The Emergence of Digital Democracy: Exploring the Effect of Technology on Political Engagement in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates how technological advancements have transformed access to political information, thereby facilitating more effective political participation. Using a quantitative methodology, 351 questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected registered voters, party members, political leaders, and election officials in Osun State, chosen for being one of the first states where digital technological innovations have been used in an election. Data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS. Findings indicate that digital transformation has substantially improved Nigerians' political knowledge, expanded access to information, promoted public debate, and empowered civic engagement. While the focus on Osun State may limit the generalizability of results, this research advances understanding of how digital technologies foster political participation and help mitigate electoral malpractices, contributing to better governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Digital democracy, political engagement, election, good governance

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the integration of technology into democratic processes has increased globally, positioning Nigeria—characterized by its vibrant and diverse population—at the forefront of this transformation (Agunyai et al., 2024). Digital democracy now encompasses a range of technological innovations, including online civic discourse, real-time reporting, and electronic voting systems. During the 2023 General Elections, Nigeria reached a critical point at which the intersection of technology and politics began to reshape conventional understandings of political participation. Digital platforms such as social media and e-governance initiatives have become influential instruments for information dissemination and have provided citizens with new opportunities for engagement, deliberation, and participation in democratic activities (Agunyai, 2023).

Nigeria, with an estimated population of 214 million as of early 2022, has experienced substantial internet penetration, evidenced by over 109 million active internet users. This trend parallels the widespread adoption of mobile technology, with mobile connections exceeding 176 million. Among social media platforms, YouTube leads with approximately 33 million active users at the start of 2022, while Facebook follows with 26 million, and Instagram, in third place, records 9 million users. These figures

underscore a national preference for multimedia engagement, particularly among Nigeria's predominantly young population, whose average age is just over 18 years. The convergence of a youthful demographic and high technology adoption positions Nigeria for sustained digital innovation and expansion (Guardian Newspaper, 2022; Agunyai & Ojakorotu, 2021). Additionally, Twitter has become instrumental in Nigeria's digital democracy, facilitating political discourse and shaping public narratives. As Yegen, Ayhan, and Demir (2022) contend, Twitter provides a platform for political engagement, enabling citizens to share opinions, monitor political developments, and participate in online debates.

Digital democracy goes beyond social media and online forums. It also includes using technology in the electoral process. Tools like electronic voting, digital voter registration, and online result transmission can make elections more efficient and transparent. In Nigeria's 2023 general elections, these digital practices helped address issues like voter fraud, logistical problems, and low voter turnout. Digital tools, such as decision-making software, can also make it easier for citizens to participate and for officials to manage complex decisions. According to Deseriis (2021), these applications can simplify decision-making, improve transparency, and help citizens take part in shaping policies.

A significant challenge associated with the emergence of digital democracy in Nigeria is the proliferation of disinformation and the manipulation of public opinion via social media platforms and other digital tools (García-Orosa, 2021; Agunyai et al., 2024). The rapid expansion of digital technologies has contributed to the fourth wave of digital democracy, which is marked by the deployment of bots, astroturfing, and the widespread dissemination of misleading information (García-Orosa, 2021). These developments raise critical concerns regarding the integrity of the electoral process and the capacity of citizens to make informed decisions based on reliable information.

Furthermore, the rise of digital democracy has also brought about changes like political participation, particularly among the youth population. In countries like Indonesia, digital platforms have played a crucial role in engaging young people in political processes (Saud & Margono, 2021). However, there is a need to explore the extent to which these digital tools encourage meaningful participation and whether they are inclusive enough to represent the diverse voices and perspectives within society (Lee, 2021). Similarly, Ford (2020) also raises questions about the security and privacy of citizens' personal information and the potential for identity theft or manipulation (Ford, 2020). With the increasing reliance on digital platforms for political engagement, it is essential to evaluate the level of inclusion, equality, security, and privacy provided by these platforms (Ford, 2020).

