

6. A Discourse of Prospects and Challenges of Multimedia Usage in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

The study was conducted to explore the effects of multimedia technology usage during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The researchers relied on secondary data sources to investigate the effects of multimedia usage. Anchored on the social responsibility theory, the study is an encouragement for media practitioners to produce multimedia content that performs the roles the society entrusts to journalists. The effect of multimedia usage during the 2023 elections was seen in election jingles, advertorials, campaign messages, posters, pictorials, and live and recorded reports from various polling units across the country were reported simultaneously. Multimedia thus gave Nigerians a real-time experience of events across the country. The usage of multimedia was multidimensional, and it affected every aspect of the electoral process, from civic engagement to disseminating effective electoral messages, increasing youth participation, and monitoring the election processes. However, malfunctioning of multimedia technologies and the use of multimedia platforms to spread misinformation, disinformation, fake news, hate speech, political propaganda, as well as the inability to access election messages as a result of a lack of digital devices, power failure, or network connectivity, were among the challenges to the use of multimedia in the elections. The researchers concluded that, overall, multimedia technologies had a tremendous impact on the election and recommended professional training on the creation of multimedia content.

Keywords: Digital media, Multimedia, Election, INEC, Nigeria

Introduction

The 2023 general election was the seventh held since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. Elections in Nigeria have continued to evoke more than occasional concern among Nigerians, given that, regardless of the appreciation that only credible elections can strengthen and foster the country's democracy, Nigeria has continued to witness a failure to conduct peaceful, free, fair, and credible elections (Ojukwu et al., 2023). The 2023 general election in Nigeria was a pivotal moment for the country's democratic journey, thanks to the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) innovative use of technology. By introducing the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), INEC intended to improve the electoral process and provide transparent results. The results viewing portal utilised multimedia elements like charts, maps, and graphs to present election results in lucid and concise terms. The reliance on the voter authentication and vote tracking mechanisms was necessary, considering the prevalent skepticism among Nigerian voters, many of whom doubted the impact of their votes (Ojukwu et al., 2023).

Multimedia has revolutionised the way we consume and interact with content, seamlessly integrating into every aspect of performance. From captivating entertainment to informative educational experiences, multimedia's versatility has redefined the communication landscape. The development of the internet has equally increased the demand for multimedia content. Studies have established that there are substantial positive relationships between the use of multimedia platforms and political

participation and knowledge, at least during election campaigns (Dimitrova et al., 2014). In view of this, this study looked at the effects of different forms of multimedia usage on electoral processes and campaigns in the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

The 2023 general election marked 24 years of uninterrupted democracy - the longest span in Nigeria's history. The election was the first nationwide ballot conducted within the context of the new Electoral Act, which the former President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari signed into law in February 2022. Sustaining Nigeria's position for using advanced technology in elections, the INEC utilised two technological innovations to improve the integrity, accuracy, and accountability of the electoral process. The BVAS ensured voter verification and authentication, while the IReV provided a public-facing voter tabulation system nationwide, using multimedia elements like charts, maps, and graphs for clarity. Nevertheless, the pre-election period was marked by uncertainty. This was predominantly a result of the prior experiences of the Nigerian electorate, many of whom have a long-held belief that their votes do not count. This belief springs from a perception of not having a say in determining their elected leaders at various levels (Ojukwu et al., 2023).

The deliberate use of multimedia platforms and technology to spread electoral messages across traditional and new media platforms was thus intended to mobilise support for and build confidence in the electoral process among voters. Elections are the harbinger of democracy, the essential equalizer of citizens in free countries through "one person, one vote" endorsements of candidates for elective offices of the state. However, the process is legitimate only if elections are free, fair, and credible (Alemika, 2011). Democracy as a form of government thrives when elections meet the constitutional muster, are credible, and the results are acceptable to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, both local and international. There are signs that this can be enhanced using technology. Therefore, this study is based on the effect that such use of technology, such as multimedia, had on the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine whether there was the use of multimedia technologies were used in elections in Nigeria
2. Find out the devices and platforms used during elections in Nigeria
3. Identify the challenges associated with the use of multimedia technologies during the 2023 elections in Nigeria

