Strategic media campaigns in electoral politics: Analysing the impact of Team Peter Obi in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election

Isaiah ILO, PhD
University of Abuja

Lois Otse ADAMS-OSIGBEMHE
University of Abuja

Abstract

This study investigates the role of Media Campaign Teams (MCTs), focusing on Team Peter Obi's digital strategies during Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election. The research marks a step toward understanding the evolving dynamics of digital campaigning and its implications for electoral politics. It explores the impact of digital campaigning on voter engagement, particularly among the youth, and the overarching electoral outcomes. Leveraging a comprehensive analytical framework that integrates theoretical perspectives from the Agenda-Setting Theory, Spiral of Silence Theory, and Social Identity Theory, this research elucidates how Team Peter Obi's innovative use of digital platforms—social media engagement, targeted digital marketing, and data analytics—reshaped political communication and mobilisation. The comparative analysis underscores Team Peter Obi's campaign as a benchmark in digital electoral strategy within Nigeria, characterised by its novel engagement approaches and extensive outreach, setting a new precedent for the strategic use of digital media in political campaigning. The findings reveal a significant shift in electoral strategies towards digital engagement, evidencing increased voter interaction, community building, and mobilisation through platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This study contributes to the academic discourse on media influence and political communication by highlighting the efficacy of digital platforms in shaping political discourse, amplifying supportive voices, and fostering a cohesive supporter base online. It offers insights for political campaigners and media strategists on the importance of digital engagement, targeted messaging, and community building in the digital era. Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges limitations, including the reliance on publicly available data and the challenge of attributing electoral outcomes directly to digital strategies.

Keywords: Strategic Media Campaign, Electoral Politics, Presidential Election

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of global electoral politics, Media Campaign Teams (MCTs) have emerged as significant agents in shaping political narratives, influencing voter perceptions, and ultimately determining electoral outcomes. The strategic deployment of MCTs, particularly in leveraging digital platforms, has redefined traditional campaigning methods, introducing a dynamic interplay between political communication and technology (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). This study delves into the significant role of MCTs in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria, an event marked by intense digital campaigning and social media engagement. The political landscape of Nigeria leading up to the 2023 elections presented a complex tapestry of socio-political dynamics, with social media and digital campaigning at the forefront of electoral strategies. The proliferation of digital platforms has facilitated broader engagement and introduced new challenges and opportunities for political discourse (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). During this period, we witnessed an unprecedented utilisation of social media tools by political entities, aiming to harness the power of digital communication to sway the electorate, a reflection of a global trend towards digitised political engagement (Bello et al., 2019).

This study focuses on Team Peter Obi, the media campaign team supporting Peter Obi's candidacy, renowned for its innovative and impactful use of digital strategies in the 2023 Presidential Election. Team Peter Obi's approach to digital campaigning, characterised by a significant online presence and strategic social media utilisation, presents a unique case for exploring the efficacy and impact of MCTs in modern electoral processes. The selection of Team Peter Obi is rationalised by its distinct campaign strategies, which stood out amidst a highly competitive political environment, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of digital political communication in Nigeria (Bello et al., 2019). This study aims to: 1. Examine Team Peter Obi's strategic use of digital platforms in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election. 2. Analyse the impact of Team Peter Obi's digital campaigning on voter engagement and electoral outcomes. The guiding research questions include: 1. How did Team Peter Obi leverage digital platforms for campaign purposes? 2. What impact did Team Peter Obi's digital campaigning strategies have on voter engagement and the electoral outcome of the 2023 Presidential Election?

Digital Campaigning and Social Media

The landscape of political campaigning has undergone a significant transformation with digital technologies. The transition from traditional media—such as television, radio, and print—to digital platforms marks a shift in electoral strategies (Graber & Dunaway, 2018). Digital campaigning, using social media, blogs, and online forums, offers unprecedented opportunities for political engagement and voter mobilisation (Bello et al., 2019). This evolution is driven by the broader reach, cost-effectiveness, and interactive nature of digital platforms, enabling candidates to communicate directly with the electorate (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, have shaped political discourse and voter behaviour. Studies have demonstrated the significant role of social media in increasing political awareness, facilitating discussion, and influencing electoral outcomes (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). Social media serves as a platform for candidates to disseminate their campaign messages and enables voters to actively participate in the political process, share their opinions, and engage in debates (Rossini et al., 2018). The 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria exemplifies the profound impact of social media on voter engagement. Team Peter Obi, for instance, leveraged digital platforms to galvanise support, particularly among the youth, demonstrating the effectiveness of social media in mobilising a significant segment of the electorate (Ajetunmobi & Imam, 2022).

