Technology and the Effect of Multimedia Usage in the 2023 Election in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper delves into the multifaceted effect of multimedia usage in Nigerian elections, exploring its role, challenges, and implications for democratic governance. This study analyses the impact of multimedia on voter perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour, as well as its role in shaping campaign strategies and fostering political engagement. Drawing upon a range of scholarly literature and empirical evidence, this study elucidated how multimedia, encompassing various platforms such as television, radio, newspapers, social media, and online platforms, has become integral parts to the electoral landscape in Nigeria. However, alongside its benefits, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news emerged as a significant challenge during elections, exacerbated by the decentralised nature of social media and the digital divide. Political polarisations, social divisions, and the manipulation of social media further complicated the electoral landscape, hindering constructive dialogue and undermining electoral integrity. Regulatory frameworks governing multimedia usage in elections were fragmented and inconsistent, necessitating comprehensive reforms to enhance transparency, accountability, and ethical standards. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, civil society organisations, media practitioners, and technology companies. By bridging the digital divide, promoting media literacy, and fostering ethical standards, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic foundations and promote inclusive and transparent electoral processes.

Keywords: Multimedia usage, Nigerian elections, democratic governance, social media, misinformation, digital divide.

1. Introduction

The importance of communication in the electoral process can better be understood from the perspective of mobilisation, awareness creation, and voter education. These three encapsulate the necessity of communication and information-sharing within the window of an electoral period in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. It is a major way to ensure that communication with the electorate is through the use of different channels and modes of communication – from interpersonal, group, public and mass communication to that of the use of broadcast and print media, new media platforms and tools and even the social media. It is such efforts that can be tagged the adoption and utilisation of multimedia tools during an electoral cycle. In Nigeria, the situation is not different.

Recent Nigerian elections marked a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic journey, with multimedia platforms playing an increasingly influential role in shaping voter

perceptions and behaviours. More than ever before, the use of media platforms (especially the new forms) characterised the elections in Nigeria. Notably among the ones conducted in the very recent times are the 2019 and 2023 electoral years. There seem to be rapid adoption and utilisation of the digital tools for varied reasons, which may range from voter mobilisation, sensitisation, education, to that of upload and transmission of results right from the polling units scattered throughout the country. The entire processes can be seen to be the digitisation of the Nigerian electoral processes; wherein more and more digital platforms are being utilised for the purpose of making the process seamless and transparent.

Political advertising has been digitised with the use of technology in the form that new media provides the on-demand access to content as well as create possibility for interaction among the different stakeholders involved in the process (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). This is also closely related to their use by the electoral umpire in Nigeria with the e-transmission of election results from polling units across the federation to the INEC result viewing (IReV) portal (Folorunsho, 2023; Shittu, 2023). This was the case for the national assembly elections conducted alongside the presidential elections during the 2023 electoral period as the umpire significantly utilised technology to upload 84.97 percent of the results from the Senate election, and 85.98 percent for the House of Representatives. The implication of this is that there was a considerable adoption of the use of technology in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, and multimedia technology led the way.

Multimedia as a concept is suggestive of an advancement in digital technology whereby a number of media formats are enabled in information dissemination and communication. It can be seen from different perspectives. The first, different media forms put in understandable sequence for ease-of-communication and information dissemination. The second, the use of multiple forms of digital media to make the process of information-sharing seamless and more effective. It is known as the media that uses numerous forms of information content and processing such as audio, video interactivity, graphics, text, and animation to inform or entertain the user (Pavithra *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, communication can be enhanced through information conveyance via multiple channels as offered by the multimedia technology or application.

The application of multimedia technology cuts across various strata of the society; as they may prove to be useful in education, entertainment, business systems, medical services, public places, multimedia conferences and so much more (Puvanes, 2023). In addition, the application like the contents themselves also rests on multiple media foundation. Multimedia could be applied in training and education, audio-visual processing, multimedia analysis, artificial intelligence, wireless and mobile computing, 3-D imaging and virtual reality, graphics and animation, as well as visual communication (Pavithra *et al.*, 2018). In essence, these possibilities and more are offered by virtue of multimedia technology available to our 21st century world.

Furthermore, multimedia can also be applied in the political systems (Tualeka & Bungin, 2020). Evidence exists in respect of multimedia usage during the 2023 elections in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2023). The author further notes that during the period under review, there was cross-platform content posting wherein users used the screen-grab possibility to share contents across platforms, thereby a wider reach was enabled. Additionally, different stakeholders adopted the use of multimedia contents to reach their numerous political bases with the youths being the major targets of political communication across different social media platforms. There was wide use of highly interactive social media for various purposes during the 2023 elections; the youths were most positively influenced to participate in the

process (Ohaja *et al.*, 2023). This implies that the political parties and their candidates leveraged on the interactivity of the platforms and the active youthful population presence.