Moreover, Hague 2020 examined how digital democracy can address the existing challenges of traditional democracy in Nigeria, such as voter apathy, corruption, and inadequate representation (Agunyai, 2023; Agunyai et al., 2024). By leveraging technology, digital democracy has the potential to increase citizen engagement, decentralize power, and foster greater transparency in the political system (Hague, 2020; Afolabi et al., 2025). Despite previous literature and studies on digital democracy in Nigeria, there is a dearth or lack of studies on how the rise of digital democracy influenced political organization and online engagement, and transformed political communication and discourse in Nigeria's 2023 general election. Hence, this study examined the influence of digital democracy on political organization, online engagement, political communication transformation, and discourse in Nigeria's 2023 general election.

Mapping the problem in Nigeria's digital democracy and its effects on the 2023 general elections

Expectedly, with the introduction of digital technological innovations in the 2023 general elections, hopes were raised that the election results were likely to be more credible and acceptable across Nigeria and beyond. However, the reality in Nigeria shows that while these digital innovations, such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), were merely able to curb irregularities such as swapping of names, multiple accreditations by voters, impersonation, among others, they also push politicians into massive vote buying (Agunyai, 2023; Agunyai et al., 2024; Afolabi et al., 2025). This ugly scenario has severe negative implications for the credibility and integrity of the 2023 general elections. In addition, the refusal of INEC to showcase the presidential election results on its own portal in real time further dampened the hope and trust of voters in the 2023 electioneering process. INEC's claim about technical hitches was greeted with lots of criticisms from the opposition parties and Nigerian citizens, who felt that the ruling government had conspired with INEC to manipulate the election results.

This singular act of error from the INEC provoked severe consequences, such as violence in parts of Nigeria, loss of trust in INEC and the government, and recurrent long court cases. This may have made Agunyai and Ikedinma (2021) conclude that Nigeria's elections are characterized by violence and hate speech. It led to electoral violence that claimed some innocent lives across the country; more importantly, the majority of the opposition political parties

believed that the ruling government used INEC to rig them out of the election. The inability of the ruling government of late Buhari's administration to provide adequate security on the election day also intensified tendencies of electoral violence before, during, and after the election. This is likened to what Agunyai (2018), Agunyai and Ojakorotu (2021), Fagbadebo et al (2014), and Fagbadebo et al (2018) described as governance crises or bad governance. One of the state's core roles is its coercive power to control violence, including that occurring on election day.

Indeed, the inability of INEC to effectively utilize its digital innovations in Nigeria's 2023 general elections shows that both the electoral umpire and the ruling government only gave empty promises that these digital innovations would enhance the credibility and trust in Nigeria's general election. It was empty because INEC failed to transmit the results of the presidential election in real time, and this drastically affected the general overview of people about the election. Today, the majority of Nigerians still believe that the current President, Bola Tinubu, never convincingly won the 2023 presidential election.

This suspicion has provoked a series of research works, all in an attempt to proffer solutions that can make the transmission of election results more transparent and accessible to people through the INEC's portal in real time. However, the findings of these studies merely focused on what can be done to improve the workability of the digital innovation in terms of enhancing credible election results, whereas research is very scant on why the emergence of digital democracy in terms of the deployment of technological innovations for general elections is causing more rampant electoral malpractices, like vote buying. Researching the factors that stimulate such an attitude of vote buying between Nigerian politicians and voters, despite digital innovations, requires a thorough investigation.

2. Conceptual review

2.1 Digital Democracy

Digital democracy refers to the use of digital technologies and online platforms to enhance citizen participation and engagement in political processes (Berg, 2017). It leverages the power of technology to facilitate the exchange of information, opinions, and ideas, allowing citizens to have a more direct role in decision-making processes. Digital democracy encompasses various forms of online political participation, such as e-voting, online petitions, social media activism, and crowdsourcing of policy ideas (Fleischer, 2016). It aims to foster greater transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in

democratic systems.