While traditional campaign methods have their strengths, such as broader accessibility among older demographics and those in rural areas, digital campaigning offers several advantages that have reshaped electoral strategies. Digital platforms provide real-time interaction, enabling candidates to respond swiftly to political developments, gauge public sentiment, and adjust their campaign messages accordingly (Graber & Dunaway, 2018). Additionally, the analytical tools available on social media platforms allow campaign teams to target specific demographic groups with tailored messages, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of campaign outreach (Bello et al., 2019). However, the reliance on social media also presents challenges, including spreading misinformation and creating polarised echo chambers, which can distort the political discourse and undermine democratic processes (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Despite these challenges, the benefits of digital campaigning in engagement and mobilisation are undeniable. The evolution of digital campaigning and the role of social media in contemporary electoral processes signify a paradigm shift in political communication. The 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria underscores the transformative power of digital platforms in engaging voters and shaping electoral outcomes. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, future research should explore the long-term implications of this shift on democratic engagement and the integrity of electoral processes.

Comparative Perspective on MCTs in Nigeria's Electoral Context

Media Campaign Teams (MCTs) have played essential roles in shaping electoral outcomes globally. In Nigeria, the evolution of MCTs reflects a broader trend towards digitalisation and sophisticated voter engagement strategies. This section provides a comparative perspective on MCTs in Nigeria's electoral context, emphasising their evolution, techniques, and impacts on electoral processes. Historically, Nigerian electoral campaigns relied heavily on traditional radio, television, and print media. The 2011 elections marked a turning point with the advent of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, allowing for more direct and interactive communication between candidates and voters (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). This transition underscored a shift towards digital campaigning, with subsequent elections witnessing increasingly sophisticated use of digital platforms by MCTs.

Comparing strategies employed by MCTs in different electoral cycles reveals a trend towards more targeted and data-driven approaches. In the early 2000s, MCTs focused on broad messaging through conventional media. By contrast, recent strategies involve using social media analytics for targeted messaging, sentiment analysis, and real-time voter engagement (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). Digital tools have enabled MCTs to segment the electorate and tailor messages to specific demographic groups, enhancing the effectiveness of campaign communications. The impact of MCTs on Nigeria's electoral processes has been profound. Digital campaigns have increased political participation and raised concerns about misinformation, polarisation, and the integrity of electoral processes (Ajetunmobi & Imam, 2022). Comparative analysis indicates that digital MCTs have democratised electoral campaigning, enabling smaller parties and candidates to reach wider audiences. However, they have also necessitated regulatory responses to address challenges such as fake news and online harassment.

Internationally, MCTs in countries like the United States and India have similarly embraced digital technologies, though the scale and regulatory environments differ. Unlike Nigeria, where regulatory frameworks for digital campaigning are still evolving, countries like the U.S. have established more comprehensive regulations governing digital campaign activities (Williams & Gulati, 2018). Additionally, integrating big data and artificial intelligence in campaign strategies in these countries provides insights into potential future directions for MCTs in Nigeria. For Nigeria, the way forward

involves balancing the benefits of digital MCTs with the need to safeguard electoral integrity. Learning from international best practices, there is a need for robust regulatory frameworks, voter education programs to combat misinformation, and ethical guidelines for digital campaigning. The comparative analysis of MCTs in Nigeria's electoral context highlights the transformative impact of digital technologies on political campaigning. While offering new opportunities for engagement, it also presents challenges that require careful management to ensure free, fair, and credible elections.