Relatedly, different civil society organisations (CSOs) also deployed their systems to monitor the process. According to Folorunsho (2023), Yiaga Africa, a CSO deployed the parallel vote tabulation (PVT) system to conduct a real-time monitoring of the voting process and declaration of result. There was use of coded SMS and analysis carried out with the use of the technology database. This demonstrates multi-dimensional and multimedia usage during the elections by both the electoral umpire, CSOs, and the political stakeholders, such as the candidates, their political parties, and the electorate. Emphasis must be laid on the general use of multimedia during the 2023 election in Nigeria in order to have a good perceptual look.

This study explores the effects of multimedia usage in the 2023 election in Nigeria with a view to create a clearer picture of the dynamics of their application, the strategies, the influence on voter behaviours, and the challenges. Therefore, the objectives of the study are: decipher the dynamics of the multimedia landscape in Nigerian politics, identify the multimedia strategies deployed during the 2023 elections in Nigeria, ascertain the influence of multimedia on voter behaviours, and situate the challenges and critiques of multimedia usage in elections.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Multimedia, political communication, and the elections*

As highlighted by Chigbo (2024), interactive mass media are crucial in educating voters and fostering informed decision-making during electoral campaigns. Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023) further emphasized that the emergence of social media has reshaped the landscape of political communication, offering unprecedented opportunities for political actors to engage with voters and disseminate their messages. The implication of the foregoing is that this period (more than ever before) as seen to an increased interactivity between and among electoral stakeholder – such as the politicians and their political parties, the electoral umpire (INEC) and even the electorate.

Against this backdrop, understanding the dynamics of multimedia usage in the 2023 Nigerian elections holds immense significance for the field of political communication and election studies. In addition, it also becomes significant towards understanding the dynamics of the adoption of multimedia tools in the entire electoral process of Nigeria. The advent of digital technology has transformed the way political information is disseminated, received, and interpreted by the electorate. Okidi *et al.* (2023) underscored the role of social media in political campaigns, highlighting its potential to amplify candidates' messages and mobilise support among diverse voter segments. Moreover, the impact of social media on political mobilisation has been emphasised on account of the lessons learned from the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria (Uwakwe *et al.*, 2023).

The context of the 2023 elections in Nigeria is particularly noteworthy, given the country's socio-political landscape characterized by ethnic diversity, socio-economic disparities, and historical challenges in electoral integrity. The use of social media for election communication and monitoring in Nigeria has been discussed, with both its benefits in promoting transparency and accountability and its potential for spreading misinformation and inciting violence given prominent attention (Bartlett *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, Aghator

and Moussa (2023) explore media framing in relation to the legitimacy of Nigerian elections, shedding light on how narratives surrounding issues such as 'stomach infrastructure' shape public perceptions of electoral processes.

The role played by the media in the electoral process of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria was the focus of a study conducted by Urechukwu, Uche and Okorafor (2023) wherein phenomenological approach to analysis was adopted to assess the roles played by the media during the period. Findings showed that the media actively engaged the people within the period but identified ownership control as part of the challenges glaringly confusing the capacity to perform assigned functions. The researchers further showed that media organisations through the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) can be useful in voter and civic engagement, ethical, fair and professional election coverage and setting-up the platform for debates by individuals vying for elective positions in the Nigerian electoral sphere.

Furthermore, Ogochukwu (2023) conducted a comparative study of media coverage in the 2015 and 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, offering insights into the evolving media landscape and its impact on electoral outcomes over time. Acheampong (2023) critically examined the role of digital technology in Nigeria's electoral processes, raising questions about the gap between political promises made online and their real-world implications. As the country grapples with the challenges of ensuring free, fair, and credible elections, the role of multimedia in shaping public discourse and political participation cannot be overstated. It is also the case owing to the imperativeness in the drive to digitise most processes in modern times, and the electoral system and process is not left out owing to the important place it holds in the emergence of the leadership that will be responsible for policy formulation.

2.2. *Multimedia landscape in Nigerian politics*

The history of media and politics in Nigeria is marked by a complex interplay of colonial legacy and post-independence struggles (Ogunleye, 2017). During the colonial era, media outlets were primarily controlled by the British colonial authorities, serving as instruments for propagating colonial ideologies and suppressing dissenting voices (Olorunyomi, 2018). The emergence of nationalist movements in the mid-20th century saw the rise of indigenous newspapers and radio stations, which played a crucial role in mobilising public opinion against colonial rule (Omotola, 2015). In fact, with multiple ordinances, the colonialist control and exerted so much pressure on the media of the era.

However, after gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria experienced a series of military coups and authoritarian regimes, characterised by censorship and state control of the media (Olorunnisola, 2019). However, despite the challenges posed by government repression, the media continued to serve as a platform for dissent and political mobilisation, particularly during periods of political transition and democratisation (Omotola, 2015). It is why the media is considered as pivotal and central in respect of massive political advertisement across different platforms such as radio, television, social media, billboards, and different others (Bappayo *et al.*, 2021). This implies that the mass media has been useful in the entire gamut of the electoral process in Nigeria.