2.2 Technology

In the milieu of this study, technology refers to digital tools and platforms that enable communication, information sharing, and engagement in the political sphere (Prins et al., 2017). This includes but is not limited to the internet, social media platforms, mobile applications, and online voting systems. Technology has become an integral part of modern societies and has the potential to transform political processes by providing new avenues for citizen participation and political engagement (Helbing & Pournaras, 2015).

2.3 Political Engagement

Political engagement refers to the active involvement of citizens in political processes, including activities such as voting, campaigning, participating in public discussions, and expressing opinions on political issues (Zhao, 2016). It encompasses both traditional forms of engagement, such as attending rallies and joining political parties, as well as newer forms facilitated by digital technologies, such as online activism and digital mobilization. Political engagement is crucial for a functioning democracy as it ensures that citizens have a voice in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

2.4 General Elections

General elections are the periodic elections held in a country to elect representatives to the legislative body or executive positions (Andreotti & Pashby, 2013). In the context of this study, it refers to the national elections that was held in Nigeria in 2023. General elections are pivotal moments in democratic systems as they provide an opportunity for citizens to exercise their right to vote and choose their political leaders. These elections shape the future direction of a country and determine the composition of its government.

3. Theoretical Framework

A democratic theory provides a foundational understanding of democratic processes and principles, which is crucial in examining the emergence of digital democracy in the context of Nigeria's general elections. According to Trappel and Tomaz (2021), digital transformation has had a profound impact on news media and their role in democratic societies. This aligns with the idea that a free and independent media is essential for a functioning democracy. The Media for Democracy Monitor (2021) emphasizes how leading news media are adapting to the

challenges posed by digital transformation, indicating the need to consider the evolving media landscape in relation to political engagement in the digital age.

In the realm of Nigeria's electoral landscape, the infusion of digital democracy is a complex interplay that can be examined through various democratic theories. One such lens is that of deliberative democracy, which underscores the importance of thoughtful and inclusive public deliberation in democratic decision-making. In Nigeria, the advent of digital platforms, including social media and online forums, has become a conduit for informed discussions on election-related matters. While these platforms offer spaces for deliberation, it is critical to address digital divides to ensure the representation of diverse voices in these online dialogues.

Another democratic theory pertinent to Nigeria's digital democracy is participatory democracy, emphasizing active citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Digital tools play a pivotal role in enabling increased citizen participation, exemplified by online voter registration and engagement in virtual town hall meetings. However, challenges such as ensuring equitable access to digital resources and addressing cybersecurity concerns must be navigated to uphold the integrity of participatory platforms. Digital democracy is also integral to understanding Nigeria's electoral evolution. Initiatives like biometric voter registration, smart card readers, and electronic result transmission align with the principles of e-democracy, aiming to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accessibility (Agunyai, 2023). Nevertheless, the implementation of electronic voting trials and technology integration necessitates vigilance in mitigating cybersecurity threats, bridging the digital divide, and ensuring the reliability of digital systems.

As Nigeria continues to navigate the intersection of digital tools and democratic processes, addressing challenges related to infrastructure, cybersecurity, and digital literacy is paramount. The success of digital democracy hinges on a comprehensive approach that not only embraces technological advancements but also ensures inclusivity and safeguards against potential pitfalls.

4. Literature review of existing studies

4.1 Technology and Political Engagement

Scholars and researchers have explored the effects of technology on political processes, particularly in the context of elections. One key area of research is the role of digital platforms in facilitating intra-party democracy. Lupato and Meloni (2021) conducted an exploratory analysis of Podemos and the Labour Party, examining how these parties utilized digital tools to promote internal democracy and political participation. The study found that digital platforms can enhance transparency, inclusivity, and citizen engagement within political parties. This research has important implications for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, as political parties can leverage digital technologies to enhance internal democracy and encourage greater citizen involvement.