Electoral Psychology

The intersection of digital campaigning and electoral psychology offers insights into voter behaviour, perceptions, and decision-making processes. As political campaigns increasingly migrate to digital platforms, understanding the psychological underpinnings influencing how voters receive, process, and act on digital campaign content has become essential (Rossini et al., 2018). Digital campaigns, through their targeted messaging and interactive capabilities, have the potential to influence voter behaviour significantly. The selective exposure theory suggests that individuals prefer information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. This tendency is amplified in the digital environment, where algorithms can create echo chambers (Stroud, 2008). However, digital campaigns can break through these barriers by leveraging the persuasive power of social media to engage with undecided or swing voters, potentially altering their voting intentions (Bello et al., 2019).

The framing effects theory posits how information is presented can influence perceptions and decision-making (Graber & Dunaway, 2018). Digital campaigns skillfully use framing to shape voters' perceptions of candidates and issues. For instance, the positive framing of a candidate's policies can enhance voter perceptions of their competence and suitability for office. In contrast, negative framing of opponents can lead to adverse perceptions, affecting voter preferences and choices (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). The abundance of information available through digital platforms can both aid and complicate the decision-making process for voters. On one hand, access to diverse viewpoints and detailed policy explanations can enable more informed decision-making. On the other hand, the overload of information and prevalence of misinformation can lead to confusion and voter fatigue, potentially discouraging electoral participation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The cognitive dissonance theory explains how conflicting information can create psychological discomfort. It leads voters to seek consistency in their beliefs and choices, often influenced by the most persuasive or prevalent digital campaign content (Apuke & Tunca, 2018).

Digital campaigns also capitalise on the psychological principles of engagement and mobilisation. By creating content that resonates with voters' emotions and identities, campaigns can enhance engagement and encourage electoral participation. Social identity theory elucidates how digital campaigns that appeal to shared group identities can mobilise individuals towards collective action, including voting (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). The sense of belonging and community fostered through digital platforms can translate into increased voter turnout and active participation in the political process. The dynamics of electoral psychology in the context of digital campaigning reveal complex interactions between voter behaviour, perceptions, and decision-making. Digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for influencing voters through the strategic framing of messages and the psychological engagement of the electorate. As digital campaigning continues to evolve, understanding these psychological mechanisms will be crucial for political practitioners and scholars seeking to navigate the digital electoral landscape effectively.

Strategies Employed by MCTs to Combat or Propagate Misinformation

The proliferation of digital platforms has significantly influenced the dynamics of electoral campaigns, particularly in the context of misinformation. During the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria, Media Campaign Teams (MCTs) employed various strategies to combat or, unfortunately, propagate misinformation in some cases. These strategies reflect the dual-edged potential of digital media to influence electoral integrity and voter behaviour. Recognising the adverse impact of misinformation on electoral processes, several MCTs collaborated with fact-checking organisations to verify the accuracy of information circulating online. These initiatives involved verifying political actors' claims in real time and disseminating correct information through social media channels. To mitigate the spread of false information, MCTs launched public awareness campaigns to educate voters on the importance of verifying news sources. These campaigns often utilised infographics, videos, and interactive content to engage the electorate and encourage critical engagement with digital content. To curb the spread of misinformation, some MCTs worked directly with social media platforms to implement algorithms and policies that flag or remove false information. These collaborations also included promoting verified information to ensure greater visibility for accurate content.

Some MCTs engaged in the selective sharing of information, emphasising content that cast their candidates in a favourable light while disregarding or distorting facts. This strategy involved using out-of-context quotes, selective editing of video clips, and presenting opinion pieces as factual reports. A more nefarious strategy involved the creation of websites that mimicked legitimate news outlets. These sites published false or misleading articles to influence voter perceptions and attitudes towards specific candidates or political issues. Use of Social Media Bots and Trolls: Some MCTs employed social media bots and trolls to amplify certain narratives artificially. These automated accounts and paid individuals spread misinformation, engaged in harassment, and created a perception of widespread support for or opposition to specific candidates. The strategies employed by MCTs during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria highlight the complex role of digital media in contemporary electoral politics. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for engaging voters and promoting transparency, they also present significant challenges related to misinformation. The ethical implications of these strategies underscore the need for regulatory frameworks, media literacy, and ethical campaigning practices to safeguard electoral integrity and promote informed democratic participation.