Conceptual Review

Multimedia

Different definitions, relevance, and characteristics have been ascribed to the term multimedia, including reference to it as the field concerned with the computer-controlled integration of text, graphics, drawings, still and moving images (video), animation, and audio that allows for digital

representation, storage, processing, and transmission of diverse information types (Shakya, 2018). This multifaceted medium has significant value and a lasting impact. Research in learning processes suggests that multisensory presentation of information enhances retention, as utilising multiple senses facilitates more effective knowledge absorption. Most essentially, it can also make the information more interesting to the user (Pavithra, Aathilingam & Prakash, 2019). Simply put, multimedia is the combination of two or more media so as to convey messages geared towards informing, educating, or entertaining the receivers of the message.

Multimedia means that computer information can be portrayed using audio, video, and animation in addition to traditional media, that is, images, drawings, graphics, or text. The technology behind multimedia is one that applies the interactive components of computers, such as text, sound, graphics, and videos, to deliver a piece of information (Liu et al., 2020; Xia & Liu, 2020). Multimedia can be recorded and played, presented, interacted with, or accessed by information processing devices such as high-tech and automated devices, but can be part of a live presentation (Pavithra et al., 2019; Shakya, 2018). According to Dobrican (2008), multimedia are those technologies that allow humans to hear, see, feel, read, and talk to computers. They are technologies that transform computers into a second person of some sort, making some processes seamless. In essence, these technologies provide the grounds where little human efforts are required in processes.

Election Defined

This is the formal process by which an individual is selected for public office and could also involve the act of rejecting or accepting a political proposition through the voting exercise (Eulau & Gibbins, 2024). As a process, elections make a fundamental contribution to democratic governance, as through the processes, voters are enabled to select leaders and also hold them accountable in respect of the performance of their assigned duties (Webb & Gibbins, 2024). This is an indication that the electoral process confers on the electorate the power to hire through voting, and to evaluate the performances of those they have empowered through their votes to make decisions that benefit the public. However, the electorate also has the power to remove people from office when there is failure.

Elections are also a process that reinforces the stability and legitimacy of the political community (Weeb & Gibbins, 2024). Democratic societies built on solid foundations allow for democratic procedures in decision-making. Therefore, elections are one of the numerous democratic avenues through which the people provide the requisite stability and confer legitimacy on the system. Political community, as used in the foregoing descriptions, enables the electorate, who have the responsibility to confer on others the legitimacy to lead and govern, according to the laws and dictates of the country's constitution.

Literature Review

Nigeria and the Journey to Technology-backed Elections

Nigeria has witnessed several elections since the one conducted just before the country gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960. Some of these elections have recorded widespread irregularities (Maclean & Peltier, 2023; Obiagu, 2023; Tunmibi & Olatokun, 2022). Accordingly, the nation has, since the period before the 2015 general elections, made plans to introduce a technology-

driven electoral process to reduce malpractices (Sweeney, 2015). This has been championed by INEC through various proposals for reforms of the process. The clamour for a technologically backed electoral process was also vocalised in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in the country. According to Jega and Hillier (2012), the nation decided to deploy technology to ensure the integrity and quality of the process due to several calls for reform.

The introduction of the INEC multi-function and multimedia systems like the BVAS, the INEC result viewing (IReV) portal, and the INEC voter enrolment device (IVED) are recent attempts to solve identified election irregularities (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2022). According to Sibe and Kurnet (2023), the Electoral Act of 2022 was introduced to provide the legal framework for the adoption and deployment of these technologies. This emphasises the importance of a legal framework for a digitised electoral system to be effective, as was also pointed out in the work by Medoye and Tukur (2022). Challenges identified as bedevilling the use of digital technology in the Nigerian electoral system include infrastructural deficit, poor technological base, and weak educational orientation. This is coupled with the lack of appropriate curricula required for societal transformation (Ganiyu et al., 2024). Additionally, jurisdictional complexities, technical issues, and data protection issues that may arise have also been identified as challenges to the adoption and deployment of digital technologies in the electoral processes of Nigeria (Sibe & Kurnet, 2023). These challenges are also compounded by the lack of support from a section of the stakeholders, particularly some political candidates and regions of the country, who are of the notion that the nation has not attained the technological advancement to fully digitise its electoral system. Sibe and Kurnet (2023) aligned with this view, asserting that there are emerging challenges and risks associated with the adoption of technology for Nigeria's elections.

