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Media Engagement and Public Communication as Tools for Shaping Voting Decisions and Strategic Value Orientation

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role that media engagement and public communication play in shaping strategic value orientations and voting decisions in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It is observed that both conventional media (television, radio, newspapers) and non-conventional platforms (social media) play crucial roles in shaping public discourse and influencing electoral behaviour. Opinions formed by media users, political actors, and their supporters have shaped the nature and outcomes of elections in Nigeria. Through a qualitative method, the study explores how media platforms, both conventional and unconventional, shape voter engagement and public communication within Nigeria's democratic space. Adopting the Agenda-Setting Theory as its analytical framework, the study finds that media coverage of key issues such as economic recovery, fiscal policy, security, and governance directly influenced strategic voting behaviour during the 2023 elections. Social media amplified youth mobilisation, while traditional media remained influential in rural areas. However, misinformation, particularly on social media, significantly distorts voters' strategic value orientations, influences voting patterns and outcomes. The paper concludes that media must go beyond reporting to promote democratic values, and recommends content-specific media literacy programmes and stronger regulatory frameworks to address misconceptions in Nigeria's democratic process.

Keywords: Democracy; Political Communication; Voting Decision; Mass Media

Introduction

The role of media platforms in shaping political engagements and public discourse in contemporary democracies cannot be overemphasised. Media platforms have come to assume an indispensable role across democracies. Delivering on the responsibility of political education, election management agents and other actors, in collaboration with media platforms, determine the process and outcomes of elections (Casero-Ripollés, 2023). This process is evident in developing democracies such as Nigeria, where conventional and non-conventional media platforms serve as the primary means of political communication and public discourse. The role of the media in disseminating information and shaping election narratives, processes, and outcomes significantly affects public opinion and voting behaviour, serving as a strategic actor in democratic governance (Okechwuku, 2023). The media, often described as the 'fourth estate of the realm' in democracies, is responsible for holding government accountable and informing the populace to support informed political engagement and decision-making (Kahl, 2025; Adanlawo & Rugbeer, 2021). Across liberal democracies, a free, multicultural and neutral media environment is important for ensuring transparency, political participation and education, and the protection of civil liberties (Olayinka, 2024). The important role played by media outlets as watchdogs is fundamental during election periods. Through the release of and serving as an information source, where factual and balanced perspectives promote the integrity of the election process and outcome. According to Ullah, Salim, and Khan (2025), the indispensable roles played by media outlets, whether conventional or non-conventional, ensure continued public engagement in democracies worldwide.

The political landscape in Nigeria presents exceptional challenges and opportunities for media engagement within the scope of democratic practices and citizens' expectations. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the processes and outcomes of elections have been characterised by intense political competition, a volatile political atmosphere of ethnic and religious tensions, and anti-democratic actions (Yusuf et al., 2025). Media involvement in Nigeria's electioneering process has evolved significantly, shaping value orientation and manifesting in robust political discourse, public engagement, and media penetration across the country (Agho, 2025). Conversely, according to Mbagwu (2024), media outlets in Nigeria have shown a tendency toward disinformation. Challenges such as bias, misinformation, and political manipulation have often complicated the media's role in Nigeria's democratic process (Inobemhe et al., 2020). Voters'

decisions in Nigeria are determined by critical considerations influenced by media narratives and aired political messages (Omidiora, Ajiboye, & Abioye, 2020). Strategic value orientation, a critical factor in contemporary analysis of voting decisions, is described as the process through which intending voters and voters align their political choices and interests. Within the context of perceived benefits, ideological orientations, commitments and prevailing socio-political and economic contexts. Media platforms, both conventional and non-conventional, play significant roles in shaping orientations by framing political debates, scrutinising candidates, and dissecting party manifestos (Adegbola, Gearhart, & Zhang, 2022).

Relying on media outlets as important actors in elections provides a useful framework for understanding voter trust in the media for information dissemination and political education (Dada, 2023). During electioneering periods, citizens are often confronted with uncertainty; therefore, reliance on media platforms for guidance on voting decisions is high, especially for informed voting. This reliance increases the power of media platforms to shape value orientation by influencing perceptions, beliefs, followership, political discourses and voting behaviour (Okechukwu, 2023).