The advent of multimedia technologies has transformed political communication in Nigeria (Olorunyomi, 2018). Television emerged as a powerful medium for political communication in the late 20th century, with the establishment of state-owned and private television stations (Adegoke, 2016). Television debates, political advertisements, and

coverage of political rallies became common features of election campaigns, allowing candidates to reach a wider audience and shape public opinion (Olorunnisola, 2019). In the end, the media provides the place for visualisation of ideas and also acts as a medium where political parties and their candidates get the manifestoes amplified and people can also get to engage them on several issues.

The rise of the Internet and social media platforms in the 21st century further revolutionised political communication in Nigeria (Olorunyomi, 2018). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become important tools for political mobilisation, voter education, and citizen journalism (Olorunyomi, 2018). Politicians and political parties utilise social media to disseminate campaign messages, engage with voters, and monitor public sentiment (Adegoke, 2016). Interestingly, the platforms have served as veritable tools for mobilising the youths across the length and breadth of the country. It is especially the case in parts of the country where the adoption and application of new media technology is considered as a trend. There is an overall increase in the use of social media platforms in Nigeria for various interests, among which is that of inclusive participation (Eke *et al.*, 2023)

In any context, participation is central to elections. Political participation includes activities such as voting, taking part in campaigns, making donations to a cause or candidate, and protesting (Uhlaner, 2015). In addition to the foregoing, there is also a need for the voters to be sensitised and educated about the process just as the stakeholders need to play varied roles to ensure the success. In all of these, technology is presently considered as the fulcrum owing to the dynamics of the contemporary society and human activities. Multimedia platforms play a central role in Nigerian elections, serving as channels for political advertising, voter education, and election monitoring (Olorunyomi, 2018). Television remains a popular medium for political communication, with both state-owned and private broadcasters airing political debates, campaign ads, and coverage of election events (Adegoke, 2016).

Radio also continues to be a vital medium for reaching voters, particularly in rural areas where access to television and the internet may be limited (Olorunyomi, 2018). Political parties and candidates purchase airtime on radio stations to broadcast campaign messages, rallies, and interviews (Adegoke, 2016). This is on the power of radio as a veritable tool for awareness creation well as encouraging participation in different aspects of life including political mobilisation efforts (Arede & Oji, 2022). Through participatory communication, political actors are able to galvanise the political sphere and create an enabling environment for participation by the citizens. This is even more important considering the growing innovation in technology and their attendant adoption and application across different areas of human activities.

In addition to traditional media, digital platforms such as social media and online news websites have become indispensable tools for political communication in Nigerian elections (Olorunyomi, 2018). Politicians and parties use social media to engage with voters, share news updates, and respond to criticism in real-time (Adegoke, 2016). Social media platforms also facilitate peer-to-peer communication and grassroots organising, allowing citizens to mobilise support for their preferred candidates (Olorunyomi, 2018). While citizens with one another on political matters across platforms, they are able to share information and ideas that could culminate in voting decision and even attitude and behaviour change towards a particular political party or its candidate standing for an election.

The role of traditional media and new media in Nigerian elections is subject to ongoing debate and scrutiny (Olorunyomi, 2018). While traditional media outlets such as television and radio remain influential, the rise of new media platforms has challenged their dominance and expanded the landscape of political communication (Adegoke, 2016). According to Olrunyomi, traditional media outlets have broader reach and credibility compared to new media platforms, making them effective channels for reaching mass audiences. Furthermore, Adegoke also stated that television and radio stations have established infrastructures for producing and distributing content, allowing political parties and candidates to reach voters across diverse demographics and geographic regions. The implication of the foregoing is that political stakeholders can leverage on the reach of the media to create their own unique media forms and content targeting specific segments of the population.

However, new media platforms offer distinct advantages in terms of interactivity, immediacy, and targeting (Olorunyomi, 2018). Social media allows politicians to bypass traditional gatekeepers and communicate directly with voters, fostering greater engagement and participation in the political process (Adegoke, 2016). Moreover, digital platforms enable citizens to access a wide range of news sources and viewpoints, potentially reducing the influence of mainstream media outlets on public opinion (Olorunyomi, 2018). This is a depletion of the hitherto strength and power wielded by the mainstream in the era that preceded the introduction, adoption, and application of digital media platforms. More than ever before, people have acknowledged the powers of social media and other new media to influence the users.