Multimedia Usage in the 2023 Elections in Nigeria

An election is a process that is fundamental to states' development from emerging democracies and an endeavour to reinforce democracy. The link between the electoral process and the deepening of democratic values demonstrates the level to which the election process is free and fair (Adeyinka & Lawal, 2022). This is why past efforts to conduct elections in Nigeria have fallen on the table of debauched elections and electoral processes. So bad was the situation that the history of elections in Nigeria's efforts at democratisation has been a checkered one. Elections in the country have been conducted with several issues, including cases of violence and unique voting patterns in consideration of factors like ethnicity, religion, and other sentiments (Gabriel & Aniete, 2024; Isiaq et al., 2019; Muhammad, 2023).

The use and importance of multimedia in election campaigns have grown consistently over the years. Pieces of campaign-related information were placed on candidates' websites before, during, and after the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Websites, social media platforms, and Short Message Service became a common campaign tool. In 2004, political candidates moved beyond perceiving the web as an electronic brochure to viewing it as "electronic headquarters" (Foot & Schneider, 2006, as cited in Dimitrova et al., 2014). According to Hendricks and Denton (2010), in 2008 in America, newer online tools such as social networking and microblogging gained popularity and were efficiently used by the Obama campaign to marshal and organise supporters. Today, no candidate or party can enter an

election cycle without having an online presence, and "there is little doubt that the effects of the Internet and Internet tools on political campaigns at all levels will grow rapidly" (Trent & Friedenberg, 2008, p. 408, cited in Dimitrova et al., 2014, p. 96).

Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008) note that the political communication process involves various online platforms that enable citizens to engage with politics and policymakers, which include online video sharing, blogging, social networking, political websites, and podcasting. The abovementioned entails the use of various multimedia forms. Although these new media tools are widely regarded as playing a supplementary role to mainstream media by providing a user-friendly experience, multimedia makes the campaign and the political system as a whole appear more user-friendly to the average citizen, such offer a new public space to discuss politics, political ideologies, interests, and matters of national concern in Nigeria and beyond.

There are several levels of effects on citizens one might expect from multimedia use within a political communication context. The internet has a profound impact on political engagement, unfolding in a three-stage process. The first stage involves encouraging online engagement. Internet sites with diverse multimedia content should inspire citizens to revisit those sites, thereby promoting online participation. The second stage entails altering people's knowledge and attitudes through enriching content, ultimately leading to a more informed citizenry. The third and last stage involves motivating political action. The final stage, often regarded as the most crucial, requires citizens to take concrete political action such as voting, protesting, or contacting representatives (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Dimitrova et al., 2014). Thus, this process emphasises the potential of digital platforms in advancing political engagement and participation.

Assuming that using multimedia does not result in direct behavioural changes, nevertheless, these media represent a significant aspect of the political communication process from the perspective of democratic participation. According to media participation approaches, multimedia not only make a highly specialised and sometimes sole political system more understandable, but they also play a symbolically empowering role for the average citizen (Sharif, 2023; Sousa, Richter, & Nel, 2017). Rather than being excluded from the political process, the electorate is greatly empowered. Through the two-way communication framework, they can interact directly with the candidates through engaging multimedia content, devices, and platforms (Bucy & Gregs, 2001; Sharif, 2023).