The proliferation and increased roles of social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp have revolutionised political communication in Nigeria (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of political and non-political content, grassroots political mobilisation, and real-time public engagement and discourse (Nyambiya, 2025; Chami, 2025; Kharel, 2024). Given the nature of social media platforms as promoters of citizen engagement (Sher, 2025), they also pose challenges, such as misinformation and the spread of fake and unverified news, which create tension in the political system. These challenges have the capacity to undermine public engagement and the fairness of the electoral process and outcomes (Abah et al., 2025; Khan, 2024).

While conventional media platforms still dominate traditional political communication, non-conventional media strategically impact the younger and urban demographics (Pratama, 2024). The dual-media atmosphere provides a multifaceted system in which voters have access to multiple, sometimes conflicting, information and messages that shape their beliefs, political affiliations, and voting decisions (Salawu & Olutayo, 2019). During the electioneering process, political parties and candidates strategically use media platforms to communicate party programmes, manifestos, mobilise support, reach prospective voters and even counter opponents (McNair, 2017). Media framing of political narratives, agenda-setting, and selective emphasis can manipulate public perceptions and voter emotions (Hassan & Javed, 2025).

Despite its potential, the media in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including ownership concentration, regulatory weaknesses, and political interference. The rise of partisan media outlets often polarises public discourse and undermines journalistic objectivity (Nwabueze, 2022). Misinformation and inflammatory content on social media threaten democratic stability and can incite violence during elections (Okoro & Nwosu, 2022). For democracy to thrive, media engagement must go beyond mere reporting to actively fostering democratic values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for the rule of law.

Several recent studies have examined the media's role in Nigerian electoral politics. Arijeniwa (2023) demonstrated the capacity of social media to set agendas for public discourse and political participation among Nigerian youths. Similarly, Ejiroghene and Chuks (2026), Inobemhe, Obaje, and Asemah (2025), and Okon et al. (2025) confirmed that social media significantly influences voting decisions, while Adedoyin and Bakare (2024) documented the growing role of digital platforms in shaping political communication during elections. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap in understanding how the intersection of conventional and non-conventional media shapes strategic value orientations and long-term voting behaviour in the contemporary Nigerian context, particularly after the highly contested 2023 general

elections. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the relationship between media communication, political behaviour, and democratic sustainability.

Statement of the Problem

The role of media, both conventional and non-conventional, in shaping strategic value orientation and voting decisions has received considerable scholarly attention. However, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on how social media influences different voter segments and the voting outcome (Arijejiwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). There is insufficient attention to how engagement with conventional and non-conventional media shapes voters' strategic value orientations. That profound reasoning and evaluative processes through which voters place priorities on democracy, accountability, and economic development when taking informed electoral choices.

This study addresses this issue by exploring how conventional and non-conventional media shape voters' interest and decision-making in a politically divided environment such as Nigeria. Unlike previous studies that primarily address immediate voting behaviour, this research emphasises the cognitive processes involved in voters' decision-making and the long-term impact on democratic alignment with political actors.

In addition, the spread of misinformation across conventional and non-conventional platforms complicated the media's role in ensuring informed voting decisions. The media is traditionally tasked with promoting democratic values through information dissemination and political education. However, the spread of fake news and political manipulation distorts voters' understanding, undermines strategic value orientation, and leads to poor voting decisions based on misleading information. This study examines how misinformation during the 2023 Nigerian elections exacerbated political polarisation and undermined electoral integrity.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the agenda-setting theory as advanced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) as its framework of analysis. The theory has been applied in recent works of Almakaty (2025), Mohammed, Mojaye, and Adalakun (2022), and Perloff (2022). The theory posits that while the media may not expressly tell people what to think and do, it has a significant influence on what they think and do. When emphasis is placed on a specific issue, media platforms, whether conventional or non-conventional, influence the interest of the public and shape the public agenda, guiding what issue, event, or policy is discussed at a material time and considered important by the public and policymakers (McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis & Wanta, 2011).

This process of agenda-setting occurs as media outlets place significant emphasis on certain topics over others, framing them as most urgent or relevant, which in turn guides public discourse and shapes public opinions. The more frequently and prominently an issue is aired or displayed by media outlets, the more it becomes a focal point of public concern and repeated engagement. In Nigerian elections, Agenda-Setting Theory becomes especially relevant, as the media platforms play critical roles in shaping public attention to specific political issues that can influence voting behaviour. For instance, in the 2023 Nigerian elections, Nwaoboli (2025) notes that the media's focus on key issues such as religion (Muslim-Muslim ticket), security concerns, economic challenges, corruption, and political stability influenced the issues that voters prioritised when making their decisions. a crucial role in framing the electorate's perception of what was at stake and which factors were most important for supporting a candidate or political party.

