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Influence of Ideological Themes in Social Media Political Campaigns on Voters' Education and Participation in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted mixed research methods to investigate how ideological themes in social media political campaigns have influenced voters' education and participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Through questionnaire and interview research instruments, the study found that in the last 2023 General Elections, Facebook was more often used for political campaigns in Nigeria compared to Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, google+, Facebook, WhatsApp and Blogs. These social media platforms, as the findings demonstrated, were more accessible to the voters thus, have easily become tools for political campaigns and were used to a great extent for that purpose. Unfortunately, as finding indicated, the ideological themes dominant in these platforms (social media) were to a great extent, negative as they were dominated by insults, abuse of opponents, hate speeches, falsehood, blame shifting, ethnocentric and religious undertones, anxiety and apathy among others, thereby, to a great extent, contributing to apathy among majority of voters in participating in the elections. Posting, commenting and sharing were the various ways through which those ideological campaign messages were spread to voters during the period of the last

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elections. The study concluded that social media has come to stay as platforms for use among stakeholders during political campaigns but its influence is abused by negative ideological construction which to a great extent, affects voters' education and turn up in elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Influence; ideological themes; social media; political campaigns; voters' education and participation; 2023 general elections.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media political campaigns are avenues through which political parties and candidates unveil their intentions and manifestos to potential voters to woo and attract their votes. Political campaigns are times for massive voter education about the ideologies of political parties. It is the mobilization of forces either by political parties or candidates to influence electorates and achieve desired political objectives. Social media provides political candidates the channels to sensitize target audience segments and sharpen public perception of their candidature as better representatives of the people [1]. In fact, "it is through campaign communication that impulses to participate are energized, issues are defined, and choices for voting decisions are conveyed" [2]. The ideological theme adopted really determines the suitability or otherwise of any political campaign. As a result, politicians and political parties use it as an important and potent tool to "express their views and feelings to the public with the intention of reshaping and redirecting the electorates' opinions to align with theirs" [3]. In doing so, the media, particularly social media become handy for construction of such messages to potential voters during political campaigns. "Historically, citizen's participation in the political processes has been considered a fundamental element of an ideal democracy. Thus, participation represents a significant component in political communication and democratic institution" (Sahly, Shao & Kwon, 2019).

"Over the last decade, there has been accelerated use of social media globally. This situation is occasioned by the extraordinary growth of information and communications technologies (ICTs), which ushered in the phenomenon of social media through the popularization of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Flickr, and YouTube" [4]; and has introduced a new dimension to political communication wherein electioneering campaigns and scouting for votes by political office-seekers and political parties are done by

utilizing the vast opportunities provided by social media.

These platforms are used to register political interests, push out ideological themes/slogans and sharpen individual political profiles as well as persuasively appeal to be voted for [5]. "The political theatre for most successful electioneering campaigns in today's world is located on the social media and most electoral battles, nowadays, are fought and won through the social media. Access to social media is easy and could be done anywhere, in ones' office, home, while waiting in the car, in the comfort of people's bedroom, etc., using smart phones, laptops, and other forms of communication devices at the disposal of people" [6].