Furthermore, Khosrow-Pour et al. (2012) provided a comprehensive overview of digital democracy, encompassing its conceptual foundation, methodologies, tools, and applications. The authors emphasized the transformative potential of digital technologies in enabling citizens to participate in political processes and decision-making. This research is relevant to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, as it highlights the importance of leveraging technology to foster citizen engagement and strengthen democratic practices (Agunyai, 2023). Miller and Vaccari (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of digital threats to democracy, offering insights into the challenges faced by democratic systems in the digital age. The study identified issues such as misinformation, disinformation, and the manipulation of online platforms, which can undermine political engagement and trust in democratic processes.

In the discourse on information society and digital democracy, Rostiashvili (2012) explored the theoretical foundations and implications of the digital age on democracy. The study highlighted the opportunities and challenges associated with the digital revolution, including the potential for increased citizen participation and the need for digital literacy. Brown and Nicholas (2012) examined the responses of Canadian First Nations and Māori communities to heritage concerns in the digital era. The study highlighted the importance of communal and institutional efforts in safeguarding indigenous cultural property in the face of digital challenges. Schia and Gjesvik (2020) delved into the management of influence campaigns and disinformation in the digital age, often referred to as "hacking democracy." The study highlighted the vulnerabilities of digital platforms to the spread of false information and manipulative influence campaigns. The findings underscore the urgency of developing effective strategies and policies to counter disinformation and maintain the integrity of democratic processes in the upcoming Nigerian elections.

4.2 Digital Democracy Initiatives in Nigeria

The pervasiveness of digital technologies has permeated the domain of election administration, propelling a global movement towards the adoption of digitized solutions to enhance the integrity and

reliability of electoral processes. As nations strive to strengthen their democratic frameworks, they are increasingly embracing digitalization, thereby injecting positive values into the ever-evolving civic landscape. The transformative impact of the digital revolution is particularly evident in African countries, where recent elections have been marked by the implementation of innovative measures such as biometric voter registration, smart card readers, optimal mark recognition, direct electronic recording, and electronic result transmission.

Nigeria is among the African countries that have made significant strides in embracing digital technologies to enhance democratic processes. The country has implemented several digital democracy initiatives aimed at improving voter participation, transparency, and accountability in elections. These initiatives are driven by the recognition that digital tools can play a crucial role in strengthening democratic institutions and promoting inclusive governance.

Key Digital Democracy Initiatives in Nigeria:

1.   Biometric Voter Registration (BVR): The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced BVR in 2011 to enhance voter registration and prevent voter impersonation. This system utilizes fingerprint and facial recognition technology to uniquely identify each voter and create a credible voter register.

2.   Smart Card Readers (SCRs): INEC deployed SCRs in the 2015 general elections to verify voter identity and prevent multiple voting. These devices utilize microchips to store voter information and authenticate their eligibility to vote.

3.   Optimal Mark Recognition (OMR): INEC has adopted OMR technology to automate the counting of ballots, reducing human error and increasing the speed and accuracy of results collation. OMR scanners can identify and interpret voter markings on ballots, ensuring that votes are accurately counted.

4.   Direct Electronic Recording (DRE): INEC is exploring the use of DRE machines to directly record votes cast electronically. This technology could eliminate the need for paper ballots and further streamline the voting process.

5.   Electronic Result Transmission (ERT): INEC is considering implementing ERT to transmit election results electronically from polling stations to central collation centers. This could improve transparency and reduce the potential for manipulation of results.

6.   INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV): The INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) is an online platform where polling unit-level results are uploaded directly from the polling unit, transmitted, and made available for public monitoring. This real-time transmission of results aims to increase transparency and reduce the potential for manipulation or tampering with election outcomes.

7.   Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS):

The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) is a multipurpose device that serves both voter accreditation and result transmission purposes. It employs fingerprint, iris, and facial recognition technologies to authenticate voters and prevent impersonation. Additionally, the BVAS captures and transmits images of polling unit results to the IReV, further enhancing the transparency of the electoral process.