Even if such collective interaction is only sensed and not actually accomplished, the very awareness of chances to take part may contribute to higher internal and external confidence in one's own abilities. In this sense, multimedia use could be greatly empowering and psychologically gratifying, making the public feel more involved in the political and electioneering process (Chen & Unal, 2023; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Wijngaarden, 2023). Their adoption could also stimulate interest in other electoral activities, such as voter education and even participation in general terms.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study rests on the social responsibility theory of the media. The media owes society an obligation to report events so that citizens would have sufficient information about electoral processes to plan their lives and avoid danger. The media has a history of public education, letting the public know what it is supposed to know and helping it to understand social problems and take rational decisions. The politicians constitute a major news source for the media, and the media is a major medium for the politicians to reach the electorate. They are conditioned by what Gurevitch and Blumber (1977) describe as a mutual power relationship (Udoakah, 2014).

The media with such a responsibility to fulfil must be responsible to the society that entrusts that obligation. It is against this backdrop that this study is anchored on the social responsibility theory. Social responsibility theory holds that the journalist who enjoys freedom to operate in a democratic society should remember that freedom goes hand in hand with responsibility. Elections come with different emotions (Ibiloye, 2024). It is especially the case in Nigeria, where corruption and bad leadership have put the country in jeopardy. A journalist or media organisation reporting on elections must ensure that views are balanced, privacy is not invaded, characters, not defamed, and seditious issues are avoided. This theory is related to the study in the sense that a journalist or media organisation covering elections will ensure that the news values of objectivity, accuracy, prominence, and significance are vehemently adhered to, so that citizens can benefit from the information and make informed decisions.

When journalists report objectively without bias to a political party, candidate, or interest, it builds public trust in the media, thereby bringing peace and evading the chaos that characterises most elections in Nigeria. A journalist who adheres to the dos and don'ts of journalism practice is socially responsible to society.

Methods

The researchers relied on secondary data sourced from online platforms. Accordingly, the search criteria include words such as "election in Nigeria," "multimedia use in Nigeria's election," and "challenges with use of technologies during elections in Nigeria" on platforms like Google Scholar and Web of Science. Initial result returned over 138,000 hits from both platforms. The inclusion criteria were relevance to the topic in discourse, which is elections, and the use of multimedia technologies and elections in Nigeria in particular. After a careful consideration of the abstract, findings, and conclusion, the number was reduced to 60 as the initial number of articles for consideration (that is, $n = 60$). However, upon further consideration, the final selection for inclusion in the analysis was 22, which implies $n = 22$ for the study.

The method of data analysis for this study was critical review, comparative analysis, and synthesis to arrive at a meaningful discourse for this study. Upon collection of relevant secondary data, the researchers arrived at the use of thematic analysis to situate the data on the current study's objectives. Therefore, themes were selected to reflect the objectives and direction of this study.

Discussion

In line with the objectives of this study and the methodology adopted, a thematic discussion of the findings is presented below:

Multimedia Technologies and Their Use in Elections

Multimedia, with its integrative features, has come to stay and is now an effective means of conveying electoral messages in Nigeria. The mass media is an influential means of information dissemination, social change, communication, social mobilisation, and socio-political education in Nigeria. The Nigerian mass media industry is a robust one. It has proved to be an efficient social and political message distribution channel that was relied upon for the dissemination of electoral information, political campaigns and participation, voters' education, and training through its multimedia messages. The media has a good understanding of what elements of multimedia to integrate to convey an effective message.

As a multimedia platform, social media has transformed the perspective of participation in politics generally. Social media has emerged as an effective and influential platform for disseminating information, influencing public opinions, as well as mobilising citizens during electoral processes. Social media now plays a major role in the country's political space, and the 2023 general elections in Nigeria are a further affirmation. Social media provides the means to reach a large audience. The Independent National Electoral Commission notes that 39.65% of registered voters for the 2023 elections are aged 18 to 34, and between the ages of 18 and 27, source their news from social media. Social media was a common tool for voter education, campaigns, and election monitoring. Despite the influence of social media, it behoves most Nigerians to understand that, as engaging and interactive as the multimedia contents and platforms are, votes are not cast online and elections are not won on social media; most youth are carried away with the online debates and forget to go out and exercise their civic rights.