Despite the increasing use of social media for political mobilization in contemporary democracy, there is also a great concern about the way the platforms construct political campaign messages and the impact of such ideological themes on voter's education and participation in elections (Zhuravskaya, Petrova, & Enikolopov, [7]. For instance, Saeed & Ilkhanizadeh [8] examined mental psychology of voters, social media marketing, corporate social responsibility and political campaigns perspectives signaling the ultimate relevance of social media and the huge influences its messages bring to bear on a target social system. It shows therefore that there is a phenomenal increase in the use of social media for political campaigns and users of these platforms have different ways of framing messages to influence their potential voters and supporters. However, there is a huge empirical gap in the previous literature on how the ideological themes of political campaign messages in social media impacted voter education and contributed to their participation in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The problem this study seeks to investigate, therefore, is the kind of ideological themes dominant in political campaigns in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria and how such ideologies influenced voters and contributed to their education and participation in the elections.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study was set to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To find out social media platforms used for diffusion of ideological themes of political campaigns in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.
- ii. To ascertain the various ways such platforms were used for diffusion of ideological themes of political campaigns in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.
- iii. To identify the dominant ideological themes in social media political campaigns in Nigeria's 2023 general elections.
- iv. To determine the influence of social media ideological themes on voter education
- v. To verify whether ideological themes in social media campaigns influenced voters participation in the Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Ideology is a core theory in discourse analysis, especially when dealing with media discourse. Ideology can be viewed as a way of representing the world. In this sense, our views of the world are ideologically and symbolically constructed. Ideology is considered to be a multidimensional concept. It has normative and political dimensions. Ohme, [9] describes "ideology as '... the basis of the social representations shared by members of groups". "This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and to act accordingly" [10]. "This connotation relates to more judgment and values, which is of relevance to this thesis. From a political perspective, ideology is viewed as 'the groundwork for the most fundamental political standings - how should society be organized, what is the role of the state, what kind of government is desirable" [11]. 'Political reading' recognises that politics is not natural, but 'contingent, plural and conflictual' (Carver & Hyvarinen, 1997, p. 6). Political ideology, therefore, represents our political philosophy, thought, opinion or idea which is captures in our political manifestoes and campaigns. As opinion, political ideologies are capable of influencing voters' behaviour and participation in an election.

Different theorists (Fairclough & Wodak 2000; [12,13] Van Dijk 2005) have approached "the

links between media, power, and ideology in contemporary societies; identifying multiple strategies usually employed by the media to serve the power, either explicitly or through linguistic practices in disguise". Moreover, according to Martín [14], "the media institutions interpret the world through socially constructing stable meaning by providing its public tools and frameworks and even being able to integrate contradictions within the discourses of dominant ideologies".

"Consequently, an increase in the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google+ and Myspace, among others generally has seen a tremendous increase in use for political activism. More and more people get news via digital media, they increasingly access news via mobile devices (especially smartphones), and rely on social media and other intermediaries in terms of how they access and find news" (Boulianne, 2015; Borah, 2016; David, Zhitomirky-Geffet, Koppel & Uzan, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fountaine, 2017; Sweetser&Lariscy, 2008); [15] suggesting that the prominence of social media, particularly in politics has the potential of positively influencing political participation [16] Khang, Ki & Ye, 2012; Stienglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013), and electoral process in general if properly utilized. Okolo, Ugonna, Nebo & Obikeze [17] paint the following scenario surrounding the effects of social media in the marketing of political candidates in Nigeria: The use of social media platforms are important tools within political communication campaigns to secure victory and encourage interaction between political parties/candidates and voters.

"There is good evidence largely from the existing empirical literature to suggest therefore, that social media is now being used in political campaigns to circulate diverse campaign messages and ideological themes to various constituents who have interest in the political career and aspirations of a candidate" (Okoro & Kwafor, 2013; Sorah, 2016; Williams & Gulati, 2013). Indeed, there is a relationship between social media and politics (Abbott, MacDonald & Givens, 2013; Ender, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010 [18-27] and through social media, political mobilization and support is sustainable [28] (Kreiss, 2016) if effectively utilized. "The ubiquitous access of social media has no doubt, democratized electoral effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more engagement in the political process. This means that voters

have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages" [27].

"While some studies have shown that social media are essential social force that lubricate the engine room of democracy in Africa (Borah, 2016; Nagourney, 2008), and are no doubt, revolutionizing the process of political communication and expanding the frontiers of political participation (Suntai & Targema, 2017); other research has shown that social media are sometimes used inappropriately by political aspirants and their supporters which affect the fairness in political campaigns and processes at large" [29]. To this connection, Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele & Popoola [30] found that "social media was the most frequently used media in the election, followed by radio, television and newspaper". Bandipo [31] revealed that "the new media and its ability to disseminate information in geometric proportions is one of the critical factors responsible for the avoidance of post-election crisis in Nigeria. To Bandipo [31], the new media impacted positively on the Nigeria 2015 presidential elections". Babaleye, Ibitoye & Odorume [32] also found that "social media, in spite of their excesses play positive roles to ensure and enhance durable democracy in Nigeria". Okolo, Ugonna, Nebo & Obikeze [17] found that "social media serve as credible tools and are capable of influencing the image of political candidates in Nigeria". The use of social media according to Madueke et al. [33], has grossly affected "the participation of individual in the day to day political process". Utilizing social media according to Bello, Yusuf & Yusuf [34], "is an effective strategy for arousing the interest of, for example, university undergraduates in political participation".