The regulation of multimedia usage in Nigerian elections is governed by a combination of laws, regulations, and self-regulatory mechanisms (Olorunyomi, 2018). The Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the press, but also imposes limitations on speech that is deemed to be defamatory, seditious, or inflammatory (Adegoke, 2016). The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) regulates television and radio broadcasting in Nigeria, issuing licenses, setting standards, and enforcing content regulations (Olorunyomi, 2018). Political advertising on television and radio is subject to guidelines that require equal access for all political parties and adherence to ethical standards (Adegoke, 2016). These guidelines are in place to ensure fair play in the allocation of media space to the numerous interest groups in the political landscape of a country.

In the digital sphere, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) oversees internet service providers and telecommunications companies, ensuring compliance with regulations related to content filtering, data privacy, and cybersecurity (Olorunyomi, 2018). However, the regulation of online political communication remains a contentious issue, with concerns about censorship, misinformation, and the spread of hate speech (Adegoke, 2016). Furthermore, self-regulatory mechanisms such as codes of conduct, industry standards, and voluntary agreements play a role in shaping the ethical and professional conduct of media practitioners and political actors (Olorunyomi, 2018). Civil society organisations, media associations, and electoral stakeholders also play a crucial role in monitoring and promoting accountability in the use of multimedia during elections (Adegoke, 2016).

3. Method

A triangulation research methodology was adopted for this study. As such, the researchers adopted an expository literature review, participant observation and in-depth interview to

gather data. Accordingly, the expository literature review afforded the researcher the opportunity to gather and analyse relevant literature, academic papers, reports, and articles related to multimedia usage in the 2023 elections in Nigeria. This method involved systematically reviewing existing literature to gain insights, identify trends, and generate knowledge on the subject matter. The method allowed for a comprehensive exploration of multimedia's role in election campaigns, drawing from a diverse range of sources and perspectives.

Furthermore, participant observation method enabled the researchers to have firsthand experience with the use of technology during the election. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights through the perception of persons that played active roles in the adoption and utilisation of multimedia technology during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Telephone interviews were conducted with four individuals selected from the North and South of Nigeria. The North and South divide as the criteria for selection was based on the need to have a geographical balance. The sessions took place between 23 and 25 December 2024. Audio recordings were transcribed to text-based data to aid the presentation and analysis. Based on the request of the participants and in line with research ethics, the interviewees were coded accordingly as PT1-4. The explanation building method was adopted as the data analysis method of this qualitative study.

4. Empirical findings

On the dynamics of multimedia landscape in Nigerian politics, the interviewees made significant contributions taking on the dynamics of multimedia technology adoption over time in the Nigerian electoral landscape. Accordingly, they noted that:

> In Nigeria, we have moved past several phases of development through history. Starting with the period of independence with minimal technology and manual method being the adopted measures, but the development has been smooth. The landscape is one that has seen a growing need for technologies. Now, multimedia technology has permeated electoral landscape including voter registration and transmission. Such technologies are also used for political communication. (PT1, Male, 52, 2024)

It is obvious that there has been great transformation of political communication owing to multimedia technology adoption in the electoral landscape of Nigeria. This corroborates the assertion of Olorunyomi (2018) that multimedia technologies have transformed politics and associated communication in Nigeria. Olorunnisola (2019) also aligned with the foregoing position with the position that the mass media in Nigeria have taken an approach to political advertising and coverage through the use of multimedia technologies. Furthermore, some of the interviewees stated that:

> My approach to the understanding of the dynamics of multimedia landscape is that of the traditional media form and technology utilised by the stakeholders in the political realm. These stakeholders package messages to their numerous supports and potential voters just to get them to accept their ideology. In some cases, the contents are packaged in multimedia formats with the use of advanced technological tools and disseminated through similar platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X and so on. (PT2, Male, 59, 2024)

> The movement from largely interpersonal political communication to a preference of digital technology is the hallmark of the use of multimedia technologies in the

political landscape of Nigeria. As seen in the period, it is about using technology as mediums for communication by stakeholders in the political landscape. (PT3, Female, 49, 2024)

Another interviewee simply noted, "The dynamic nature of the multimedia adoption and utilisation in Nigeria is unique but I can say that modern electoral landscape is driven by technology including that that takes on the form of multimedia" (PT4, Male, 46, 2024). The implication is that there is a long history of the use of multimedia technology in Nigeria and in respect of their use within the context of elections in the country; there are different perspectives as seen in the views of the interviews. Additionally, the use of multimedia technology has assumed the status of indispensable, especially in the 21st century where communication is driven by technology and so voters can be targeted and reached through social media and new media platforms with content taking the multimedia form.