During the 2023 elections in Nigeria, multimedia technologies played significant roles. However, these roles are entwined and intertwined. Discussed below are some other uses of multimedia in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, including:

a) Multimedia as a means of educating participants in elections: Multimedia contents were used for voter education during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Multimedia's ability to combine separate media in one form makes it a rich source of voter education. Even in the conventional method of learning, where audiovisual and chart models are used for imparting education, these days, the classroom demand is not limited to that accepted method; instead, it needs audio and visual media (multimedia). Multimedia integrates all of them in one system. To enhance learning through multimedia, the computer features a high-resolution display, facilitating an engaging and interactive learning experience. All this has advanced the improvement of a wide scope of computer-based training. The software package named computer-aided direction is accessible and provides a friendly interactive learning (Idowu, 2022; Odionye et al., 2023; Ogieva & Ajisebiyawo, 2023; Pavithra et al., 2019). The implication is that journalists and media practitioners also leveraged multimedia content to educate members of the public as part of their social responsibility. This aligns with the assumptions of the social responsibility of the media.

b) Multimedia in electoral process training: Multimedia was used in the 2023 elections to train election officials and voters on how to vote, where to vote to avoid invalidating a voter's ballot paper. There are various systems and intelligent tutoring systems accessible to train the voters and election

officials in numerous areas, primarily from how to use the BVAS to how to upload results online to the INEC Result Viewing Portal. As their sufficient audio clips that aid these tutorials, and an action can be seen from all orientations and repetition, so evidently, as far as practical skills are concerned, it provided visual satisfaction (Ogieva & Ajisebiyawo, 2023; Pavithra et al., 2019).

c) Social media campaign: Through social media like Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram, multimedia contents were shared by political parties and candidates to engage voters and mobilise support through the use of memes, live streams of speeches and rallies, campaign music, videos, and infographics. Notably, candidates of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) during the 2023 presidential elections utilised different social media platforms to anchor a digitally oriented campaign.

d) Multimedia advertising: Multimedia advertising was used in the 2023 elections in Nigeria for political communication, spread across candidates' websites and social media platforms using videos, catch phrases, pictures, and graphics to disseminate political messages, shape and influence public opinion (Nwaoboli & Egbulefu, 2023). These actions added some visibility to the campaigns by the different parties and their candidates during the electioneering campaigns.

e) Live reports of election results: Multimedia content, such as graphs, charts, and maps, were used by INEC to report election results. Also, with the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) Portal, the electorate could access election results electronically. This has been implemented in some of the different elections conducted after the 2023 presidential election, though the electoral body failed to comply fully with its earlier announcement to fully deploy the IREV to display results from the different polling units in the country.

f) Contents generated by users: Users used multimedia to create content in support of or against a candidate. Contents like memes, cartoons, and comic videos were used in different ways to send sarcastic messages, promotional campaigns, or misinformation. Thereby enhancing the election discussions and citizen engagement (Bolin, 2021). Social media users were able to engage with the different communication teams of their favourite candidates and political parties of choice during the period through the user content-generation capacity of digital technologies.

g) Broadcast media campaign: Radio, television, YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Instagram Live were used to air campaign interviews, political advertising, and jingles on different political parties and different candidates. In fact, the traditional media forms like radio and TV, and even print media, also leveraged on the powers and reach of social media to engage the audience through digital broadcasting, where live streams of their programmes were made accessible to users.

Multimedia Devices and Platforms

Multimedia devices are electronic media strategies used to store and display participatory multimedia content. They are hardware devices that can play and display multimedia content. They include: Smartphones, tablets, radio MP3 players, television, projectors, digital cameras, camcorders, CD

players, and webcams, among many others. These devices entail the use of elements such as text, graphics, audio, video, animation, charts, graphs and maps to convey effective multimedia messages.

