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# THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN ADVANCING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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**Abstract**
This study examined the role of digital technology in political campaigns in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Although political campaigns are critical in elections in the country but the role played by digital technology in the 2023 general elections remains a subject of concern. The study was anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory and descriptive research design. Data collection was through documentary method while content analysis mechanism was employed for data analysis. The study found out that digital technologies such as social media tremendously impact political campaigns in Nigeria. It also found out that Nigeria, with her complicated political environment, has potential with digital tool to reach far-flung audience even though concerns regarding the spread of misinformation and such challenges remain. The study therefore recommended the need to bridge the digital divide through media literacy and education for informed participation. It equally recommended the need for responsible data practices in addressing misinformation and harnessing technology's potential for positive political outcome.
**Keywords:** Technology, Digital Technology, Political Campaigns, Election, Artificial Intelligence

## 1.0 Introduction

The integration of digital technologies into political campaigns in Nigeria has marked a transformative shift in how political actors engage with voters, disseminate information, and shape electoral outcomes. Digital technologies, encompassing social media platforms, mobile applications, websites, and online advertising tools, have emerged as powerful instruments for advancing campaign strategies, particularly in a country with a growing internet user base. Digital technologies in Nigerian politics gained prominence during the 2011 general elections, when platforms like Facebook and Twitter began facilitating political discourse (Omojuwa, 2015). By the 2015 elections, these tools had become integral to campaign efforts, enabling candidates to reach wider audiences and counter misinformation in real time (Akinfemisoye, 2016). The 2023 general elections further highlighted this trend, with parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) deploying the Chart App and the Labour Party utilizing the Structure Media App to enhance grassroots mobilization (Ezeibe et al., 2023). These milestones reflect a rapid evolution driven by Nigeria's expanding digital infrastructure and a youthful, tech-savvy population.

The uses of digital technologies have revolutionized voter engagement by offering direct, interactive, and cost-effective communication channels. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok have become vital for targeting Nigeria's youth, who form a significant electoral demographic (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). For example, Peter Obi's 2023 presidential campaign leveraged these platforms to build a viral online movement, challenging traditional political structures (Odesola, 2023). The #EndSARS protests of 2020 also showcased how digital activism can influence political agendas, a momentum that carried into subsequent elections (Adebayo, 2021).The rise of digital technologies in Nigerian political campaigns offers both opportunities and risks for democracy. While they enhance participation and transparency, their misuse can undermine trust and polarize society (Mustapha & Omar, 2023). Balancing innovation with regulation is key to ensuring their positive contribution to Nigeria's democratic process.Traditional political campaigning methods

have historically encompassed a range of activities, including rallies, speeches, and door-to-door canvassing, with rallies organized by political candidates to connect with voters, present their platforms, and generate enthusiasm among supporters (Redner, 2019). Speeches providing candidates with a platform to articulate their vision, policies, and messages to potential voters and door-to-door canvassing involving campaign volunteers visiting individual homes to engage with voters, distribute campaign materials, and discuss the candidate's platform (Kreiss, et al., 2018).

Nigeria's political campaigns have undergone a dramatic change in tactics and appeal since the introduction of computers and the internet. Political advertising has undergone a fundamental change as a result of the internet's growth, which allowed political parties to use affordable online ads with a wide audience (Redner, 2019; Kreiss, et al., 2018). Social media platforms have become essential to contemporary political campaigns, providing a direct channel for candidate-voter interaction, campaign message dissemination, and supporter mobilization. Additionally, the integration of computer technologies has facilitated the shift towards data-driven campaigns, including micro-targeting and personalized advertising strategies (Redner, 2019; Kreiss, et al., 2018).

Computers are utilized in diverse ways in modern political campaigns, influencing the political landscape in several significant ways, with micro-targeting and data-driven strategies becoming prevalent, enabling campaigns to identify potentially persuadable voters and tailor personalized messaging, thereby reshaping campaign tactics and voter outreach (Hegselmann, et al., 2015; Sumpter, 2018; Bennett, 2016). While social media platforms play a crucial role as a campaign tool, allowing candidates to engage with voters, promote their agendas, and mobilize support on a larger scale (Redner, 2019; Kreiss, et al., 2018). However, the increasing reliance on technology in political campaigns has raised ethical concerns related to data privacy, misinformation, and the potential for manipulation, prompting the need for regulatory frameworks and guidelines (Benigni, et al., 2019). Addressing these ethical issues is essential to maintaining the integrity of democratic processes and the public's confidence in political institutions, as technology continues to play an increasingly significant part in political campaigning in Nigeria. The ethical and responsible use of technology in political campaigns requires striking a balance between maximizing its advantages and reducing its moral risks. It is in respect to the above; the study relied on the descriptive research design and content analytical techniques to explore the use of digital technology in advancing political campaigns in Nigeria.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Digital Technology: Role and Historicisation