Furthermore, political actors and media platforms use agenda-setting strategically to influence voter perceptions and influence election outcomes. Political campaigns, through media consultants, often work to push issues that favour their position while downplaying topics that may harm their candidacy. During the 2023 Nigerian elections, both traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) and non-conventional platforms (social media) were utilised by political actors to highlight their successes and frame opposition

candidates negatively. In this way, agenda-setting became a tool of strategic framing, in which media coverage of certain issues helped shape voters' perceptions of candidates and parties.

Social media's role in agenda-setting has grown exponentially in the digital era. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp have enabled citizens and political actors to advance their agendas, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Social media users, through viral content, hashtags, and trending topics, can directly impact which issues rise to the forefront of political discourse. In Nigeria, social media platforms have become key spaces where issues like electoral fraud, insecurity, and youth unemployment are heavily debated. The viral nature of these platforms can rapidly shift the focus of the election agenda, democratise the agenda-setting process and allow for more direct public participation.

One of the major implications of Agenda-Setting Theory, particularly in the Nigerian context, is the media's ability to influence electoral outcomes by creating a sense of urgency around certain issues. Voters may base their decisions not just on candidate platforms, but also on which issues are seen as most pressing or in urgent need of resolution. This phenomenon has particular resonance in developing democracies like Nigeria, where media coverage can significantly shape voter perceptions in regions affected by particular issues, such as conflict zones in the North-East due to insurgency or economic distress in southern Nigeria.

Moreover, Agenda-Setting Theory can be enriched by considering the interactions between the media and public opinion during election periods. As issues rise on the public agenda, media coverage can generate feedback loops in which public concern over specific issues forces media outlets to cover them even more extensively, reinforcing their prominence in the electoral process. This agenda-building process leads to a feedback cycle in which media, public opinion, and political actors continuously shape and reshape the issues that define the election, influencing not just immediate voting behaviour but long-term political discourse as well.

In summary, Agenda-Setting Theory offers a valuable lens for understanding how media coverage of key issues influences public perceptions and strategic voting decisions in Nigerian elections. This effect is further amplified in the context of social media, which allows for more direct and dynamic engagement with the public agenda. Understanding how the media prioritises issues during election periods provides crucial insights into voters' strategic alignment, enabling a deeper analysis of how the media shapes strategic value orientations that guide voting behaviour in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring how media engagement shapes strategic value orientations and voting decisions in the 2023 general election. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding media and electoral behaviour (Hirose, M., & Creswell, 2023).

Data were collected through multiple qualitative sources. First, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with purposively selected stakeholders, including representatives from major political parties (the All-Progressives Congress, the Peoples Democratic Party, and the Labour Party), journalists, media practitioners, and civil society actors. Participants were selected on the basis of their direct involvement in, or extensive knowledge of, the 2023 Nigerian elections and political communication processes.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to media framing, agenda-setting, misinformation, and voter responses. Secondary data from existing literature were also incorporated to contextualise primary findings within the broader scholarly discourse.

Conceptual Analysis

Media engagement is described as the degree and manner in which individuals or groups interact with media platforms to access, share, and respond to information of public interest. In the electoral context, media engagement involves consuming political news, participating in political discussions, sharing campaign materials, and engaging in political debates, both online and offline (McNair, 2017). Media engagement is not a passive activity; it involves selective exposure, attention, and interpretation shaped by individual predispositions toward the subject of discourse and social contexts (Chaffee & Metzger, 2021).

In Nigeria, media engagement has advanced rapidly with the advent of the internet and social media platforms, allowing for a more decentralised and participatory media landscape (Ofei et al, 2024). Importantly, the increase in media engagement has also introduced complexities, including the spread of fake news, misinformation, and political propaganda, as well as the challenge of verifying information credibility in real time. Public communication involves the dissemination of reliable information from political actors, media organisations, and civil society to the public. It includes speeches, press releases, debates, advertisements, and social media posts that are intended to inform, persuade, or mobilise the electorate (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2022). Public communication in democratic settings is fundamental for ensuring transparency, political education, and improved citizen participation in the political process. Within Nigeria's electoral space, public communication often reflects long-standing political divisions and can either contribute to issue-based campaigns or perpetuate ethnic and religious tensions (Idike & Ezeah, 2025). The quality of public communication via clarity of information, fairness to candidates, and factual basis of arguments is important for shaping voter perceptions and strategic choices.