The combined use of IReV and BVAS represents a significant step forward in Nigeria's efforts to conduct free, fair, and credible elections. By providing real-time access to polling unit-level results, these technologies empower citizens to monitor the electoral process and hold election officials accountable. Moreover, the BVAS's voter authentication capabilities help to safeguard the integrity of the voter register and prevent fraud.

4.3 Impact of Digital Democracy Initiatives in Nigeria

Access to information plays a crucial role in political engagement, as it allows citizens to make informed decisions and participate actively in the democratic process. The internet has revolutionized the way information is accessed and disseminated, providing citizens with a wealth of information on political candidates, parties, and policies. Guthro (2019) argues that the digital economy, while offering unprecedented access to information, also presents challenges in terms of monopolies and potential manipulation of information by powerful actors. This raises concerns about the quality and reliability of information available to Nigerian citizens during the 2023 general elections.

Furthermore, the internet and digital media have opened up new channels for political participation in Nigeria. Citizens can now engage in online discussions, express their opinions, and mobilize support for their preferred candidates or causes. Hofmann (2019) emphasizes the role of digital technology in facilitating political agency, allowing citizens to actively participate in the democratic process. However, it is important to consider the digital divide in Nigeria, as not all citizens have equal access to digital technologies. Evans (2019) highlights the challenges of digital politics in Africa, suggesting that the benefits of digital democracy may not be evenly distributed across the population, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.

Social media platforms, in particular, have emerged

as powerful tools for political engagement in Nigeria. Leaders and political candidates utilize social media to communicate with citizens, share their views, and mobilize support. Bulovsky (2019) argues that the relationship between democracy and leaders' digital communicative practices is complex, as social media can be both a platform for democratic expression and a tool for authoritarian communication. It is essential to critically examine the role of social media in political engagement and assess its impact on democratic processes in Nigeria.

Additionally, digital media has the potential to shape public opinion and influence political outcomes. Jungherr, Rivero, and Gayo-Avello (2020) emphasize the role of digital media in shaping political narratives and mobilizing support. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed an increased use of digital media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, for political campaigns and voter mobilization.

5. Methodology

The study employed quantitative methods to gather data on the extent of digital democracy and the level of political engagement through technology in the 2023 general elections. The study was carried out in Osun State due to its readiness to embrace technology in the democratic process and as one of the states in Southwest Nigeria that engaged in the General Election of 2023. The total population of registered voters in Osun State for the 2023 general election was 1,954,800, with a land area of 8,521 km² (Osun Election Report, 2022). The entire population of Osun State cannot be interacted with; a sample size becomes imperative to avoid ambiguity in data collection. Krejcie and Morgan's sample size was used to obtain 351 respondents. The targeted respondents comprise electorates, party leaders, media, journalists, and INEC officials who were randomly selected for this study. The data collected from the questionnaire surveys were analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive analysis and chi-square, allowing for the identification of patterns and relationships between variables (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016).

6. Limitations of the study

Although the paper's only case study is Osun State, this appears limiting considering the number of states in Nigeria. It may also raise concern if findings about digital technological innovations in the Osun State's governorship election could reflect a true picture of the effect of digital innovations on governorship elections in Nigeria. This concern does not really have

any significant effect on the overall findings of this study, because Nigerian politicians, governments, and voters share similar characteristics in terms of participation in the governorship election. All 36 states in Nigeria experienced or recorded cases of vote buying due to the emergence of digital democracy, where elections are conducted with technological innovations. Thus, the study's consideration of Osun State is likely to be a fair representation of other states' experiences with digital innovations and the electioneering process. In addition, the study's reliance on the quantitative method seems to limit the opportunity of allowing participants to expressly give detailed responses to some of the questions on the questionnaire. Although the findings are adequately aligned with the research objectives and questions, the inclusion of a qualitative method that allows interviews with key informants or respondents could have also enhanced the chances of receiving multiple balanced responses from participants, instead of just from one research design.