The emergence of digital technology and the internet inclusive in the 1990s brought about a revolution in political campaigning, introducing two significant innovations: campaign websites and email lists. Exploring the impact of these tools on reshaping the connection between campaigns and voters is essential to understanding their significance. In the mid-1990s, the first campaign websites made their debut, reflecting the initial exploration of the digital realm by the general public. These rudimentary websites often constructed by volunteers with basic HTML skills, primarily aimed to offer fundamental information about the candidate, their stances on important issues, and press releases. Although features such as online fundraising and interactive elements were absent, these websites laid the groundwork for the sophisticated campaign websites prevalent today (Politico Magazine, 1996).

Email lists emerged in 1990's as another pivotal tool for political campaigns. While contemporary resources like "How to Build a Political Email List" by The Campaign Workshop primarily concentrate on current strategies for developing effective lists, they implicitly acknowledge the enduring significance of email for campaign communication (The Campaign Workshop, n.d.). Email lists provided campaigns with a means to nurture connections with supporters, distribute updates and announcements, and mobilize them for specific actions. Unlike traditional mail, email offered a more cost-effective and timely approach to reach a targeted audience. In terms of applications, data analytics and micro-targeting are increasingly shaping modern political campaigns, as evidenced by the growing use of data-driven personalization in political communication (Witzleb& Paterson,

2021). This involves collecting and analyzing voter data to identify and target specific demographics, with the rise of social media further amplifying this practice. The accessibility of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools raises concerns about the potential misuse of large language models for large-scale micro-targeting efforts.
Studies have shown that personalized political ads tailored to individuals' personalities are more effective, highlighting the impact of personalized messaging (Simchon et al., 2024). However, the ethical considerations of data collection and micro-targeting have garnered significant attention. Scholars have addressed the potential risks of using AI and micro-targeting to craft messages that resonate with individuals based on personality traits, while the impact on voter privacy, democratic discourse, and electoral integrity is also a key focus of ethical and policy discussions (Simchon et al., 2024). The rise of online fundraising platforms has fundamentally transformed political campaign finance by providing secure and efficient means to gather funds. These platforms act as virtual hubs where individuals can conveniently and safely contribute, allowing campaigns to optimize fundraising through streamlined donations and a wider network of supporters, ultimately increasing accessibility and inclusivity. Furthermore, online platforms empower campaigns to engage with small donors, with recent data showing a majority of online donations under $25, highlighting the importance of crowd funding and grassroots efforts. By cultivating a loyal base of recurring small donors, campaigns can raise significant sums each quarter, leveling the playing field and creating a more inclusive landscape through the "collective power" of small donations (Piper, et al., 2024).
The shift towards online donations has significantly impacted campaign finance, with recent analyses showing it has become the majority fundraising method for congressional candidates. This reshapes campaign dynamics by enabling candidates to raise substantial sums online and reach a wider audience, diminishing reliance on traditional methods (Piper, et al., 2024).The significant role of social media as a platform for live broadcasts, virtual town halls, and direct candidate-voter interaction cannot be overemphasized. Illustrating how political campaigns utilize social media to host live events, enabling candidates to engage with voters in real-time, articulate their vision, and address pressing issues. This direct, interactive approach through social media platforms has proven instrumental in enhancing candidate-voter communication and mobilization (Ate, et al., 2023).