In Nigeria, voting decisions have been shaped by ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations. Due to increased media penetration and political awareness, there is a shift towards more issue-based and strategic voting behaviour among urban and younger populations (Okereke, 2025). Strategic value orientation is described as the prioritisation of political values that guide people's voting decisions and political engagement (Etzet, 2023). These factors that inform strategic decisions include the status of democracy, accountability, good governance, security, economic development, and social justice (Harrison et al., 2023). Strategic value orientation refers to the rational evaluation of political choices based on their alignment with voters' prioritised values and interests (Vrat & Gutpa, 2026). In Nigeria, strategic value orientations are an important requirement for improving electoral processes and outcomes, as voters navigate a politically tense and information-rich environment (Omoniyi, 2026). The contents and information released by the media significantly shape public orientations by framing political debates, highlighting policy issues, and scrutinising candidates' platforms

The Interplay Between Media and Voting Behaviour

The relationship between media engagement and voting behaviour is both complex and multidimensional in nature and outcome. Media platforms, in all their forms, do not merely serve as a passive means of disseminating information; they shape how information is conveyed to the public and consumed, ultimately influencing how people form opinions, perceive political actors, and make electoral decisions. Through agenda-setting, the media determines which issues are considered most important and relevant during election periods, aligning people's attention toward these subjects and invariably influencing what voters deem relevant when making voting decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

For instance, during the 2023 Nigerian elections, the traditional media's focus on security and economic recovery guided voter perception, shaping candidates' platforms around these issues. While social media served as the ground for intense youth engagement and all manner of misinformation through #tags. (Bakare, 2025; Ezeigbo, 2024). When media platforms framed these issues as important and critical to

national well-being, they determined which candidates were considered best positioned to address them (Olaolu & Adeola, 2025; Ayeni, 2024). R1 noted

The media does not convert voters; it only amplifies voices and opinions. According to him, in the 2023 election, the Obidient movement used social media to sell their candidate. With limited resources compared to the other candidates, they were able to sell him to the electorate as the best.

In addition to agenda-setting, the media also operates through priming effects, which subtly influence public opinion by repeatedly highlighting certain characteristics of political figures or issues (Buturoiu, Corbu, & Boțan, 2023). Through repeated exposure to specific narratives, such as framing a candidate as a 'strong leader' on security or a 'progressive reformer' on economic policies, the media primes voters to focus on those qualities when making their voting decisions (Entman, 2022). The evolution of media engagement with the rise of social media has dramatically altered the dynamics of political communication. Political actors, campaigns, and parties now have direct access to voters through platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This has democratised the communication process, allowing candidates to present their messages directly, engage with the electorate, and mobilise supporters without the filtering or framing of traditional media.

However, while social media's democratising effect has allowed for broader participation, it has also introduced significant challenges, particularly in the form of misinformation and 'fake news', (Waza, 2026). The unregulated nature of social media platforms enables the spread of false or misleading information, which can distort strategic voting decisions and influence public opinion in ways not grounded in factual accuracy (Abdulazeez, Omale, & Florence, 2025). For example, during the 2023 Nigerian elections, false narratives about the integrity of electoral processes or candidates' backgrounds often circulated through WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts, leading to confusion, mistrust, and polarisation among voters (Okunnu, 2026).

Furthermore, social media's ability to spread misinformation is amplified by echo chambers, in which individuals are exposed predominantly to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and biases (Abdulazeez, Omale, & Florence, 2025; Garaschuk, 2024). Algorithms on platforms like Facebook and X tend to amplify content that generates strong emotional reactions, reinforcing partisan divides and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Omachi & Okoh, 2025). Through media platforms, especially social media, candidates like Peter Obi of the Labour Party became the talking point of the period, posing a significant challenge to the presumed popular candidates of the All Progressives Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party (Amaza, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the relationship between the media and voting behaviour remains a powerful force in shaping democratic outcomes in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. The increasing influence of social media requires a deeper understanding of how digital platforms alter traditional media effects and influence voting behaviour. Both traditional and non-traditional media contribute to the formation of strategic value orientations and the priming of voters' decisions. This dual function of media as both an informational resource and a potential vehicle for manipulation underscores the need for careful analysis of how content and information released by media platforms are framed, shared, and consumed in contemporary elections.