Theories of Media Influence and Political Communication

The Agenda-Setting Theory, initially proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception by selecting the issues deemed worthy of public discourse. In electoral contexts, this theory suggests that media campaign teams (MCTs) can influence the political agenda by highlighting specific themes or issues related to their candidates, thereby shaping voter perceptions and priorities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). For instance, Team Peter Obi's strategic use of digital platforms to emphasise economic policies and anti-corruption measures illustrates the application of agenda-setting in political campaigning, directing public attention towards these issues (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). The Spiral of Silence Theory, introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1974), describes the tendency of individuals to remain silent on their views when they perceive these views to be in the minority for fear of social isolation. In the digital era, this theory finds relevance in how social media can amplify and suppress political discourse. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook, utilised extensively by Team Peter Obi, can create echo chambers

reinforcing majority opinions, while minority voices may feel pressured to remain silent (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Bello et al., 2019). This dynamic potentially influences political engagement and mobilisation, as supporters may feel emboldened or dissuaded from expressing their electoral choices.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), explores how individuals' self-concepts are influenced by their membership in social groups. Applied to political communication, this theory underscores how digital campaigning strategies can foster a sense of identity and belonging among supporters. Team Peter Obi's campaign, for example, successfully cultivated a collective identity among its followers, dubbed the "Obidients," leveraging social media to strengthen group cohesion and mobilise voters based on shared social and political identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Apuke & Tunca, 2018). This phenomenon illustrates how MCTs can use digital platforms to communicate political messages and build and reinforce community amongst supporters. These theories collectively offer an understanding of the mechanisms through which media influence operates in electoral contexts. The agenda-setting role of MCTs, as seen in Team Peter Obi's case, demonstrates the media's power to focus public attention on selected issues, thereby influencing the criteria by which the electorate evaluates political candidates. Meanwhile, the Spiral of Silence Theory elucidates the challenges and opportunities presented by social media in political discourse, highlighting the potential for both inclusivity and exclusivity in online political engagement. Lastly, Social Identity Theory provides insights into the strategies employed by MCTs to galvanise support, suggesting that the cultivation of a strong, shared group identity among supporters can be a critical factor in political mobilisation and voter turnout.

Comparative Studies

The study of media campaign teams (MCTs) across different electoral contexts, both within Nigeria and internationally, offers a rich comparative perspective on the evolving nature of digital campaigning. This section analyses similar studies, drawing parallels and identifying divergences in strategies, outcomes, and voter engagement.

The evolution of MCTs in Nigeria from traditional media strategies to digital platforms has been marked by a significant shift in campaign dynamics. Nigeria's 2011 and 2015 general elections serve as pivotal moments, showcasing the initial stages of digital campaign adoption. Studies conducted during these periods underscored the role of social media in enhancing political participation and shaping voter perceptions, with the 2015 elections particularly noted for the instrumental use of platforms like Twitter and Facebook by political parties and their supporters (Apuke & Tunca, 2018; Okoro & Santas, 2015). The effectiveness of these digital campaigns was further evidenced by increased political awareness and engagement among the electorate, especially the youth. Utilising MCTs in the United States, particularly during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, illustrates a more mature application of digital strategies. The campaigns employed sophisticated data analytics and targeted advertising to reach specific voter segments, leveraging social media to a greater extent than earlier Nigerian campaigns (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The American approach to digital campaigning has emphasised customising messages, deepening engagement through interactive content, and mobilising supporters via social media platforms.

In Europe, the use of MCTs has varied significantly across countries and elections. For instance, the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and various national elections across the continent have highlighted the role of digital platforms in disseminating campaign messages and rallying support. Unlike the Nigerian context, European campaigns have often faced challenges related to misinformation and the regulation of online political content, prompting a broader discussion on the need for digital

campaign transparency and accountability (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). One of the key insights from the comparative analysis is the universal recognition of digital platforms as crucial tools for modern electoral campaigning. However, the degree of sophistication and ethical considerations surrounding digital campaigns vary significantly. While Nigerian campaigns have increasingly adopted digital strategies for broader engagement, they still grapple with issues of misinformation and polarised online spaces. In contrast, countries with more established digital campaigning practices, like the U.S., have moved towards refining targeting techniques and addressing the challenges of fake news and electoral interference.