### 2.1.1 Digital Technology and Political Campaigns

The implementation of online tools for voter registration, phone banking, and volunteer coordination has significantly streamlined campaign communication and mobilization efforts. Digital platforms have facilitated voter registration processes and volunteer coordination, thereby improving the campaign's operational efficiency. Furthermore, the integration of online tools for phone banking has enabled campaigns to reach a broader audience and mobilize supporters more effectively. The impact of digital campaigning on voter turnout and participation constitutes a pivotal application of how digital strategies have influenced voter engagement, leading to increased voter turnout, active participation in political discussions, and heightened involvement in the electoral process (Ate, et al., 2023).
Computers have demonstrable positive effects on political campaigns, as documented in research by Boulianne (2015) and Terren et al. (2021) that highlight increased voter outreach and engagement. Digital platforms allow campaigns to reach a wider audience, facilitate direct candidate-voter interaction, and mobilize supporters, ultimately contributing to enhanced civic participation and political engagement. Transparency and accessibility to campaign information have also been enhanced with computer use, according to studies by Persily & Tucker (2020) and Lewandowsky et al. (2020). Digital media facilitates the dissemination of campaign information, providing voters with greater access to candidate platforms, policy proposals, and electoral processes. Finally, the literature, including work by Adena et al. (2015) and Ate et al. (2023), underscores the democratization of campaign finance through small-dollar donations facilitated by digital platforms.
Online fundraising empowers grassroots supporters to contribute financially, reducing reliance on large donors and promoting a more inclusive approach to campaign financing. The increasing use of computers in political campaigns, while offering undeniable benefits, also presents significant challenges and risks associated with

digital strategies. These challenges include the rise of misinformation and foreign interference. Scholarly works by Stroud (2010) and Van Bavel et al. (2021) point to the rise of misinformation and "fake news" campaigns, where the rapid dissemination of unverified or misleading information through digital channels raises concerns about its impact on public discourse and electoral processes. Furthermore, research by Banks et al. (2021) and Marozzo and Bessi (2018) examine how social media algorithms contribute to echo chambers and political polarization.

The selective exposure to ideologically aligned content on digital platforms is linked to the exacerbation of political polarization, potentially leading to societal divisions and reduced exposure to diverse viewpoints. Finally, studies by Scheufle and Moy (2021) and Gagliarducci et al. (2020) delve into the security vulnerabilities and potential for foreign interference. The reliance on digital tools and platforms exposes campaigns to cyber security risks, including the threat of foreign influence, data breaches, and online manipulation.Computers have undeniably reshaped political campaigns especially in Nigeria, making digital tools essential for everything from voter outreach to fundraising. Looking ahead, several emerging trends promise to further transform campaign strategies, offering a glimpse into a future filled with both exciting possibilities and significant challenges.

Advanced algorithms are another vast datasets of voter information, allowing campaigns to personalize messages and outreach strategies with unmatched precision. This could lead to highly effective campaigns with laser-focused messaging that resonates deeply with specific voter segments. However, concerns remain about the potential for manipulation and privacy violations. As research by Grimmer (2019) highlights, micro-targeting raises ethical questions about exploiting individual biases and swaying voters through undue influence. Additionally, as Narayanan and Shmatikov (2008) point out, the ability to collect and analyze such vast amounts of personal data raises privacy concerns that need to be addressed.

Conversational AI tools like Chabot and virtual assistants are already being used for direct voter interaction, answering questions, providing information, and mobilizing supporters (Chattopadhyay et al., 2020). The future might see AI-powered Chabot engaging in more complex conversations, potentially blurring the line between human and machine interaction (Meel et al., 2023). This could allow for 24/7 voter engagement and a more personalized experience, but also raises concerns about transparency and the potential for AI bias to influence these interactions. Social media platforms are likely to remain a central battleground for political campaigns. However, the way campaigns utilize these platforms is likely to change. We can expect a rise in "deep fakes" and other forms of synthetic media designed to influence voters (Shao et al., 2020). This highlights the growing importance of media literacy for voters to discern real from fabricated content. Additionally, ongoing debate can be expected over regulations around social media content and political advertising (Wagner et al., 2021).

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) have the potential to revolutionize political campaigning by creating immersive experiences for voters. Imagine attending virtual town halls or experiencing a candidate's policy proposals firsthand through AR (Bimber, 2021). While still in its early stages, VR/AR for political engagement holds significant promise, as research by Konstantinidis et al. (2022) suggests. This technology could enhance voter understanding of complex issues and increase engagement, but questions remain about accessibility and the potential for a virtual divide if certain segments of the population lack access to this technology.As campaigns rely more heavily on digital tools, cyber security becomes paramount. Protecting sensitive data from breaches and foreign interference will be critical. Additionally, campaigns will need to develop effective strategies to counter online misinformation and "fake news" campaigns (Huang et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2017). This will require ongoing vigilance and collaboration between campaigns, social media platforms, and fact-checking organizations.