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Responsibility Media theory and supported by the agenda setting theory. On one hand, Social Responsibility Media Theory is relevant to this study because it is a theory that reconciles independence of the media with obligations to society. It clearly defines the obligations of the media to the society as Anaeto, Onabajo&Osifeso [35] clearly posited:

... Freedom carries concomitant obligations and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication.

McQuail [36] outlines the principles of the social responsibility theory as:

- i. Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society; these obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of information, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance;
- ii. In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions;
- iii. The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorders or give offence to minority groups;
- iv. The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversities of their society. Giving access to various points of views and granting all the right to reply;
- v. Society and the public, following the first named principles, have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to serve the public good; and
- vi. Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

The Agenda setting theory on the other hand says that media are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), cited in Asemah [37], "in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its positions". Wimmer& Dominick [38] observe that "the theory on agenda setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicize".

"The theoretical link of the social responsibility and agenda setting theories to this study is that while social responsibility media theory shows how the media such as the social media should behave responsibly in reporting on issues such as politics. Thus, the agenda setting theory defines how the media such as the social media can responsibly form public opinion by amplifying important issues to the public for deliberation. It implies therefore that the media in setting agenda for public opinion is to do so responsibly

without abusing the privilege it has in doing so” [83].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted mixed research methods where survey research design involving quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate on how the public perceive the ideological representation of political campaigns in the social media and the impact of such representation to voter's education in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed us to harvest the strengths of width inherent in quantitative analyses and those of depth inherent in qualitative inquiries. The use of mixed methods (combination of quantitative and qualitative) was also to enable the researchers compare quantitative and qualitative data in order to understand contradictions between quantitative results and qualitative findings; reflect participants' point of view by giving equal voice to study participants and ensure that study findings are grounded in participants' experiences; foster scholarly interaction by encouraging the interaction of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods scholars; and provide methodological flexibility (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2013). It was also because both qualitative and quantitative research, in combination, provides a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone. This places the research outcomes in the position to be considered as more reliable and dependable since the strengths of one method complement the weaknesses of the other [39]. It allows researchers to profit from the benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative data in the same study while minimizing their individual shortcomings [40]. Tashakkori & Newman (2010) as cited in Fiorini, Griffiths, & Houdmont [40] have identified seven reasons often given for using mixed methods.

- i. Complementarily: to integrate two different but connected answers to a research question: one reached via a quantitative approach and the other by means of a qualitative one.
- ii. Completeness – to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by merging qualitative and quantitative findings.
- iii. Development – to use the first phase of a study to obtain research questions, data

sources or sampling frameworks for the second phase of a study.

- iv. Expansion – as in “development” but with the aim of elaborating on the information obtained in the first phase of a study.
- v. Corroboration/confirmation – to determine the integrity of inferences attained from a strand of a study by means of integrated methods.
- vi. Compensation – to compensate for the weaknesses of one method via the strengths of the other.
- vii. Diversity – to compare and contrast divergent representations of the same phenomenon (as discussed later in the Dialectic approach).

The population of the study comprised the social media users who were of voting age in the selected states in Nigeria. The states were Bauchi, Kano, Benue, Rivers, Anambra, and Lagos. These states represented one state from each of the geopolitical zones of the country which has more registered number of voters in that zone. According to INEC (2023), the number of registered voters from each of these states were as follows: (a) Bauchi (2,749,268), (b) Kano (5,921,370), (c) Benue (2,777,727), (d) Rivers (3,537,190), (e) Anambra (2,656,437), and (f) Lagos (7,060,195), bringing a total number of the population of the study to twenty four million seven hundred and two thousand, one hundred and eighty seven (24,702,187). The population of the study therefore, is twenty two million seven hundred and two thousand one hundred and eighty seven (24,702,187) registered voters who were also active social media users in the last (2023) general elections in Nigeria.