On the second objective of the study, the researchers sought to identify the multimedia strategies adopted and deployed by various stakeholders during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Accordingly, the interviewees reacted with the assertions that:

To me, the use of multi-channel points by stakeholders is one strategy that has gained prominence in electoral affairs in Nigeria in the recent past. As seen in the 2023 elections, political parties and candidates leveraged the use of traditional mediums of radio and TV, the Internet as well as social media platforms where the younger voters were targeted with political messages. (PT1, Male, 52, 2024)

It demonstrates that integrated strategy involving the use of multiple platforms was mainly adopted as strategy by stakeholders. Igbinedion & Ajisebiyawo (2023) suggested the use of traditional media during the period of election while Uwakwe *et al* (2023) talked about the use of social media for the purpose of tailoring messages designed for specific demographics. According to another interviewee, "the use of different mediums suggests that the stakeholders had full knowledge of what they wanted which was to target different demographics" (PT2, Male, 59, 2024). Furthermore, another interviewee perceived the use of multimedia technologies from a different angle:

I really do not think there was any strategy from the political parties and their candidates. In reality, they simply followed the trend. Since most youth voters in Nigeria have online presence, there was a shift from the traditional approach to political communication to one that is largely social media-dependent. The younger generation will mostly definitely respond to messages and contents of multimedia nature and so that validates the choice of the use of platforms. The idea was more like following trend than adopting a strategy. (PT3, Female, 49, 2024)

In essence, there was adoption of different strategies but the foregoing assertion simply implies that there may be no concrete plan by stakeholders to adopt a particular strategy to reach the electorate. This was further corroborated by another interviewee who held that, "the use of multimedia contents was more opportunistic. There seem to be no visible tactics to communication by all political elements in Nigeria" (PT4, Male, 46, 2024). This demystifies the idea that political communication across all cases in Nigeria may have been carefully planned and strategies adopted systematically applied.

Researchers also sought to ascertain the influence of multimedia on voter behaviour. In response, one of the interviewees explained, "the use of different multimedia technology-generated contents can influence the electorate to support a political cause due to the insights gained from the information embedded in such contents" (PT1, Male, 52, 2024). Another observed, "the influence of multimedia in respect of election is unquantifiable as it

provides the grounds where political affiliations and identities can take on a positive outlook brightening the chances of candidates and their parties" (PT2, Male, 59, 2024). This mirrors the position expressed by Ogunleye (2020) on the influence of multimedia within the context of elections in Nigeria. Interviewees further expressed their opinions:

> As voters are exposed to political messages packaged in multimedia formats, the voter net could be expanded on the grounds of the affordances and the ease of disseminating the information across platforms. Consequently, there is increased participation of the people and this was also the case during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Therefore, we can say categorically that there is influence. (PT3, Female, 49, 2024)

> On the grounds that multimedia contents are distributed through the use of social media, we can say that such contents are effective and so remain great influence in elections in Nigeria. The contents are engaging and encourage participation and interactivity whereby voters are able to engage one another on different topics. In essence, these contents shape discourse especially on topes of political dimensions. (PT4, Male, 46, 2024)

This indicates that communicators who leverage the use of multimedia technologies do so towards an end which is to achieve a specific purpose. In tailoring their messages, they are usually poised to impress on the audience and sway their perceptions about issues and topics.

Another point of enquiry for this study was on challenges and critiques of multimedia usage in Nigeria. Accordingly, the in-depth interview sessions yielded significant data. An informant remarked that, "A major challenge with the use of multimedia in the era of the new media is that of manipulation. The truth is that anything can be manipulated and then people can also be misled with contents on the base of advancement in technology (PT1, Male, 52, 2024)." Another informant added:

> Great disruptions to the truth on account of the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories through different social and multimedia platforms in the political realm of Nigeria can be considered as one of the greatest challenges. In essence, these platforms are thriving grounds for all forms of falsehood and untruths and so serving the voting population 'misleading information'. It is not a good thing for the polity. (PT2, Male, 59, 2024)

It is another point that falsehood gets spread through different social media platforms through which various stakeholders reach out to the electorate during elections. From another angle, a further position expressed by one of the interviewees:

> In the Nigerian situation, modern technologies are used to cause disaffection among the people of the country. Fake news and other vices found social media platforms and new media devices as good grounds to fester. With the speed offered by social media, individuals with sinister motive often disseminated falsehood to the people including the electorate. Additionally, mobile devices like phones are used to share falsehood. This is a major point that discredits multimedia use within the context of elections in Nigeria. (PT3, Female, 49, 2024)

This position aligns with that of Ume (2020) on political actors leveraging on the powers of the multimedia platforms such as social media to exacerbate tensions in the populace as seen in different electoral scenarios in Nigeria. On a final note, another interview observed:

> The use of multimedia platforms, though with many benefits to the electoral system are noted, but also bear marks of danger as platforms can be used to further the ideology and plot of some groups as seen in the spread of propaganda in recent elections in Nigeria. (PT4, Male, 46, 2024)

This is a demonstration that though new media technologies and social media platforms may appear useful and effective but also have some areas where they could be considered as platforms of negative impact. One of such is that the cause of individuals and group can be furthered through propaganda.