Additionally, the impact of digital campaigns on voter behaviour appears to be a common theme across studies, with evidence suggesting that social media can significantly influence election outcomes by mobilising support, shaping perceptions, and enhancing political participation (Bello et al., 2019; Graber & Dunaway, 2018). Comparative studies of MCTs across different electoral contexts reveal a complex landscape where digital campaigning has become an indispensable component of modern elections. While the tactical application of these strategies varies, the overarching goal remains the same: to engage voters, influence perceptions, and secure electoral victories. As digital platforms continue to evolve, understanding these comparative dynamics will be crucial for political practitioners and scholars seeking to navigate the intricacies of global electoral campaigning.

Gaps in the Literature:

The burgeoning field of digital campaigning and the role of Media Campaign Teams (MCTs) in electoral politics have been extensively explored in scholarly literature. However, despite the considerable body of research, several gaps remain, particularly in developing democracies like Nigeria. This section outlines these gaps and positions the current study as an effort to address them.

While numerous studies have focused on the impact of social media and digital campaigning in developed countries (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011), less attention has been paid to their roles in developing democracies. Comparative analyses that juxtapose digital campaigning strategies, effectiveness, and challenges across different political and cultural contexts within developing countries are scarce (Bello, Inuwa-Dutse, & Heckel, 2019). This study fills this gap by offering a comparative perspective on MCTs in Nigeria's electoral context. The literature provides insights into how digital campaigns influence voter behaviour. However, there remains a lack of depth in understanding the psychological mechanisms underpinning these influences, especially in African electoral contexts (Okoro & Santas, 2015). This study attempted to delve deeper into electoral psychology, exploring how digital campaigning shapes voter perceptions, decision-making processes, and political engagement in Nigeria.

While the challenge of misinformation and its impact on elections have been acknowledged in the literature, there is a notable gap in comprehensive studies that examine the mechanisms of misinformation dissemination within digital campaigns and its effects on voter trust and electoral outcomes in Nigeria (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). The current study aims to address this gap by analysing the strategies employed by MCTs to combat or propagate misinformation during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. This study is positioned to address these gaps in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of MCTs in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election. Through comparative analyses, a deeper exploration of electoral psychology, an examination of misinformation dynamics, and methodological diversification, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital campaigning and its implications for electoral democracy in developing contexts.

Research Design

This research design utilises a multi-method approach, combining content analysis, case study, and scoping review elements to explore the Peter Obi campaign's use of digital platforms in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election. The data sources included news articles, which were reputable Nigerian and international news sources used to gather information on the campaign's activities, strategies, and performance. Social media data: Publicly available data from the campaign's pages, such as follower count, engagement metrics, and content themes. Campaign statements and press releases provide insights into the campaign's official messaging and strategies. Expert opinions: Interviews with political analysts, digital marketing professionals, and academics offer valuable insights and interpretations. Existing research: A limited scoping review of academic literature and reports on African digital campaigning was conducted to identify broader trends and contextualise the findings.

For data analysis, thematic content analysis identified recurring themes, messages, and strategies employed by the campaign across different platforms. Case study analysis examined the campaign's overall approach, strengths and weaknesses, and potential impact on voter engagement and participation. Findings from limited scoping review analysis provided context and compared the Obi campaign's strategies to broader trends in digital campaigning. This data collection and analysis approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the campaign's digital strategies using various data sources and perspectives. It acknowledges the limitations of available data and relies on multiple methods to triangulate findings and enhance credibility. However, due to the reliance on existing data and anecdotal evidence, establishing causal relationships or measuring the precise impact of the campaign's strategies is challenging. The limited scope of the research (focusing on a single case) restricts the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Nevertheless, the research design offers a valuable framework for exploring the Peter Obi campaign's innovative use of digital platforms within the context of the 2023 Nigerian elections. While acknowledging the limitations, the combined approach can provide valuable insights and contribute to the evolving understanding of digital campaigning in Africa.