The population of 24,701,187 was quite huge and could not be studied as a whole. This study therefore, has made use of a sample size of 1111 which was statistically drawn from the population of the study using Taro Yamane (1967) statistical method of sample size determination. The method provides that, when the population of the study is greater than 100,000 the sample size of the study under the precision level of $\pm 3\%$ and the confidence level of 95% will be one thousand one hundred and eleven (1,111).

In sampling the 1111 respondents, multi-stage sampling technique involving stratified, purposive and proportionate sampling techniques was used. In the multi stage, using already existing geopolitical strata, stratified sampling technique

was used to group the country (Nigeria) into six geopolitical zones. In each of the geopolitical zones therefore, purposive sampling technique was used to sample one state; bringing the total number of states sampled in the study to six (6) as follows: (a) Bauchi State from North East, (b) Kano State from North West, (c) Benue State from North Central, (d) Anambra State from South East, (e) Rivers State from South-South, and (f) Lagos State from South West respectively. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample the six states because it assisted us to select states that have more registered voters across the geopolitical zones of the country. This is in consonant with the explanation made by Neuman [41] that purposive sampling “uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases, or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind”.

In distributing sample to the states sampled in the study, proportionate sampling technique was adopted using the following formula explained by Hayes [42] to distribute the sample proportionate to the population size of each state thus:

$$\frac{S \times n}{N}$$

Where;

S = Size of State
 N = Sample Size
 N = Total Population of the study

The proportionate sampling was done using the above formula as follows:

$$\text{Bauchi State } \frac{2749268}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 124$$

$$\text{Anambra State } \frac{2656437}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 119$$

$$\text{Benue State } \frac{2777727}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 125$$

$$\text{Rivers State } \frac{3537190}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 159$$

$$\text{Kano State } \frac{5921370}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 266$$

$$\text{Lagos State } \frac{7060195}{24702187} \times \frac{1111}{1} = 318$$

After distributing sample proportionate to the population size of each state sampled, purposive sampling technique was used to select three (3) local governments from each of the states selected, bringing the number of local

governments sampled across the states to eighteen (18). The reason purposive sampling technique was used to sample the 18 local governments was that it assisted us to sample local governments with high percentage of social media users of voting age (18 years and above). In sampling respondents, purposive sampling was again used to sample respondents from the three local governments in each state sampled in the study with Lagos state having 318, Kano 266, Rivers 159, Benue 125, Anambra 119 and Bauchi 124 respectively. Thus, bringing the total number of respondents sampled in the study to 1111. Purposive sampling was used to sample respondents in the study because this technique (purposive sampling) assisted us to sample only respondents that have access to social media and were of voting age (between 18 years and above).

The instruments used for data collection were the questionnaire and interview guide. Both instruments were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data that complemented each other and enhanced the validity of the results. While questionnaire was administered on 1093 respondents who were not activists but just mere users of social media, the interview was conducted with 18 social media activists that assisted to elicit in depth perspectives on the phenomenon been investigated. Both instruments were administered through face-to-face approach and by the use of online platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Email* and *Facebook*. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

4. RESULTS

This study, although the sample size of this study was 1111, 1093 were reached through the questionnaire instrument while the remaining 18 were reached through the interview guide. In the 1093 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents, 3% were invalid and not suitable to be analyzed while 97% were valid and suitable to be used for analysis in Anambra State; in Bauchi, 4% of the questionnaire administered were invalid while 96% were valid and suitable for analysis; in Benue State, 3% of the questionnaire administered on the respondents were invalid and not suitable for analysis while 97% were valid; in Rivers State, 5% of the total questionnaire administered were invalid and were not suitable for analysis while 95% of the questionnaire administered were valid; in Kano State, 5% of the total questionnaire administered on respondents were invalid while

95% were valid; and in Lagos, 5% of the questionnaire administered on respondents were invalid while 95% were valid and suitable for analysis. In all, the valid questionnaire rate was 1,062 copies representing 97% of the total number of the questionnaire administered, while the invalid questionnaire rate was 31 copies representing 2.8% of the total questionnaire rate administered. The mortality rate of 2.8% was insignificant to affect the data and results of this study; hence the success rate of 97% achieved was significant enough to form the basis for this analysis. Below is a table showing the returned questionnaire rate:

Table 2 reveals that Facebook (36%) representing the mean score of (64.1) was the social media platform often used for ideological representation in political campaigns, compared to WhatsApp (20%), Instagram (9%) Twitter (23%), YouTube (7%), and Blogs (5%). In the interview conducted with some social media activists, it was revealed also that users made use of different social media platforms to frame their campaign messages. They mentioned *Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, google+, Facebook* and *WhatsApp* as some of the platforms used by them. It implies. Therefore, that Facebook is used for diffusion of ideological themes in political campaigns more often compared to *Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and Blogs*.