6.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section constitutes integral phases in the research process, playing a crucial role in extracting meaningful insights from raw data.

6.2 Socio-Demographic of Respondents

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	51	14.5
25-34	148	42.2
35-44	90	25.6
45-54	44	12.5
55 and above	18	5.1
Total	351	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An analysis of the age distribution reveals the demographic composition of the surveyed population (n = 351) across distinct age brackets. The 25-34 age group represents the largest segment, comprising 42.2% of respondents, indicating a significant presence of individuals in their late twenties and early thirties. The 35-44 age group accounts for 25.6% of respondents, suggesting a substantial proportion of individuals in their mid-thirties to early forties. While

the 18-24 age range represents a notable but smaller segment with 14.5% of respondents, the older segments of the surveyed population, including the 45-54 and 55 and above age groups, constitute 12.5% and 5.1%, respectively.

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	222	63.2
Female	108	30.8
Prefer not to say	21	6.0
Total	351	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An analysis of gender distribution sheds light on the demographic composition of respondents (n = 351) based on their self-identified gender. The majority of respondents (63.2%) identified as male, indicating a notable overrepresentation of male participants in the survey. Conversely, female respondents accounted for 30.8% of the surveyed population, representing a lower but still significant proportion of the overall sample.

Table 3: Educational Background

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
None	17	4.8
Primary	37	10.5
NECO/WASSCE	34	9.7
OND/NCE	108	30.8
HND/B.Sc	114	32.5
PGD/Master/PhD	41	11.7
Total	351	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The educational background analysis reveals a diverse range of educational attainments among the 351 respondents. Approximately 4.8% of respondents indicated having no formal education, suggesting a limited yet existent presence of individuals who may not have pursued formal schooling. A modest 10.5% of respondents fall under the primary education category, representing individuals with foundational education. The NECO/WASSCE category, accounting for 9.7%, encompasses individuals with secondary school qualifications, highlighting the presence of those with at least a high school education. A substantial 30.8% of respondents hold diploma or National Certificate in Education (NCE) qualifications, placing them in the intermediate-level education category. A notable 32.5% of respondents possess higher education degrees such as Higher National Diplomas (HND) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degrees, indicating a strong representation of those with undergraduate-level education. Finally, 11.7% of respondents hold postgraduate qualifications, including Postgraduate Diplomas (PGD), Master's degrees, and PhDs, reflecting a diverse group of individuals with advanced educational backgrounds.

Table 4: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	188	53.6
Employed	111	31.6
Others	52	14.8
Total	351	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An examination of respondents' occupations reveals the diverse professional backgrounds within the surveyed population (n = 351). The majority of respondents (53.6%) identified as students, indicating a significant representation of individuals actively engaged in academic pursuits. This category encompasses individuals enrolled in schools, colleges, or universities. A substantial portion of the surveyed population (31.6%) falls into the employed category, highlighting their active participation in the workforce. This category encompasses individuals with various employment statuses, including full-time and part-time employment. A smaller but notable percentage (14.8%) falls into the "Other" category, encompassing respondents whose occupations do not fit into the specified student or employed classifications. This category may include individuals who are self-employed, unemployed, or engaged in non-traditional forms of work.

Table 5: The most used online platforms during the 2023 general election in Nigeria

Which online platforms do you use most for political information and

discussions in the last 2023 General Election?	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Facebook	88	25.1
Twitter	63	17.9
Instagram	35	10.0
Whatsapp	127	36.2
Telegram	38	10.8
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An analysis of respondents' preferences for online platforms in seeking political information and engaging in discussions during the 2023 General Election reveals a diverse digital landscape for political communication. Among the 351 respondents, Facebook emerged as the most utilized platform, with 88 individuals (25.1%) relying on it for political engagement. This highlights the enduring popularity of social networking sites for staying informed and interacting with political content. Twitter, another major social media platform, was used by 63 respondents (17.9%), indicating a significant presence of individuals who turn to this platform for political discourse and updates. Instagram, with 35 respondents (10.0%), reflects the utilization of visual-centric platforms for political information dissemination and engagement. While not as dominant as Facebook or Twitter, Instagram still plays a role in the digital political landscape. Interestingly, messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram are gaining traction in the realm of political communication. WhatsApp stood out as a prominent platform, with 127 respondents (36.2%) using it for political information and discussions. This high percentage suggests that WhatsApp has become a primary channel for political engagement, possibly through group chats or individual conversations. Telegram, with 38 respondents (10.8%), represents a smaller but noteworthy segment of individuals who prefer this messaging platform for political communication, likely due to its emphasis on privacy and group features.

