Strategies Adopted by Two Major Political Parties in Edo State During the Nigeria 2023 Presidential Election Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

Background: The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was one of the most competitive in the country's political history, with the All Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) which were the two major political parties, deploying diverse strategies to mobilise voters and shape electoral outcomes. Digital media, coupled with traditional methods such as door-to-door mobilisation, significantly influenced campaign dynamics, voter perception, and voter behaviour.

Objective: This study investigated the persuasive, engagement, and communication strategies adopted by APC and PDP in the 2023 presidential election, and assessed their effectiveness on the electorate.

Method: Guided by Media Dependence Theory and Rational Choice Theory, the study employed a survey research design. The population comprised 553,736 registered voters across three Local Government Areas in Edo State. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 was proportionally allocated. Data were collected through a validated 24-item questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81) and analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Ethical principles of consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were upheld.

Result: Findings reveal that persuasive strategies relied on ethnic and religious appeals, economic promises, and negative attacks, alongside positive image-laundering efforts. Engagement strategies combined digital campaigns with grassroots mobilisation, while communication clarity was mixed— strengthened by charismatic leadership and promises but weakened by vague policies, misinformation, and negative campaigning. Voter perceptions were polarised, shaped by economic realities and exposure to fake news, yet many remained committed to future democratic participation.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while APC and PDP strategies mobilised participation, they also deepened polarisation. It recommends issue-based persuasion, structured civic education, fact-checking collaborations, digital literacy promotion, and clearer economic policy communication.

Unique contribution to Knowledge: This study uniquely contributes to knowledge by integrating Media Dependence and Rational Choice theories to analyse how persuasion, engagement, and communication strategies shaped voter behaviour in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. It provides empirical evidence on the interplay between digital and grassroots mobilisation within a polarised political environment. The findings advance understanding of how strategic communication can both enhance participation and intensify division in emerging democracies

Keywords: Political campaigns, APC, PDP, persuasion, Nigeria 2023 election

INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was one of the most hotly contested in the country's history. The major contenders were Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Peter Obi of the Labour Party, and Rabiu Musah Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP). With an estimated 93 million registered voters, the election produced Tinubu as the winner with 37% of the total votes, marking the narrowest margin in Nigeria's recent history (INEC, 2023). Each party deployed integrated marketing communication strategies to gain an edge over rivals, reflecting the increasingly competitive nature of Nigerian politics.

A significant feature of the election was the rise of new Nigerian voters, particularly the youth, facilitated by social media. Nigeria's internet penetration, at over 38% of the population (Statista, 2022), gave young people access to political information and avenues for participation. With 39.68% of registered voters aged between 18 and 34 (INEC, 2023), youth involvement was driven by online engagement, highlighting the power of digital media in agenda-setting, decision-making, and shaping voter perceptions (Bassey, Josiah & Akpede, 2024; Aligwe, et al., 2016). The 2023 elections therefore underscored how social media transformed traditional campaign dynamics.

The strategic use of digital media was evident in the viral spread of slogans such as "hulabalu," "bluba," and "go and verify," which boosted candidate visibility and relevance. Memes, videos, and influencer-driven campaigns amplified candidates' messages across Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, while traditional media supported these digital efforts (Itua, 2023). The Labour Party particularly relied on the underdog narrative to inspire voter support, portraying Peter Obi as a fresh alternative to established political giants. This demonstrated how perception management, storytelling, and branding played central roles in shaping political narratives.

Political marketing, which originated from the commercial sector, has evolved into a critical component of contemporary politics. Kotler and Keller (2006) define marketing as "meeting needs profitably," while Durmaz and Direkci (2015) expand this notion to include the distribution of ideas. Harris and McGrath (2012) conceptualise political marketing as a communication process that employs media to supply voters with the information necessary for informed decision-making. Sofyan (2015) further contends that in today's transparent and competitive political landscape, candidates must employ marketing strategies to distribute political products such as ideologies, programmes, and leadership attributes. Consequently, the fusion of marketing principles with political communication has become an indispensable determinant of electoral success in modern democracies.

In the Nigerian context, the deployment of digital media as a campaign tool began to gain traction during the 2011 presidential election, particularly with the successful online mobilisation of supporters by Goodluck Jonathan. Since then, digital platforms have progressively become central to political communication and voter engagement (Taylor & Eshkeme, 2023; Nwokoma, 2023). By the 2023 general elections, platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and Facebook had emerged as dominant arenas for mobilising voters, circulating campaign materials,

and facilitating political discourse (Ibrahim, 2023; Okoro, & Nwafor**,** 2013). Nevertheless, these same platforms became breeding grounds for propaganda, misinformation, and digital political labelling. For instance, Bola Ahmed Tinubu's campaign strategically branded Atiku Abubakar as "Mr. Sell Everything" and Peter Obi as "Mr. Stingy," labels that gained significant traction across social media platforms to shape voter perception and polarise public sentiment (Adeyemi, 2023).