In Table 3, data indicate that the “Obidient” ideology (60.4%) was dominant in social media political campaigns in the 2023 Nigeria’s General

Elections compared to the “Kwankwasiyya” Ideology (19.6%) and the “Emilokan” ideology (15.9%). In the interview with social media activists, data revealed that the ‘Obidient’ ideological themes dominated social media platforms in political campaigns with positive messages of hope, courage and faith the nation projecting Per Obi as the hope and only way out of the country’s economic woes to influence electorate, the Emilokan Ideological theme represented some form of self-entitlement and ethnicity judged negative multi lingual and sectional Nigeria [72-76]. According to the interviewees, during political campaigns, social media majorly become platform for users (political party members and supporters) to settle their political dissimilarities and discrepancies rather than engage in the promotion of the main manifestoes of their parties and candidates. The interviewees noted that rather than based on issues, social media political campaign ideological themes were used more to abuse, insult and defame the opponents [47-51]. They also used social media to spread hate speech, falsehoods, blame shifting, instill fear, anxiety and apathy into others and promote ethno-religious and cultural sentiments. It implies, therefore, that The Obidient ideological theme dominated social media campaigns others were more lousy and charted a path of insults, abuse, defamation of opponents; spreading hate speech, falsehoods, shifting blames, instilling fear, anxiety and apathy into others and promoting ethno-religious and cultural sentiments [52-56].

Table 1. Returned rate of the questionnaire

Questionnaire	Frequency						Total
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos	
Returned and usable	115 (97%)	119 (96%)	121 (97%)	151 (95%)	254 (95%)	302 (95%)	1062 (97%)
Not returned	4 (3%)	5 (4%)	4 (3%)	8 (5%)	12 (5%)	16 (5%)	31 (2.8%)
Total	119 (100)	124 (100)	125 (100)	159 (100%)	266 (100)	318 (100%)	1093 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2. Social media platforms utilized for ideological representation of political campaigns in Nigeria’s 2023 general elections

Response	No of respondents						Total	Mean
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos		
Facebook	36 (32)	40 (35)	48 (39.7)	60 (40)	90 (36)	101 (33)	375 (36)	64.1
whatsapp	25 (22)	30(25)	33 (27.3)	39 (26)	41 (16)	51 (16)	219 (20)	36.5
Instagram	13 (10)	11 (9)	7 (5.7)	10 (7)	20 (8)	30 (9)	91 (9)	15.1
Twitter	24 (21)	26 (21)	20 (16.6)	23 (15)	74 (29)	83 (28)	250 (23)	41
YouTube	10 (9)	7 (6)	6 (4.9)	11 (7)	19 (7)	20 (8)	73 (7)	12.1
Blogs	7 (6)	5 (4)	7 (5.7)	8 (5)	10 (4)	17 (6)	54 (5)	9.0
Total	115 (100)	119 (100)	121 (100)	151 (100)	254 (100)	302 (100)	1062 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3. Kind of political ideological themes dominant in social media in Nigeria’s 2023 general elections

Response	No of respondents						Total	Mean
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos		
Emilokan Ideology	31 (27)	20 (16.9)	15 (12.4)	40 (26.5)	17 (6.8)	46 (15.3)	169 (15.9)	28.1
Obidient Ideology	70 (60.8)	85 (71.5)	96 (79.4)	96 (63.7)	56 (22)	238 (78.8)	641 (60.4)	106.8
Articulated Ideology	9 (7.8)	7 (5.8)	5 (4.1)	9 (5.9)	4 (1.5)	10 (3.3)	44 (4.1)	7.3
Kwankwasiyya ideology	5 (4.3)	7 (5.8)	5 (4.1)	6 (3.9)	177 (69.7)	8 (2.6)	208 (19.6)	34.6
Total	115 (100)	119 (100)	121 (100)	151 (100)	254 (100)	302 (100)	1061 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4. Influence of social media ideological themes of political campaigns on voting behavior in Nigeria’s 2023 general elections