Table 6: Sources of information about the candidates and their policies in the 2023 general

election

How did you stay informed about the candidates and their policies in the 2023 general election	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Television	57	16.2
Radio	48	13.7
Newspapers	34	9.7
Social Media	180	51.3
Political rallies	32	9.1
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An examination of respondents' sources of information regarding candidates and their policies in the 2023 General Election reveals the diverse ways individuals sought political knowledge. The data, based on a total of 351 respondents, highlights the continued relevance of traditional media alongside the growing dominance of digital platforms. Television emerged as a significant source for 57 respondents (16.2%), indicating a notable portion of the population still relies on this medium for political updates. Radio followed closely with 48 respondents (13.7%), suggesting that this audio medium remains a popular source of information, possibly during daily activities like commuting. Newspapers, with 34 respondents (9.7%), represented a segment that continues to value print media for political coverage, despite the decline in overall print readership. Social media emerged as the most prominent source, with a remarkable 51.3% of respondents (180 individuals) relying on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp for political information and discussions. This substantial shift towards digital platforms reflects the growing influence of social media in shaping political discourse and influencing voter perceptions. Political rallies, with 32 respondents (9.1%), represent a comparatively smaller segment but still indicate a subset of the population actively engaged in on-the-ground political activities.

Table 7: Influence of Digital Democracy in the Democratic Process

Table 7: Effect of Digital Democracy in Nigeria

Digital Democracy has made it easier for citizens to participate in the Democratic Process	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	20	5.7
Disagree	16	4.6
Neutral	23	6.6
Agree	138	39.3
Strongly Agree	154	43.9
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An analysis of respondents' perspectives on the impact of Digital Democracy on citizen participation in the Democratic Process reveals a range of opinions within the surveyed group, consisting of a total of 351 individuals. While a minority of respondents (5.7%) strongly disagree and 4.6% disagree with the assertion that Digital Democracy has facilitated citizen participation, a larger group (6.6%) expresses a neutral stance, indicating reservations or uncertainty about its impact. However, on the positive side, a substantial proportion of respondents (39.3%) agree, and a notable majority (43.9%) strongly agree, that digital technologies have significantly eased citizen participation in the Democratic Process.

Table 8: Effect of Digital Democracy in Nigeria

Digital Democracy has increased political discourse in Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	12	3.4
Disagree	9	2.6
Neutral	11	3.1
Agree	160	45.6
Strongly Agree	159	45.3
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork 2023

An investigation into respondent perspectives on the impact of Digital Democracy on political discourse in Nigeria reveals a spectrum of viewpoints within the surveyed cohort (n = 351). While a minority of respondents (3.4% in the "Strongly Disagree" category) vehemently oppose the notion that Digital Democracy has elevated political discourse, another marginally smaller cohort (2.6% in the "Disagree" category) expresses dissent with the proposition, indicating a collective skepticism or uncertainty about the affirmative influence of digital technologies on political deliberations. A segment of 3.1% of respondents falls within the "Neutral" category, signifying a group that refrains from endorsing or rejecting the idea that Digital Democracy has influenced political discourse. This subgroup indicates an indifference or unresolved opinion regarding the overarching impact of digital technologies on political conversations. Conversely, a substantial proportion of respondents (45.6% in the "Agree" category) concur that Digital Democracy has indeed heightened political discourse in Nigeria. This demographic represents a significant portion of individuals who perceive digital tools as exerting a positive influence on the depth and expansiveness of political conversations. Likewise, a notable majority (45.3% in the "Strongly Agree" category) fervently supports the notion that Digital Democracy has played a pivotal role in augmenting political discourse in Nigeria.