Beyond direct attacks, political campaigns also capitalised on digital spaces to recycle and recontextualise historical narratives. An example is the resurfacing of Balarabe Musa's 2019 remarks about Atiku Abubakar during the 2023 election season, illustrating how digital memory and archival content can continue to influence political discourse (Adeyemi, 2023). Such developments underscore the growing significance of digital marketing in sustaining political narratives and shaping electoral opinion long after initial dissemination.

Despite the increasing convergence between marketing principles and political communication in Nigeria, there remains a theoretical and empirical gap in understanding how these dynamics operate in practice. Existing studies have largely explored political marketing in Western democracies, focusing on branding, image management, and campaign strategy from developed-country perspectives (Lees-Marshment, 2011; Scammell, 2015). Even within African scholarship, most analyses have concentrated on social media use in political mobilisation or propaganda (Okoro & Adibe, 2018; Chiluwa & Ajiboye, 2019), without systematically integrating marketing frameworks into the study of Nigerian electoral communication. The paucity of empirical work examining the interplay between traditional marketing principles and digital campaign strategies within the Nigerian political context constitutes a significant academic gap.

Furthermore, prior studies have often adopted descriptive or case-study methodologies, overlooking the comparative analysis of how major political parties operationalise marketing strategies to shape voter perception and engagement. Few have assessed how commercial marketing concepts such as segmentation, positioning, and brand differentiation translate into political practice in Nigeria's evolving digital ecosystem. Additionally, while some research has considered digital media's role in general electioneering, little attention has been given to its integration with traditional campaign structures or its influence on electoral competitiveness and voter behaviour during the 2023 presidential election.

Therefore, this study fills a critical lacuna by interrogating how Nigeria's major political parties—particularly the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP)—integrated marketing principles and digital communication strategies in their 2023 presidential campaigns. It provides a theoretical contribution by bridging political communication and marketing scholarship within an African context, and an empirical contribution by offering evidence-based insights into the hybridisation of traditional and digital campaign strategies. This is essential in an era when digital media not only shapes public discourse but also determines the trajectory of political engagement and democratic participation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Ascertain the persuasive strategies used by APC and PDP in the 2023 presidential election
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies on the electorate in the 2023 presidential election
3. Ascertain the engagement strategies adopted by APC and PDP in the 2023 'presidential election
4. Determine the clarity of the communication strategies adopted by APC and PDP in the 2023 'presidential election
5. examine voters' perception of media messages or campaign strategies adopted by the PDP and APC in the 2023 election

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Elections

The concept of elections varies across countries in terms of roles and functions, but broadly it refers to the process by which citizens choose individuals to occupy official positions of authority. Historically, elections were practised in ancient Athens and Rome for selecting leaders such as popes and emperors. The modern practice emerged with representative government in Europe and North America from the 17th century (Heinz, 2008). According to Collins (n.d.), elections enable citizens to decide who governs them, while Heinz (2008) sees them as an organised channel of popular expression where the electorate accepts or rejects a candidate or proposition. Similarly, Kindersley (2021) defines elections as the act of voting in order to choose leaders or representatives in government, emphasising their role as the core democratic mechanism through which citizens influence governance.

Campaigns

Election campaigns serve as platforms where aspirants and political parties solicit voter support by presenting manifestoes, programmes, and promises. Campaigns are dynamic, constantly adopting new strategies to communicate effectively with voters (Titus & Aliyu, 2018). Constituencies—geographical units of electorates—form the basis of campaign mobilisation, with candidates meeting voters to discuss pressing issues and solutions. The planning, organisation, and execution of campaigns differ across contexts but remain essential for democratic participation. In Nigeria and other presidential systems, campaigns operate across multiple levels of government, reflecting local concerns and national priorities.

Strategic Communication

Strategic political communication is the purposeful management of information to achieve political goals. Bonk, Henry, and Emily (1999, cited in Popa, 2019) describe it as the orchestrated use of communication channels to promote agendas, whether in policy advocacy or corporate promotion. Olisa (2015) notes that strategic communication spans public relations, advertising, diplomacy, and managerial communication, helping organisations develop purposeful, goal-oriented messaging. Within politics, it enables parties and candidates to manage public perception, mobilise voters, and achieve electoral objectives.