Response	No of Respondents						Total	Mean
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos		
To a great extent	97 (85)	98 (83)	106 (88)	131 (86.8)	224 (88.3)	283 (93.8)	939 (88.5)	156.5
To a little extent	13 (11)	17 (14)	9 (7.3)	10 (6.6)	20 (7.8)	12 (3.9)	81(7.6)	13.5
Difficult to say	5 (4)	4 (3)	6 (4.7)	10 (6.6)	10 (3.9)	7 (2.3)	42 (3.9)	7
Total	115 (100)	119 (100)	121 (100)	151 (100)	254 (100)	302 (100)	1061 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5. Ways users spread political campaign ideological messages to others in the social media

Response	No of respondents						Total	Mean
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos		
Sharing	28 (24.3)	29 (24.3)	31 (25.7)	40 (26.5)	73 (28.7)	70 (23.1)	271 (25.5)	45.1
Posting	38 (33)	41 (34.5)	42 (34.8)	55 (36.4)	88 (34.7)	112 (37)	376 (35.4)	62.6
Commenting	21 (18)	24 (20.1)	25 (20.6)	30 (20)	56 (22)	90 (29.8)	246 (23.1)	41
Texting	15 (13.4)	14 (11.7)	13 (10.7)	17 (11.2)	21 (8.3)	17 (5.7)	97 (9.1)	16.1
Calling	13 (11.3)	11 (9.3)	10 (8.2)	9 (5.9)	16 (6.3)	13 (4.3)	72 (6.7)	12
Total	115 (100)	119 (100)	121 (100)	151 (100)	254 (100)	302 (100)	1061 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 reveals that social media political campaign used ideological themes to influence voting behavior to a great extent (85.5%). In the interviews conducted with social media activists, data also revealed that social media were actually used significantly to build ideological themes in political campaigns in Nigeria. They noted that social media has indeed democratized the media system; thereby offering greater freedom for participation by all. It implies therefore that social media are instrumental to voting pattern and used for creation and diffusion of ideological themes of political campaigns in Nigeria to a great extent [57-64].

Table 5 revealed that posting (35.4%) followed by sharing (25.5%) and commenting (23.1%) were used more often to spread messages to others during the 2023 political campaigns in Nigeria compared to texting (9.1%) and calling (6.1%). In the interviews conducted, it is revealed that during political campaigns, users utilize social media to post their comments and images, share other people’s comments and images, comment on posts from others, send text to others, and call others. The implication of the above data is that posting followed by sharing and commenting are used more often to spread political campaign messages to others during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Table 6. Influence of dominant Ideological themes in the social media on voters education in the Nigeria’s 2023 general elections

Response	No of Respondents						Total	Mean
	Anambra	Bauchi	Benue	Rivers	Kano	Lagos		
Positive attitude towards elections	23 (20.4)	28 (24)	29 (24)	35 (23)	73 (28.7)	71 (23.5)	259 (24.4)	43.1
Negative attitude towards elections	79 (69.9)	78 (66)	86 (71)	109 (72)	173(68.2)	222 (73.5)	747 (70.4)	124.5
Indifference	13 (9.7)	12 (10)	6 (5)	7 (5)	8 (3.1)	9 (3)	55 (5.2)	9.1
Total	115 (100)	119 (100)	121 (100)	151 (100)	254 (100)	302 (100)	1061 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 6 revealed that there was more of negative attitude (70.4%) among electorates due to the kind of ideology represented in the social media political campaigns in Nigeria’s 2023 general elections, while those with positive attitude towards the elections was few (24.4%). In the interview conducted, data revealed that the ideological themes dominant in the social media during political campaigns in Nigeria promoted negative rather than positive knowledge of voters towards the elections. According to the respondents, ideology dominant in the social media during campaigns did not, to a great extent, give potential voters justifiable reasons they should vote in or vote out a political candidate or party; rather, it was largely abuse of each other, blame shifting, spread of falsehoods and fake news against each other, and the spread of distorted information which subsequently instilled fear in voters and promoted voter apathy [65-71]. This implies that the ideology dominant in the social media during political campaigns promotes voters’ apathy rather than encourage them to participate in the elections in Nigeria.