**2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted technological determinism theory as framework of analysis. The concept of technological determinism boasts a rich and multifaceted history, with roots tracing back to early social theorists like Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) (Veblen, 1919).). Unlike some singular groundbreaking ideas, however, technological

determinism evolved through the works of many scholars, making it difficult to pinpoint a single founder (Veblen, 1919). Marshall McLuhan (1964), famous for his dictum "the medium is the message," and Melvin Kranzberg (1985), who explored the social and cultural implications of technological inventions, are other prominent figures who significantly shaped the theory (McLuhan, 1964; Kranzberg, 1985). At its core, technological determinism posits that technological progress is the primary driving force of social change. Society adapts and moulds itself around the capabilities and limitations of new technologies, as seen with the rise of literacy and mass communication following the invention of the printing press, or the internet's impact on global connectivity and information dissemination. These are just a few examples that illustrate how technological advancements can fundamentally reshape societies. In the context of political campaigns, technological determinism argues that the rise of computers and the internet has fundamentally transformed how campaigns operate. This digital revolution can be seen in several key areas; traditional methods of reaching voters, like town criers or mass mailings, have been largely eclipsed by online advertising. Digital platforms offer wider reach; more targeted messaging based on demographics and interests, and the potential for real-time engagement with voters (Chattopadhyay et al., 2020). Data-driven campaigns with micro-targeting leverage vast datasets of voter information to personalize communication and outreach strategies (Wagner, et al., 2021).

While technological determinism offers a valuable lens for understanding the transformative impact of computers on political campaigns, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Here are some key criticisms. Critics argue that the theory overemphasizes the power of technology and underestimates the role of human agency and social structures in shaping how technology is developed and used (Bijker, et al., 2012). Humans make choices about how to develop and implement technologies, and social and cultural contexts heavily influence these choices. For instance, how a society regulates social media platforms can significantly affect how they are used in political campaigns. The theory does not fully account for the social, political, and economic factors that influence how technology is adopted and integrated (Mackenzie &Wajcman, 1999). The impact of computers on political campaigns might vary depending on a country's level of digital literacy, infrastructure, and existing political culture. For example, the role of social media in swaying voters might be more pronounced in countries with high internet penetration compared to those with limited access.

While the technological determinism framework provides a valuable lens for understanding the transformative impact of computers on political campaigns, a more nuanced approach is essential. Future research on the intersection of technology and political campaigns in Nigeria might benefit from exploring these social and human elements alongside the undeniable transformative power of technology itself.

## 3.0 Methodology

Data collection for the study was through documentary method while content analysis mechanism was employed for data analysis.

## 4.0 Data Analysis

### 4.1 Utilizing Technology in Nigeria Political Campaigns

Technology has become a transformative force in Nigeria’s political campaigns, enhancing outreach, engagement, and transparency while introducing new challenges. Outreach and Engagement ensure that candidates and parties use platforms like Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to reach voters, particularly the youth, who constitute ~37 million of Nigeria’s electorate (NOI Polls, 2023). In the 2023 elections, Peter Obi of the Labour Party leveraged social media to build a strong online presence, mobilizing supporters with hashtags like #Obidient (BBC, 2023). Candidates live stream campaign events on platforms like YouTube and Instagram to reach wider audiences, especially during COVID-19 restrictions in earlier cycles (CDD, 2023). Parties use data-driven ads to target specific demographics, such as urban voters or regional groups, with tailored messages (Premium Times, 2023). Political parties and civil society organizations use SMS campaigns and apps to educate voters on registration, polling locations, and candidate profiles. For example,

INEC's voter education campaigns in 2023 utilized SMS blasts (INEC, 2022). Online Platforms, related websites and apps like BudgIT and Enough is Enough Nigeria provide voter guides and candidate manifestos, encouraging informed voting (BudgIT, 2023).