Sample Selection

This study strategically focuses on Team Peter Obi's campaign during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria to explore the transformative impact of media campaign teams (MCTs) in electoral politics. This choice is underpinned by several vital rationales that align with the study's objectives to delve into the nuances of digital campaigning and its effects on political engagement and voter behaviour. Team Peter Obi represents a paradigm shift in the Nigerian political landscape, particularly in utilising social media and digital platforms for campaign purposes. Unlike traditional campaigns relying on physical rallies and mainstream media, Team Peter Obi's approach was notably innovative, leveraging digital platforms to galvanise support and engage with the electorate. This campaign team's strategies mirror broader global trends towards digitalisation in political campaigning but are contextualised within the unique socio-political fabric of Nigeria (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). Several criteria guided the selection of Team Peter Obi for this analysis:

Team Peter Obi's campaign demonstrated significant digital engagement, with a substantial online presence and active participation across multiple social media platforms. This makes it a pertinent case for examining the dynamics of digital campaigning in Nigeria (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020). Preliminary data indicated that Team Peter Obi's digital campaign had a broad reach and potentially influenced voter

perceptions and engagement, aligning with the study's interest in the impact of MCTs on electoral outcomes. Compared to other campaign teams in the 2023 Presidential Election, Team Peter Obi's strategies presented a unique blend of traditional and digital approaches, offering a rich case for analysis within the Nigerian electoral context. The campaign's innovative use of digital platforms and its implications for political communication, voter engagement, and the broader democratic process directly relate to the research objectives of this study.

The focused analysis of Team Peter Obi's campaign provides an invaluable opportunity to explore Nigeria's evolving landscape of electoral campaigning, particularly the shift towards digital engagement. By examining this case in depth, the study aims to contribute to understanding digital campaigning's effectiveness, challenges, and potential to reshape political communication and engagement in emerging democracies.

Findings

Key Digital Strategies Employed by the Peter Obi Campaign

The 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election was a notable event that witnessed unprecedented digital engagement by various political campaigns. Team Peter Obi, representing the Labour Party, stood out for its extensive use of digital platforms to galvanise support. This digital strategy encompassed social media engagement, digital marketing, and data analytics to effectively target voters and disseminate campaign messages.

1. Social Media Mobilization: Team Peter Obi leveraged platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to reach a broad audience, significantly younger voters. The campaign created viral content to engage the electorate, including memes, videos, and infographics. The hashtag #Obidients became a rallying cry for his supporters, showcasing the campaign's ability to create a digital movement (Oladapo, 2023).

2. Digital Marketing and Advertising: The campaign also employed digital marketing techniques, including search engine optimisation (SEO) and targeted online advertising to reach potential voters. Using data analytics, Team Peter Obi could tailor its messages to different demographics, optimising ad spend and message reach (Smith & Lu, 2023).

3. Data Analytics and Voter Targeting: Advanced data analytics played a crucial role in the campaign's strategy. The campaign identified key voter segments by analysing online behaviour and demographic data and targeted them with customised messages. This approach allowed for efficient resource allocation and maximised the impact of their messaging (Politivos, n.d.).

4. Use of Digital Platforms for Donations and Volunteer Recruitment: Team Peter Obi's campaign used digital platforms to facilitate donations and recruit volunteers. This broadened their funding base beyond traditional political donors and engaged a larger pool of supporters in the campaign process (Okeke & Ibrahim, 2023).

5. Engagement with Diaspora Voters: Recognising the influence of the Nigerian diaspora, the campaign actively engaged these communities through webinars, social media live streams, and digital town halls. This strategy helped to garner financial support and amplify their message internationally (*The Guardian* 2023, August 26).

6. Reports and Studies: Although specific reports and studies detailing the quantitative impact of these digital strategies on the election's outcome are still emerging,

preliminary analyses suggest that digital engagement significantly increased voter awareness and participation among the youth demographic. Studies focusing on social media analytics, voter behaviour, and campaign strategies will likely provide further insights into the effectiveness of these digital tactics (Oladapo, 2023).

7. Professional Commentary and Analysis: Political analysts and digital marketing professionals have highlighted Team Peter Obi's digital campaign as a case study in modern electoral strategy. The campaign's ability to mobilise support through digital channels has been cited as a significant factor in its performance in the election, reflecting a broader global trend towards digital-first political campaigns (Oladapo, 2023).