Media Influence on Strategic Voting

One important issue in this study is the role that media engagement played in shaping strategic voting decisions during the 2023 Nigerian elections. R4, who is familiar with political conversation during the 2023 election, noted,

Both social media and traditional media played a role in shaping public opinion, especially regarding the presidential candidates. I got different information about each candidate, and in some cases, I read about scandals and some unprintable words, all because of the election and power.

Voters, particularly those who felt uncertain about the political landscape, relied on media platforms for information and guidance about which candidates or parties aligned with their priorities. On this note, R5, a social media enthusiast, noted

During the campaign period, social media, especially X (formerly Twitter), served our movement's purpose. Any information or news I read from the movement, I reshared, and you will see how many people reshared those messages. We were getting traction, which helped our candidate make a significant impact in the election.

Security concerns, economic policies, and electoral integrity were major topics heavily covered by both conventional and non-conventional media. These issues became the primary focus for many voters, with candidates perceived to offer clear, credible solutions being favoured. R6 also noted, "I stopped visiting social media platforms because the messages you will read were too toxic for me". R3 noted, "With the use of #tags such as #Obident and #Atikulate, the social media space became the ground for intense political debates and discussion. It was an interesting and engaging period".

Strategic voting was evident in how voters prioritised certain issues amplified by the media. In regions severely impacted by insecurity, such as the North-East, voters were heavily influenced by media discussions about national security and candidates' credibility in addressing terrorism and insurgency. Commenting on the issue of insecurity as discussed across media platforms, R8 noted,

During the campaign period, the subject of interest was the Politics Today conversation on Channels Television. I stayed glued to my device and took my voting decision on the failure of the government to address insecurity and hardship in the North and across the country.

Similarly, voters in urban centres, where economic hardship was a significant concern, favoured candidates whose media messages emphasised economic development and job creation. On the issue of the economy and the hardship experienced by the masses, R7 noted emphatically that, "the change of currency and scarcity of PMS under the previous administration was a major deciding point. When opposition parties supported that action, I was surprised and made up my mind who to support. It is important to note that the media's role in framing these critical issues during the 2023 electioneering process led voters to make rational, issue-based decisions and, in some cases, emotion-based ones. Supporting and voting for the candidate whose platform appeared to offer the most substantial and achievable solutions based on the prevailing subject of conversation.

Conventional vs. Non-Conventional Media Impact

The impact of conventional media (television, radio, newspapers) versus non-conventional media (social media platforms such as X, Facebook, and WhatsApp) on voters' strategic decisions varied significantly across demographics and geographies. Conventional media had the internet. R11 noted thus.

Given the nature of our supporters and our understanding of them, we decided to reach them using the platform that was most convenient for them. In rural areas, we used radio stations; in urban centres, new TV stations served as the primary platform, and amongst the Youth, social media was the primary platform.

On the subject of social media as a means of voter engagement during the 2023 general election, R 5 noted

On my phone, I have different groups where we discuss political issues. Most of the information is forwarded, and we make it a subject of debate. We have groups for different subjects on the 2023 election. Our focus was on the Presidential election (R5).

It was also reported by another respondent that “older voters tended to get information through national TV stations or radio broadcasts, which offered news framed by professional journalists or political analysts”. The traditional media outlets' influence on these groups was largely through top-down communication, in which political candidates and parties could strategically frame their messages via structured debates, interviews, and news coverage (Idowu & Odeyemi, 2021). These outlets have continued to provide information to the people, especially through constructive political discourse and candidates' engagement.

Non-conventional media had a more pronounced effect on younger, urban voters and those who were socially and politically active online. Social media platforms enabled a more interactive and dynamic exchange of ideas, allowing voters to engage directly with political messages, comment on posts, and share their opinions (Ofei et al., 2024). Social media influencers, digital activists, and youth-based movements were instrumental in shaping political discourse in the 2023 general elections. Platforms like X and Facebook, where #tag and viral content often took centre stage, allowed candidates such as #Obidents and #Atikulate, as well as parties, to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly influence voters (Adebayo, 2025).

Geographically, urban centres such as Lagos and Abuja experienced a greater impact of non-conventional media, especially among younger voters, who are accustomed to political debates on social media. Rural regions continued to rely on conventional media, with political campaigns conveyed through broadcast channels. This difference revealed a digital divide in how information was received, with non-conventional media driving engagement in urban areas while conventional media continued to play a pivotal role in rural areas.