5. DISCUSSION

Facebook was used more often for ideological representation in the 2023 political campaigns compared to Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, google+, Facebook, WhatsApp and Blogs which were also used to spread political campaign messages during the period [77-83]. This finding agrees with the finding in the study by Apuke & Apollos [29] that Facebook was used in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba, and Ekwueme&Ugwuta [43] which found, however, that facebook was the most abused social medium given the number of subscribers.

Further findings of the study revealed that posting, commenting and sharing were the ways

often used to spread political campaign messages among users in the Nigeria’s 2023 general elections. This is consistent with previous findings by Ayesha & Ayesha [44], to the effect that, social media is a medium to be up to date about the socio-political happenings around us as well as for getting and sharing information. According to Rasmus, Alessio & Antonis [15], Internet users ... embrace these new opportunities to get, share, and comment on news....

The finding also indicated that hat the most dominant ideology in social media political campaigns in the 2023 general elections was the Obidient ideology driven by youths and other people of good conscience, then the Kwankwasiyya Movement driven by Kano state loyalist of the ideology and few elements in neighbouring states, Emilokan driven mainly by South Western regions’ elites, another dominant ideological themewas the Aticulated ideology driven by Hausa Northerners. All these ideological themes except one, were mostly negative in expression, based on insults, hate speeches, falsehoods, blame shifting and the promotion of ethno-religious and cultural sentiments. This finding is supported by the earlier scholars [29] Borah, 2016; [45, Nagourney, 2008; Oyenuga, 2015; Suntai & Targema, 2017) who showed how social media platforms can sometime be dysfunctional in their political mobilization role. Apuke and lyendo (2017), for instance, in their study found that “in political campaigns, social networking sites can turn out to be weapons in the hands of political candidates, in which various video releases, voice lines, feature reports, headlines, and broadcasts are made to smear other political candidates, pushing out deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, abusive speech and misinformation as a strategy for influencing public opinion in their favour”.

Another finding was that the kind of ideology dominant in the social media during political campaigns instead of voter education, promoted voters' apathy in the elections in Nigeria. This finding corroborates that of Rasmus, Alessio & Antonis [15], and validates Kiranda, Mugisha & Ojok [46], submission that, "political agents and organizations have resorted to using social media platforms mostly for self-promotion and less for deliberations on policy positions and contentious political issues, thus, increasing citizen use of social media to express political opinions and interests have not met corresponding programmatic responses by decision makers".

Furthermore, finding revealed that social media political campaign used ideological themes to influence voting behavior to a great extent (85.5%). However, the dominant ideology in social media political campaigns during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria had negative effect on voter's participation in the elections to a great extent. This agrees with the finding from the study by Humphrey [45] which indicates that social media were used as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of political parties in the 2011 general elections. According to him, character assassination, violence, and abuses (hate) speeches were carried out, which further increased the division between the North and Southern part of the country.

6. CONCLUSION

Facebook is the social media platform often used for political campaigns during elections in Nigeria compared to Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, google+, Facebook, WhatsApp and Blogs which were also used to spread political campaign messages. These social media platforms are closest to people and thus, have easily become tools for political campaigns during elections in Nigeria and were utilized to a great extent. However, the ideological themes dominant in social media political campaigns during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were largely negative hence surrounded by insults, abuse of opponents, hate speech, falsehood, blame shifting, ethnocentric and religious undertones, anxiety and apathy among others thus, promoting ethno-religious and cultural sentiments. Posting, commenting and sharing were often used as ways to spread political campaign messages among social media users in Nigeria during elections. The kind of ideology

dominant in the social media during political campaigns promoted voters' apathy rather than encourage them to participate in the elections in Nigeria. Social media has come to stay as a platform for use among stakeholders during political campaigns but its influence is abused by negative ideological construction which to a great extent, affects voter education and turn up in elections in Nigeria.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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