5. Discussions

5.1. Multimedia strategies in the 2023 Nigerian election

In the 2023 Nigerian election, political parties employed diverse multimedia strategies to garner support and sway public opinion. A study by Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023) reveals that political parties extensively utilised television, radio, social media, and outdoor advertising to reach voters. Television commercials featuring candidates' messages and promises were a prominent feature of the campaign landscape, with parties investing heavily in prime-time slots to optimize exposures (Okidi *et al.*, 2023). This takes a serious dimension on the basis that media is considered as a critical factor in the political landscape of Nigeria, and this has been glaringly displayed in recent elections conducted in the country. The 2015, 2019 and even the 2023 general elections are but examples of the increased adoption and use of the media.

Furthermore, radio remained a crucial medium for political communication, particularly in rural areas where television penetration is lower (Igbinedion & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). Parties capitalised on radio broadcasts to disseminate campaign messages, air political debates, and conduct interviews with candidates. Additionally, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram emerged as battlegrounds for political discourse, with parties engaging in real-time interactions with voters and adversaries (Okidi *et al.*, 2023). Multimedia played a pivotal role in voter mobilisation and persuasion during the 2023 Nigerian election. Political parties leveraged multimedia platforms to rally supporters, organise rallies, and encourage voter turnout.

According to Uwakwe *et al.* (2023), social media platforms served as virtual campaign hubs, where parties disseminated information about campaign events, shared campaign materials, and mobilised volunteers. Moreover, multimedia allowed parties to tailor their messages to specific demographic groups and geographic regions, enhancing their ability to appeal to diverse constituencies (Uwakwe *et al.*, 2023). For instance, parties targeted younger voters through social media platforms, while employing traditional media channels such as radio and outdoor advertising to reach older and rural voters. The use of radio in particular was recorded as a strategic move to reach people in the parts of the country (Alaekwe & Ilomuanya, 2023; Ibe *et al.*, 2023). Regardless of the use of digital media in Nigeria, radio has continued to grow in popularity among rural dwellers in the country.

The use of multimedia enabled parties to adopt a multi-pronged approach to voter mobilisation, thereby maximizing their outreach and impact (Okidi *et al.*, 2023). A content analysis of multimedia messages during the 2023 Nigerian election provides insights into the themes, narratives, and strategies employed by political parties. According to Chigbo (2024), the dominant themes in campaign messaging included promises of infrastructural development, job creation, security, and anti-corruption efforts. Parties framed their messages to resonate with voters' concerns and aspirations, emphasising their ability to deliver tangible benefits and address pressing issues facing the country. These framed

messages we carefully crafted along specific manifestoes of the political parties in line with specific needs of the country at the material time.

Furthermore, parties utilised emotional appeals, symbolism, and storytelling techniques to connect with voters on a personal level (Chigbo, 2024). Campaign ads often featured testimonials from ordinary citizens, success stories of government programmes, and images of candidate interactions with constituents. Through multimedia, parties sought to evoke empathy, trust, and solidarity among voters, thereby strengthening their electoral appeal (Uwakwe *et al.*, 2023). The electoral appeals were further reinforced through the blend of other specific appeals such as emotional and psychological appeals towards the end game of mobilising support for the candidates and their political parties. The 2023 election in Nigeria saw carefully designed message lines towards achieving the ultimate goal of victories at the polls.

The impact of multimedia on political discourse and public opinion in the 2023 Nigerian election was significant and far-reaching. A study by Aghator and Moussa (2023) found that multimedia played a central role in shaping the agenda, framing the narratives, and influencing voter attitudes. Television debates, radio talk shows, and social media discussions served as platforms for candidates to articulate their policies, engage in debates, and defend their positions. Moreover, multimedia facilitated greater transparency and accountability in the electoral process, allowing citizens to scrutinise candidates' statements, fact-check claims, and hold politicians to account (Aghator & Moussa, 2023).

However, the proliferation of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation on social media posed challenges to the integrity of the electoral process, undermining trust in the media and eroding public confidence in democratic institutions (Chigbo, 2024). Overall, multimedia exerted a profound influence on political discourse and public opinion in the 2023 Nigerian election, shaping voter perceptions, preferences, and behaviours. The strategic use of multimedia by political parties not only influenced electoral outcomes but also contributed to the broader dynamics of governance and democracy in Nigeria. It is the main reason behind the adoption and utilisation of social media handles by agencies and institutions of government in modern-day Nigeria.

5.2. *Influence of multimedia on voter behaviour*

The exposure to multimedia content significantly influences voter knowledge and attitudes in Nigerian elections. Research by Ogunleye (2020) emphasized that multimedia exposure plays a pivotal role in shaping voter perceptions of political candidates and issues. Television debates, political advertisements, and news coverage contribute to voters' understanding of electoral campaigns and policy proposals (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). As voters are exposed to multimedia contents across different platforms, so are their understanding broadened to have unique perceptions about the entire electoral process in the country.