Crowd funding and Digital fundraising enable candidates like Peter Obi in 2023 used platforms like Flutterwave and Paystack for crowd funding, enabling diaspora and grassroots supporters to contribute (Vanguard, 2023). Digital payment systems streamlined campaign donations, reducing reliance on traditional "godfather" funding (Transparency International, 2023). In terms of data analytics and polling, parties employ data analytics to analyze voter sentiment, track campaign performance, and refine strategies. For instance, polls by NOI Polls and Stears provided insights into voter preferences during the 2023 campaigns (NOI Polls, 2023). Social listening tools monitor online conversations, helping candidates respond to public concerns in real time (CDD, 2023). Social media enables candidates to reach millions instantly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. In 2023, 60% of Nigerians accessed campaign content online (NOI Polls, 2023). Digital campaigns reduce reliance on expensive physical rallies or billboards, which can cost up to ₦50 million in states like Anambra (Business Day, 2022). Online platforms allow marginalized groups, including the diaspora, to participate in campaigns through donations or advocacy (Vanguard, 2023). It is not without saying that disinformation and misinformation amplifies false narratives, with parties accused of hiring influencers to spread propaganda or attack opponents.

### 4.1.1 Digital Technology and 2023 General Elections

In 2023, fake news targeting candidates' ethnicity or religion was rampant (CDD, 2023). Deep fakes and manipulated videos further erode trust, with limited regulatory oversight (Premium Times, 2023). In terms of digital divide, only 55% of Nigerians have internet access, limiting digital campaigns' reach in rural areas where traditional methods dominate (World Bank, 2023). Poor infrastructure, like unreliable electricity, hampers access to online campaign content (CDD, 2023). A critical illustration was the technical failures arising from INEC's iReV portal faced delays in result uploads during the 2023 elections, triggering protests and accusations of rigging (Punch, 2023). BVAS malfunctions in some polling units undermined voter confidence (Guardian Nigeria, 2023). Campaign websites and donation platforms are vulnerable to hacking, risking data breaches or fund misappropriation (Transparency International, 2023). Candidates face online harassment, including trolling and cyber bullying, which can deter participation (CDD, 2023). Older voters and those in remote areas are less likely to engage with digital campaigns, creating an urban-rural divide (NOI Polls, 2023). Technology has revolutionized Nigerian political campaigns, enabling broader outreach, youth engagement, and transparency through tools like social media, iReV, and BVAS. However, challenges like disinformation, the digital divide, and technical glitches highlight the need for robust infrastructure and regulations. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can harness technology to foster more inclusive, transparent, and effective campaigns, strengthening its democratic process.

Drawing from the above therefore, the findings revealed that digital technologies such as social media significantly impact the campaign process in Nigeria. In addition, Nigeria, has a complicated political environment which if its digital tools and technologies are managed effectively, has the opportunities of meeting the current and future digital campaign process, inclusive of campaign funding which has been democratized via online fundraising platforms, but if not, her citizens; the present and the future may be alienated in the fast growing trend in digital technology, visa a viz difficulties with digital tool enabled campaigns to reach audiences who are spread geographically.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Digital technologies have undeniably reshaped political campaigning in Nigeria, offering new avenues for engagement, mobilization, and fundraising. To harness these tools effectively, stakeholders must address challenges related to misinformation, digital literacy, and regulatory frameworks. Promoting ethical standards and inclusive access to digital platforms will be crucial in strengthening Nigeria's democratic processes.

**6.0 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Since digital divide remains a barrier to inclusive participation, particularly in underserved rural regions of Nigeria, government and private telecom providers should invest in internet infrastructure expansion and provide subsidies or zero-rated access to civic education platforms during elections. Also, since a significant portion of the population lacks the skills to navigate social media platforms, it is therefore recommended that government, civil society, and political parties should invest in nationwide digital literacy campaigns, particularly targeting rural populations, first-time voters, and older demographics.

2. Developing guidelines for ethical data collection, usage, and micro-targeting alongside implementing training programs for campaign staff can ensure responsible and transparent use of voter data in campaigning, while promoting ethical data practices and compliance with privacy regulations.

3. To foster a responsible digital campaign ecosystem, comprehensive regulations should be emplaced through collaborative efforts between technology experts, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders. These regulations should address critical issues such as misinformation, data privacy, and foreign interference, while simultaneously promoting digital inclusion by bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to online political participation for all citizens. In addition to equipping future voters and the general population with the critical skills needed to navigate the digital information landscape, a two-pronged approach is recommended. First, by integrating media literacy and critical thinking education into school curricula, students will develop the ability to discern information from misinformation. Second, launching public awareness campaigns that emphasize the importance of verifying information before sharing it on social media platforms can further enhance information literacy across the broader population.

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