Misinformation and Its Effects

A significant finding from this study was the prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, and media bias in shaping voting behaviour during the 2023 Nigerian elections. As media platforms increasingly became the primary sources of political information, the spread of false or misleading information had a profound impact on voter perceptions and electoral decisions. Social media facilitated the rapid dissemination of unverified political claims, including fake news stories, manipulated images, and false narratives about candidates, parties, and electoral processes.

The effects of misinformation were felt particularly among young voters and urban populations, who were more active on social media but often lacked the media literacy skills to critically evaluate information. This led to the polarisation of public opinion, as voters were exposed to biased information that reinforced their pre-existing beliefs, rather than providing a balanced and comprehensive view of candidates or issues. The role of political actors in spreading disinformation also contributed to the polarisation of the media landscape, in which partisan outlets and social media influencers aligned with particular political parties, further deepening divisions within the electorate.

Traditional media outlets also faced criticism for bias and sensationalism, with some accused of favouring specific political candidates or parties. This bias further undermined voters' ability to make informed, objective decisions, as they were often exposed to one-sided narratives rather than balanced, fact-based reporting. Overall, the impact of misinformation and media bias in both conventional and non-conventional media created significant challenges for the democratic process, distorting public understanding and influencing voting behaviour in ways that undermined electoral fairness and integrity.

Social Media in the 2023 Nigerian Elections

Social media was a significant force during the 2023 Nigerian elections, especially in terms of youth mobilisation and political discourse. A notable example is the Labour Party and its presidential candidate, Peter Obi, whose campaign leveraged social media to build a strong and engaged voter base. The *#Obidient movement*, which emerged organically on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp, exemplifies the power of social media in the modern electoral process. The movement focused on advocating for change and was particularly influential among younger Nigerians, a demographic that felt disconnected from the traditional political elites.

Hashtags such as *#ObiDatti2023* and *#1MillionMarch4PeterObi* went viral, facilitating grassroots mobilisation, organising marches, online discussions, and political rallies. A survey conducted during the elections indicated that 70% of young voters cited social media as their primary source of political information and campaign updates. Obi's online presence allowed him to communicate directly with his supporters, bypassing traditional media filters and engaging in real-time dialogue.

Despite these successes, social media also became a breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation. False rumours, including allegations of vote-rigging and smears against candidates, were widely shared, leading to confusion and distrust among voters. This highlights the dual-edged nature of social media in electoral campaigns: while it can empower voters and mobilise communities, it can also facilitate the spread of false narratives that distort public perception. A study conducted by Okon et al. (2025) confirmed the impact of social media on voter behaviour, revealing that 63% of respondents stated that information shared on social media significantly influenced their voting decisions. Furthermore, 77% acknowledged the spread of misinformation during the election period, noting how false claims spread quickly through platforms like WhatsApp, contributing to voter confusion. Despite the positive mobilising role of social media, the political manipulation of online spaces posed a challenge to democratic integrity and required urgent attention to digital literacy and regulation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of media platforms towards ensuring strategic voter orientation and informed voting behaviour in the 2023 Nigerian elections. The paper noted that media platforms, both conventional and non-conventional, had a significant impact on shaping voter perceptions, value orientation, voting decisions, and overall electoral outcomes. Social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp, played central roles in mobilising younger voters, especially through grassroots movements like the *#Obidient* campaign, which significantly contributed to the Labour Party's Presidential Candidate's growing follower base and voter turnout.

In contrast, traditional media outlets like the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) remained influential among older, rural voters who relied on television and radio as their primary sources of political information. Also, private TV stations like Channels Television, Arise TV and TVC played a significant role through their political programmes such as *Politics Today*, *Early Morning Show* and *Journalist Hangout*. Through these programmes, the outlets framed political discussions around key issues such as security, economic recovery, and governance, thereby directly influencing strategic voting decisions. However, despite the important role traditional media play in voter education, a significant portion of the electorate perceived them as biased, raising concerns about media objectivity and impartiality.

The study also shows that misinformation and the use of abusive language on perceived opponents, particularly through social media, significantly distorted voters' strategic value orientations, contributing to a divided and confused electorate. This distortion undermines the democratic process by pushing voters towards an emotionally charged, tense political atmosphere rather than objective electoral choices.

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