Team Peter Obi's campaign for the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election exemplifies the growing importance of digital platforms in political campaigning. By effectively leveraging social media, digital marketing, and data analytics, the campaign was able to engage with a broad spectrum of voters, demonstrating the potential of digital strategies to transform electoral engagement and political communication. Further research and analysis will undoubtedly provide deeper insights into these digital tactics' specific impacts and effectiveness.

Impact of the Strategies on Voter Engagement and Participation

The digital campaigning strategies employed by Team Peter Obi during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria marked a significant departure from traditional electoral campaign methods, leveraging social media platforms, digital tools, and online engagement to reach a broader audience, particularly among the youth demographic. Obi was very active on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, where he directly engaged with voters and answered their questions. He also used social media to share his policy positions and to attack his opponents. This direct engagement with voters effectively generated enthusiasm for his candidacy. This approach capitalised on the rising digital literacy and the expansive use of social media among the Nigerian population, aiming to galvanise support and increase voter engagement through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Empirically, the impact of these digital strategies can be assessed through several indicators:

1. Social Media Engagement: There was a noticeable surge in social media activities related to Peter Obi and the Labour Party, with hashtags like #PeterObiForPresident2023 widely used across platforms. This increased visibility and fostered a sense of community among supporters. The engagement metrics, including likes, shares, and comments, demonstrated high interaction with the campaign's content (Oladapo, 2023).

2. Voter Turnout: While the overall voter turnout in the election reflected multiple factors, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) data, anecdotal evidence suggests that regions with higher concentrations of youth and digital engagement showed a more pronounced turnout. However, quantifying the direct correlation between digital campaigning and voter turnout requires advanced empirical research (Wisevoter, 2023).

3. Polling and Surveys: Pre-election polls and surveys indicated a significant positive perception of Peter Obi, especially among younger voters who are more active on social media platforms. These polls often reflected the enthusiasm and support generated through digital campaigns, suggesting a correlation between digital engagement and voting intentions. A poll by Bloomberg revealed that 72% of "decided voters" said they would support Peter Obi in the elections (*The Guardian*, 2023).

4. Electoral Outcome: While Peter Obi did not win the presidency, the Labour Party saw a remarkable improvement in its performance compared to previous elections, securing a significant portion of the vote share. This outcome can be partly attributed to the effectiveness of digital campaigning in mobilising support, particularly among first-time and young voters (Siegle & Cook, 2023).

It is imperative to acknowledge that while digital campaigning strategies play a crucial role in shaping voter engagement and perceptions, the electoral outcome is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including but not limited to political alliances, electoral integrity, and the broader socioeconomic context. Furthermore, the reliance on digital platforms for campaigning also raises questions about digital divides, misinformation, and the need for digital literacy to ensure informed and equitable participation in the democratic process.

Team Peter Obi's digital campaigning strategies significantly impacted voter engagement, particularly among the youth, and contributed to the Labour Party's electoral performance in the 2023 Presidential Election. While indicative of trends, the empirical evidence necessitates further research to comprehensively understand the dynamics and long-term implications of digital campaigning in electoral politics.

Discussion

The study investigates the strategies of Team Peter Obi's Media Campaign Team (MCT) during Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election, focusing on digital engagement's role in influencing voter behaviour and electoral outcomes. Central to our findings is the innovative utilisation of digital platforms, which markedly enhanced voter engagement, especially among the youth. This aligns with the Agenda-Setting Theory, illustrating how Team Peter Obi prioritised specific political issues, such as economic policies and anti-corruption, in the electorate's minds through strategic digital content dissemination. Empirical evidence from the campaign underscores the potent use of social media to mobilise support, generating a significant online movement characterised by the hashtag #Obidients. This phenomenon illustrates the Spiral of Silence Theory's relevance in digital spaces. Team Peter Obi's online strategies effectively amplified supportive voices while mitigating dissenting ones, fostering a more vocal and unified online community.