Furthermore, studies have shown that multimedia exposure can affect voter attitudes towards political candidates and parties. For instance, a study conducted by Adekunle (2019) found that positive media coverage can enhance voter trust and confidence in political leaders, while negative media portrayals may lead to scepticism and disillusionment. Additionally, exposure to biased or sensationalised media content can influence voter perceptions of electoral processes and outcomes (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). When prominent persons appear on their screen and pop-ups across social media platforms with specific messages biased towards certain candidates, they become influenced to reason along same line. Over time, people tend to get used to the type of message to which they are exposed.

Multimedia plays a crucial role in shaping political identities and affiliations among Nigerian voters. According to Ogunleye (2020), multimedia platforms such as television, radio, and social media enable political actors to construct and disseminate narratives that

appeal to specific demographic groups and ideological orientations. Political parties use multimedia campaigns to cultivate loyalty and allegiance among their supporters, often by appealing to shared values, identities, and aspirations (Adekunle, 2019). Moreover, social media platforms facilitate the formation of online communities and networks based on shared political beliefs and interests. Users engage in political discussions, share news articles, and express their views on social media, contributing to the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). These online spaces reinforce existing political identities and ideologies, shaping voter behaviour and decision-making processes.

Multimedia has a significant impact on voter turnout and participation in Nigerian elections. Research by Ogunleye (2020) suggests that exposure to multimedia campaigns can motivate voters to engage in the electoral process by increasing their awareness of election dates, polling locations, and voting procedures. Television and radio advertisements, in particular, play a crucial role in mobilizing voters and encouraging them to exercise their civic rights (Adekunle, 2019). Furthermore, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for mobilizing and organizing political participation among Nigerian citizens. Studies have shown that political parties and civil society organisations use social media to rally support, coordinate campaign activities, and mobilise volunteers for voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). Additionally, online voter education campaigns and voter registration drives conducted through social media have contributed to increased voter turnout in Nigerian elections (Ogunleye, 2020).

Social media plays a central role in shaping electoral dynamics and influencing voter behaviour in Nigerian elections. The interactive and participatory nature of social media platforms enables political actors to engage directly with voters, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and communication channels (Adekunle, 2019). Politicians and parties use social media to disseminate campaign messages, engage in real-time conversations with constituents, and mobilise support for their electoral campaigns (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). Moreover, social media platforms serve as important sources of political information and news for Nigerian voters. Research by Ogunleye (2020) indicates that a significant portion of the electorate relies on social media for news updates, analysis, and commentary during election periods. However, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news on social media poses challenges to the integrity of electoral processes and voter decision-making (Adekunle, 2019).

Overall, social media platforms have become integral components of Nigerian electoral campaigns, shaping public discourse, influencing voter perceptions, and mobilizing political participation (Olorunyomi & Adegoke, 2021). However, the impact of social media on electoral dynamics is complex and multifaceted, requiring further research to fully understand its implications for democracy and governance in Nigeria. Put in another way, further research is required to have a full grasp of the complex nature of the impact of social media and multimedia technology on the electoral dynamics of Nigeria.

5.3.   *Challenges and critiques of multimedia usage in elections*

The spread of misinformation and fake news has emerged as a significant challenge in the use of multimedia during elections in Nigeria (Ume, 2020). With the rise of social media platforms, false information can spread rapidly, leading to confusion and manipulation of public opinion (Nwabueze, 2021). With the advent of social media comes the abuse of platforms as people use them for the wrong reasons of spreading fake news. Accordingly, the

platforms are reputed to be used by users to disseminate falsehood (Inobemhe *et al.*, 2020). Regardless of efforts by the technology companies and their owners, the platforms continue to be used for the spread of disinformation, even in unimaginable proportions owing to the interactivity feature offered (Wong, 2019).

Studies have shown that during election periods, fake news tends to proliferate, often with the intent of influencing voter behaviour or discrediting political opponents (Nwabueze, 2021). For example, fabricated stories about candidates' personal lives or false allegations of electoral malpractice can circulate widely on social media, undermining the integrity of the electoral process (Ume, 2020). Fake news about candidates and their political parties are rife across social media platforms – taking on the form of multimedia with text, audio, video and infographics of such information.

Furthermore, the decentralised nature of social media makes it difficult to regulate or counteract the spread of misinformation effectively (Nwabueze, 2021). While efforts have been made to fact-check and debunk false information, these initiatives often struggle to keep pace with the sheer volume and speed of online content (Ume, 2020). Social media are reputed to be superfast with high interconnectivity speed making them the most convenient and fast ways to connect with one another (Express News Service, 2015). Issues spread fast on social media as users share information with friends, family and followers (Zhang & Vos, 2015). Wang (2012) asserts that issues with high social value are more likely to get shared several times by many users. The implication of such share by users is that more and more persons across platforms will get exposed to the information being spread.