Table 9: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	116.966[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	124.900	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.141	1	.023
N of Valid Cases	351		

a. 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.60.

The Pearson Chi-Square statistic is calculated as 116.966, with 16 degrees of freedom. The asymptotic significance (Asymp. Sig.) value for the two-sided test is .000, which is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This suggests a significant association between the categorical variables under consideration.

7. Discussion of Findings and Implications

The finding showed that online political engagement increases the prominence of messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram as complementary channels for political discourse and information sharing. In support of Hofmann (2019), he emphasizes the role of digital technology in facilitating political agency, allowing citizens to actively participate in the democratic process. These platforms, often characterized by their closed, group-based nature, have emerged as vital spaces for political discussions, enabling individuals to connect and engage with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community and shared interest. The findings also unveil the shifting dynamics of political information-seeking, revealing a growing reliance on digital platforms alongside the continued relevance of traditional media. Bulovsky (2019) argues that the relationship between democracy and leaders' digital communicative practices is complex, as social media can be both a platform for democratic expression and a tool for authoritarian communication. Respondents demonstrated a diverse range of information sources, encompassing online news sites, social media platforms, and messaging apps, reflecting the multifaceted nature of political communication in the digital age.

8. Conclusion

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria witnessed a remarkable surge in digital democracy, with technology playing a transformative role in shaping political engagement and participation. From the proliferation of online platforms for political discourse to the utilization of social media for voter mobilization, digital tools have fundamentally altered the landscape of Nigerian politics.

This study has delved into the multifaceted impacts of digital democracy on political engagement, uncovering a range of positive and challenging implications. On the positive side, digital technologies have facilitated increased access to information, fostered wider public participation, and empowered marginalized groups to amplify their voices. Moreover, digital platforms have provided avenues for cross-regional and diaspora engagement, promoting a more inclusive and diverse political discourse. However, the rise of digital democracy has also introduced new challenges, including the spread of misinformation, the potential for manipulation and disinformation campaigns, and the exacerbation of existing digital divides.

9. Recommendations

In light of the findings presented in this study, the following recommendations are put forward to further enhance the positive impact of digital democracy on political engagement in Nigeria:

i.   Implement comprehensive digital literacy programs to equip citizens with the skills to discern credible information from misinformation and disinformation. Integrate media education into school curricula to foster critical thinking and informed decision-making among youth.

ii.   Establish robust regulatory frameworks to combat the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content online. Collaborate with social media platforms to promote transparency and accountability in content moderation practices.

iii.   Implement targeted initiatives to bridge the digital divide, particularly in underserved communities. Expand access to affordable internet infrastructure and provide digital technology training to empower marginalized groups.

iv.   Foster a culture of responsible and ethical use of technology in the political sphere. Promote responsible online behavior, encourage fact-checking and verification of information, and advocate for respectful and inclusive online discourse.

v.   Recognize the transformative potential of digital democracy to promote political participation, inclusivity, and accountability. Utilize digital tools to enhance citizen engagement, strengthen democratic institutions, and foster a more vibrant political culture.

9.1 Implications for Future Studies

Since the findings of this study have indicated that, despite the use of digital innovations or the emergence of digital democracy, Nigeria's general elections are hardly credible and trusted, future research should be focused on factors limiting INEC's capacity to deliver error-free, fair, and credible general elections in Nigeria. In addition, why voter turnout was very low compared to other previous general elections in the 2023 general elections should also be the focus of future studies. Furthermore, research on this subject in

the future should cover contradictory issues in the 2022 Electoral Act. How these contradictions affect the credibility of the 2023 general elections should also be considered by future studies.

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