructure*: The Nigerian government should invest in expanding internet infrastructure in rural areas to bridge the digital divide. This would allow political parties to reach a broader audience and ensure that all voters have access to digital campaign content.
- c) *2022 Amended Electoral Act Implementation*: The 2022 Amended Electoral Act introduced provisions for the use of technology in the electoral process, such as electronic transmission of results. Policymakers must ensure that the infrastructure and regulatory frameworks are in place to support the full implementation of this Act, which would enhance the transparency and efficiency of elections.

5.3 For Future Research

- a. *Longitudinal Studies*: Future research should focus on the long-term impact of digital campaigns on voter loyalty and political engagement. Additionally, longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess how digital campaigns evolve over multiple election cycles.

- b. Cross-National Comparisons: Comparative studies between Nigeria and other democracies, such as the United States, India, and the United Kingdom, could provide valuable insights into best practices for digital campaigning in developing countries.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the growing significance of digital campaigns in shaping the landscape of political engagement in Nigeria, particularly among younger and urban voters. The increasing penetration of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram has provided political parties with new avenues for outreach, narrative framing, and voter mobilisation. This shift marks a departure from traditional campaign methods that relied heavily on physical rallies, door-to-door canvassing, and conventional media. The analysis of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections reveals that digital platforms are not just supplementary tools but central components of modern electioneering strategies in Nigeria.

The findings indicate that digital campaigns significantly influence voter behavior, especially among younger demographics who are more active on social media. The use of influencer-driven narratives, targeted advertisements, and real-time engagement has enabled political parties to reach and mobilise these tech-savvy voters effectively. However, the study also highlighted the challenges posed by digital campaigns, including the digital divide, misinformation, and issues related to data privacy and manipulation. Limited internet access and low digital literacy in rural areas create significant barriers to inclusive political participation, widening the gap between urban and rural voters.

Furthermore, the proliferation of misinformation on unregulated platforms like WhatsApp has emerged as a critical threat to electoral integrity. The rapid spread of false narratives, often exacerbated by low levels of digital literacy, distorts public discourse and poses risks to democratic stability. This issue underscores the urgent need for digital literacy initiatives and

robust regulatory frameworks to combat the spread of misinformation and ensure that voters are accessing credible and reliable political information.

The implications of the 2022 Amended Electoral Act are pivotal to this evolving digital landscape. By introducing provisions for the use of technology in the electoral process, the Act represents a step forward in embracing digital tools to enhance transparency and efficiency. However, the full implementation of these measures remains constrained by infrastructural and regulatory gaps. Policymakers must address these challenges to ensure that the potential of digital campaigns is fully realised and that electoral processes are conducted with integrity and accountability.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of digital platforms in political campaigns, particularly within the context of developing democracies like Nigeria. By exploring the successes, limitations, and challenges of digital campaigns, the findings provide valuable insights for political parties to refine their strategies and optimise their digital outreach. For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of establishing clear regulations to govern digital campaigns and creating an enabling environment for fair and equitable access to digital platforms.

Ultimately, the findings emphasise that digital campaigns have the potential to enhance democratic engagement in Nigeria, but only if the associated risks are effectively managed. Political stakeholders must work together to harness digital tools responsibly and inclusively, addressing the digital divide, combating misinformation, and upholding ethical standards in campaign practices. By doing so, Nigeria can leverage the power of digital platforms to create more transparent, inclusive, and participatory electoral processes.

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APPENDIX 1

Survey Questions

Section A: Demographics

1. What is your age group?
 - ☐ 18 - 24
 - ☐ 25 - 34
 - ☐ 35 - 44
 - ☐ 45 - 54
 - ☐ 55 and above
2. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other
3. What is your highest level of education completed?
 - ☐ No formal education
 - ☐ Primary
 - ☐ Secondary
 - ☐ Tertiary
4. Where do you reside?
 - ☐ Urban Area
 - ☐ Semi-Urban Area
 - ☐ Rural Area
5. What is your employment status?

- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Student

Section B: Digital Media Usage and Political Engagement

6. How often do you use digital platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) to get political information?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

7. Which digital platforms do you primarily use to access political content? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Other (Specify) _____

8. Do you engage with political content on social media (e.g., by liking, sharing, or commenting)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. How influential do you find digital campaigns on your political preferences?

- ☐ Very Influential
- ☐ Moderately Influential
- ☐ Somewhat Influential
- ☐ Not Influential

10. During elections, do you participate in political discussions on social media?

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Section C: Perception of Digital Campaigns

11. In the past three general elections (2015, 2019, and 2023), did digital campaigns impact your voting decision?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

12. Do you believe digital campaigns provide credible information?

- ☐ Yes, they are credible
- ☐ Somewhat credible
- ☐ Not credible

13. What issues did digital campaigns focus on that mattered most to you? (Choose up to three)

- ☐ Corruption
- ☐ Security

- Economy
- Employment
- Education
- Health
- Other (Specify) _____

14. To what extent do you think political campaigns use influencers effectively on social media?

- Very Effectively
- Effectively
- Ineffectively
- Not Sure

15. Do you believe political content on platforms like WhatsApp is more prone to misinformation?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions for Campaign Managers and Digital Strategists

Section A: General Information

1. Could you please introduce yourself and describe your role in the political campaigns?

Section B: Strategy and Implementation

2. What digital platforms did you primarily use during the recent election campaigns, and why did you choose these platforms?
3. How did you decide on the key issues to highlight in your digital campaigns?
4. What strategies did you use to engage young voters on social media?
5. Did you collaborate with influencers or social media personalities for campaign promotion? If so, what was the impact?

Section C: Challenges and Limitations

6. What were the primary challenges you faced in implementing digital campaigns, particularly in terms of reach and engagement?
7. How did you manage misinformation and rumors on platforms like WhatsApp during the campaigns?
8. Did the digital divide (e.g., limited internet access in rural areas) impact the effectiveness of your campaigns? How did you address this issue?

Section D: Policy and Regulation

9. In what ways did the 2022 Amended Electoral Act influence your digital campaign strategies, if at all?
10. Do you believe current regulations adequately address the challenges of digital campaigning? What improvements would you suggest?

Section E: Evaluation and Reflection

11. How do you measure the success of your digital campaigns? What metrics or indicators do you focus on?
12. Reflecting on your experience, what would you do differently in future digital campaigns?