Multimedia Platforms, on the other hand, refer to the software environment or systems that facilitate the formation, dissemination, and usage of multimedia content. In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the following multimedia platforms were used:

a) Social media: Owing to its large population cum growing digital connectivity, social media has emerged as a very powerful tool for disseminating information, informing public opinions, as well as mobilising citizens during electoral processes. Social media platforms were influential during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. In Nigeria, people in both rural and urban centres are on social media, and that is the go-to platform for most Nigerian youths who are considered an active population and the electorate. Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, were used for political campaigns, debates, interactive sessions with voters, spreading of information, hosting of interest group meetings, and an open space for all and sundry to air their views.

b) Political Websites and Blogs: The 2023 general elections in Nigeria saw the rise of candidates and contestants having different websites where voters can find information about them and different writings on blogs promoting their candidacy. The most prominent political parties in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), all have a website that promotes the agenda of the party and its members.

c) Short Message Service (SMS): This was adopted during the Nigerian election in 2023 to reach large and heterogeneous voters about election details such as when the voting process will commence, if there is a change in timing, a delay in bringing election materials, and many other helpful information about the election in general.

d) Online News and Entertainment Portals: The season of elections is graced with people yearning for news daily. The digitally active population of the country visits news platforms online like Television Continental (TVC) News, Channels Television, Arise TV, among many others, to satisfy their information need.

Challenges of Using Multimedia in the 2023 Elections in Nigeria

There are challenges associated with the use of multimedia. In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the use of multimedia presented several challenges:

1. Digital exclusion and disparity: An enormous gap exists in digital literacy and internet access among many Nigerians, especially in the rural and marginalised regions of the country. The exclusion of certain members of society serves as an impediment to how far multimedia platforms can be accessed, as people without digital devices and internet access were left out and unable to see or hear the multimedia content put together. Lack of adequate power supply and poor network connection served as a limitation to the effective use of multimedia technologies. Without power, multimedia content cannot be produced, disseminated, received, or accessed.

2. Spread of fake news, hate speech, and misinformation: Multimedia platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, which are mostly used by most Nigerians, promoted and aided the dissemination of fake news, hate speech, misinformation, unsubstantiated and unverifiable rumours about political parties, candidates, or a malicious intent to mar the election process.

3. Culture and language differences among the people: Multimedia contents that were created without due consideration to the cultural differences and sensitivities that existed among the different groups in Nigeria faced resistance. This was another major challenge identified in the use of multimedia technology during the 2023 general election in Nigeria.

4. High rate of data: Indigent individuals who could not purchase data were unable to access multimedia content. The cost of getting data in the country continues to see an astronomical increase owing to the prevailing economic situation. This has reduced the online hours of an average Nigerian. It was a challenge because of the need for constant engagement across different online portals used for campaigns by the different political parties and their candidates during the elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2023 Nigerian elections marked a significant turning point in the country's political landscape, with multimedia playing an essential role in influencing public opinion and shaping voter behaviour. This study demonstrated the profound impact of multimedia on the electoral process. The discussion advanced emphasises the ability of multimedia to promote participation, mobilise support, and disseminate information. Researchers concluded that other studies have also examined the impact of multimedia on different types of political engagement and suggested an overall positive effect. The effects of multimedia use would vary significantly, depending on what forms of multimedia people use. Because of the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need for professional training on how best to produce multimedia content for elections since it targets different audiences. Misinformation, the spread of fake news, hate speech using multimedia content, and the spread through multimedia platforms were among the challenges identified in the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Hence, the government should endeavour to bring the originators of such content to book by collaborating with social media companies like Meta. Social media companies need to expand their ability to act swiftly to stop lies from spreading on their platform, especially during the election season. There should be better collaboration with recognised fact-checking platforms to allow for quick response and action.
2. We need to note that, although media functions are the same everywhere, they are not and cannot be performed the same way in every society. Multimedia contents should be designed with rural dwellers in mind. The Nigerian mass media should accommodate the rural areas and rural dwellers while creating multimedia messages for electoral purposes. This can be achieved with conscious efforts aimed at content development.

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