Social Identity Theory's application through digital strategies also played a pivotal role, as Team Peter Obi's campaign fostered a robust collective identity among supporters. This digital cultivation of "Obidients" illustrates how MCTs can leverage online platforms to not only disseminate political messages but also to build and reinforce community amongst supporters, enhancing voter mobilisation and engagement. Comparing Team Peter Obi's digital strategies with those of other campaigns within the same electoral cycle reveals a significant differential in the scope and effectiveness of digital engagement. While other campaigns also employed digital platforms, Team Peter Obi's approach was distinguished by its innovative use of social media for direct voter engagement, content virality, and diaspora outreach. This comparative analysis underscores Team Peter Obi's campaign as a benchmark in Nigeria's strategic use of digital platforms for political campaigning, setting a new standard for digital engagement in electoral politics.

The findings from this study contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge on media influence, political communication, and electoral psychology. They reinforce the Agenda-Setting Theory, highlighting the critical role of digital media in shaping the political agenda. Moreover, the study challenges and expands the Spiral of Silence Theory by demonstrating that digital platforms can counterbalance traditional media's silence, empowering minority voices to create a significant impact. Furthermore,

applying Social Identity Theory in the digital realm through this campaign provides fresh insights into how political campaigns can effectively leverage digital platforms to foster a sense of identity and belonging among supporters.

The practical implications of this study are multifaceted, offering valuable insights into political campaign strategies, media engagement practices, and the future role of digital campaigning. For political strategists, the success of Team Peter Obi's digital campaign highlights the necessity of integrating digital platforms into campaign strategies, emphasising the importance of targeted messaging and community building online. For media practitioners, this study underscores the evolving role of digital platforms in political communication, suggesting a shift towards more interactive and participatory forms of media engagement. Finally, the findings illuminate the growing significance of digital campaigning in future elections, indicating that digital platforms are not merely supplementary channels but essential tools for voter engagement, mobilisation, and electoral success.

Conclusion

This study delves into the strategies employed by Team Peter Obi's Media Campaign Team (MCT) during Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election, highlighting the transformative impact of digital campaigning on electoral politics. Key findings underscore the strategic use of digital platforms to engage voters, particularly the youth, and the effectiveness of social media in mobilising support and fostering a collective identity among supporters encapsulated in the "Obidients" movement. Theoretical frameworks such as the Agenda-Setting Theory, Spiral of Silence Theory, and Social Identity Theory provided insights into how digital platforms were leveraged to shape political discourse, amplify supportive voices, and build a cohesive supporter base. The comparative analysis revealed that Team Peter Obi's digital campaign set a new benchmark in using digital media for political campaigning in Nigeria, distinguishing itself through innovative engagement strategies and extensive outreach.

The study contributes to the academic field by integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence to elucidate the role of digital strategies in modern electoral campaigns. It expands the understanding of how digital platforms can influence voter perceptions, engagement, and participation, exploring the mechanisms through which MCTs can shape electoral outcomes. The findings offer valuable lessons for political campaigners and media strategists, emphasising the importance of digital engagement, targeted messaging, and community building in the digital era. The study sets a precedent for the strategic use of digital media in electoral politics, providing a foundation for future campaigns to build upon.

While the study offers comprehensive insights into Team Peter Obi's digital campaigning strategies, it acknowledges limitations, including the reliance on publicly available data and the challenges of directly attributing electoral outcomes to digital strategies alone. Future research could employ more robust methodological approaches, such as longitudinal studies and experimental designs, to precisely measure the impact of digital campaigning on voter behaviour and election results. Additionally, comparative studies across different political contexts and electoral systems would enrich the understanding of digital campaigning's effectiveness and adaptability to various socio-political environments.

The evolving role of media campaign teams in the digital age signifies a paradigm shift in electoral politics. As demonstrated by Team Peter Obi's campaign in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election, digital platforms have become indispensable tools for political communication, enabling campaigns to reach wider audiences, engage voters more effectively, and shape the political landscape in unprecedented ways. This study

illuminates the potential of digital strategies to enhance democratic participation and underscores the need for political actors and institutions to adapt to the changing dynamics of electoral campaigning. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the insights derived from this study contribute to a broader discourse on the role of digital media in strengthening the democratic process, offering a roadmap for future research and practice in political campaigning.

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