Multimedia usage in elections has also been criticised for exacerbating political polarisation and social divisions in Nigeria (Ume, 2020). Social media algorithms, which prioritise engagement and interaction, can create echo chambers where users are exposed only to content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences (Nwabueze, 2021). Furthermore, Nwabueze noted that consequent upon the foregoing, individuals may become more entrenched in their ideological positions, leading to heightened hostility and intolerance towards opposing viewpoints. Political discourse on social media platforms often devolves into acrimonious debates and personal attacks, hindering constructive dialogue and compromise (Ume, 2020). It is such politically-charged virtual space that marks social media out creating a new vista for broadcast campaign advertising across online platforms – chiefly led by the citizens and candidates of political parties (de Boer et al., 2012)

Moreover, the manipulation of social media by political actors and interest groups can exacerbate tensions and incite violence, particularly in ethnically and religiously diverse societies like Nigeria (Ume, 2020). The spread of hate speech and incendiary rhetoric online can fuel intergroup conflict and undermine social cohesion (Nwabueze, 2021). Additionally, the digital divide and access inequality pose significant challenges to the equitable use of multimedia in Nigerian elections. Urban areas and wealthier segments of the population have relatively high levels of internet penetration and access to digital media, rural communities and marginalised groups often lack reliable connectivity and technological infrastructure.

As a result, individuals living in underserved areas may have limited access to online information and political discourse, placing them at a disadvantage in the electoral process (Ume, 2020). Moreover, disparities in digital literacy and technological skills can further exacerbate inequalities in political participation and engagement (Nwabueze, 2021). Digital literacy is an important factor in digital engagement across online spaces, be it the social media and the Internet. A lack of therefore constitutes a serious problem in the 21st century

online political activities such as mobilisation, engagement, and even participation of the citizens.

Efforts to bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive access to multimedia platforms are essential for ensuring the integrity and fairness of elections in Nigeria (Nwabueze, 2021). Initiatives such as community-based internet centers, mobile outreach programmes, and digital literacy training can help empower underserved populations and enhance their participation in democratic processes (Ume, 2020). The interventions by critical stakeholders in ensuring access to digital platforms cannot be overemphasised as such efforts will lead to so many positive outcomes, not just for the political landscape but for other developmental purposes.

The regulation of multimedia usage in elections presents numerous ethical and regulatory challenges in Nigeria (Ume, 2020). While existing laws and regulations provide some framework for overseeing traditional media outlets, the rapid proliferation of digital platforms has outpaced regulatory efforts, creating gaps in oversight and accountability (Nwabueze, 2021). Further to the foregoing, Nwabueze noted that the regulatory landscape for online political communication is often fragmented and inconsistent, with multiple agencies and stakeholders sharing responsibility for oversight. This fragmentation can lead to jurisdictional conflicts, enforcement gaps, and ambiguity regarding the application of existing laws to digital media platforms (Ume, 2020).

Moreover, ethical dilemmas related to the use of multimedia in elections, such as privacy violations, data manipulation, and partisan bias pose significant challenges for regulators and policymakers (Ume, 2020). Balancing the need to protect freedom of expression with the imperative to safeguard electoral integrity requires careful consideration of ethical principles and democratic values (Nwabueze, 2021). Addressing these regulatory and ethical challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, civil society organisations, media practitioners, and technology companies. Comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and ethical standards in multimedia usage are essential for safeguarding the integrity of elections and promoting democratic governance in Nigeria (Nwabueze, 2021).

6. Conclusion

The exploration of multimedia's effect on Nigerian elections reveals several pivotal insights. Firstly, the historical backdrop, ranging from colonial-era censorship to post-independence struggles for press freedom, has profoundly influenced multimedia's role in electoral processes. Secondly, the advent of multimedia technologies has revolutionised political communication in Nigeria, offering new avenues for engagement and expression. These multimedia platforms, including television, radio, and social media, are essential components of Nigerian elections, facilitating political advertising, voter education, and citizen journalism. Moreover, the interplay between traditional and new media underscores the necessity of a balanced approach to political communication. Finally, the evolving regulatory landscape for multimedia usage in elections reflects ongoing debates regarding freedom of expression, electoral integrity, and digital rights.

The multifaceted role of multimedia in Nigerian elections underscores its dynamic interaction with technology, politics, and society. While multimedia platforms hold potential for enhancing democratic processes by fostering broader participation and informed debate, they also present challenges such as disinformation, polarisation, and digital inequality.

Despite these challenges, multimedia has become indispensable for political communication, enabling candidates to engage with diverse audiences and empowering citizens to participate in the democratic process. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort among policymakers, electoral stakeholders, and civil society organisations to develop robust legal frameworks, implement oversight mechanisms, and promote media literacy and civic education. By adopting a holistic approach to regulating multimedia, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions and foster a more inclusive and resilient democracy for the future.

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