Communication Strategies and Electoral Campaigns

Political campaigns are essentially coordinated efforts to influence voters' decision-making (Nwaoboli, 2023). Campaign teams—ranging from volunteers to professional strategists—must communicate effectively, raise funds, and manage resources within legal and contextual constraints (Howard, 2018). The 2023 Nigerian presidential election illustrated how demographic shifts, notably youth participation (39.68% of registered voters were aged 18–34; INEC, 2023) and increased internet penetration (38% of the population in 2022; Statista), transformed political engagement. Digital platforms enabled youths to access information, mobilise, and shape narratives. Viral phrases such as "go and verify" and campaign slogans amplified through social media became powerful tools of perception management (Itua, 2023).

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram complemented traditional media, reflecting the hybrid nature of modern campaigns. Candidates leveraged influencer marketing, memes, and music to expand reach. However, disinformation also became pervasive. As the Centre for Democracy and Development (2023) observed, doctored videos, manipulated images, and synthetic media circulated widely, undermining electoral integrity. Examples included recycled videos of past campaigns presented as current events and fabricated audio files alleging rigging. INEC's limited crisis communication allowed such narratives to spread unchecked, while fact-checking efforts often faced resistance due to politicisation and media house reluctance. This underscores the dual role of digital media as both an enabler of democratic participation and a conduit for misinformation.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Several empirical studies have examined political campaigns and their strategies in Nigeria, with a focus on the role of media, technology, and voter engagement. Uwalaka (2020) studied clicktivism in the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign, using social media analysis to show how online engagement mobilised support and contributed to legislative change. While insightful, the study overlooked how political parties directly use digital platforms and did not explore offline mobilisation. The present study builds on this by examining campaign strategies of APC and PDP candidates during the 2023 election.

Nnanyelugo and Santas (2017), using survey data and the uses and gratifications framework, found that social media significantly influenced voter perceptions during the 2011 presidential election, shifting focus from ethnic to transformational considerations. However, they did not address strategies to mitigate electoral violence. This study extends their findings by analysing broader campaign techniques.

Agba (2007) highlighted the media's role in fostering national cohesion during campaigns, stressing its potential to sensitise voters and reduce violence. Yet, it did not address candidate-specific strategies for promoting unity. This research aims to close that gap by investigating approaches used by APC and PDP candidates in 2023.

Anyanwu and Orji (2020), guided by technological determinism, examined social media's impact on political participation in South-East Nigeria, finding that digital platforms enhanced engagement. However, they did not explore specific campaign strategies employed by parties.

Similarly, Oyenuga (2015) analysed social media's role in the 2015 elections, noting its capacity to increase participation but also spread misinformation. The study did not examine how candidates strategically maximised these platforms, a gap the current study addresses.

Ekhareafo (2022) discussed alternative media as spaces for free speech and political expression, yet did not consider how candidates used such platforms for mobilisation. Likewise, Apuke and Tunca (2018), using agenda-setting and uses and gratifications theories, examined social media's role in shaping public opinion but did not specify targeted strategies. Studies by Albert (2007), Godwin (2017), and Rasheed (2016) similarly provided broad discussions without campaign-level analysis.

Together, these empirical works demonstrate the transformative impact of media and digital platforms on Nigerian electoral campaigns. However, they leave significant gaps regarding the specific strategies political parties deploy to mobilise support, counter disinformation, and build national unity. The present study seeks to fill these gaps by analysing the communication strategies of APC and PDP presidential candidates in the 2023 election

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Media Dependence Theory and Rational Choice Theory, which provide complementary perspectives for analysing political campaign strategies and voter behaviour during elections. Media Dependence Theory, developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), explains how individuals and societies rely on the media to satisfy informational, affective, and behavioural needs. Dependency increases during periods of uncertainty, such as elections, when people turn to the media for guidance in decision-making and understanding political realities. The theory highlights the media's capacity to influence opinions and actions, particularly when alternative information sources are limited. Despite criticisms that it portrays audiences as passive (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and struggles to address the decentralised, interactive nature of modern digital platforms (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008), it remains useful in explaining how media campaigns against vote buying can shape attitudes and behaviours, especially in high-stakes contexts like the 2023 presidential election.

Rational Choice Theory as introduced by Downs (1957), posits that individuals make decisions based on rational calculations to maximise personal benefit. In media contexts, it suggests that both audiences and political actors behave strategically—audiences consume content that meets their needs, while parties craft messages that resonate with voters' preferences. Although criticised for oversimplifying behaviour by neglecting emotional and social influences (McQuail, 2010), the theory offers valuable insights into how campaign strategies are designed to appeal to rational voter concerns, particularly regarding electoral integrity and vote buying. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding the dynamics of media influence and strategic political communication, offering a basis for analysing how APC and PDP structured their campaigns in the 2023 presidential election.

METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey design, suitable for eliciting responses from human participants and examining interrelationships among variables (Ogbazi & Okpala, 1994). The study area comprised three Local Government Areas (LGAs) purposively selected from Edo State's senatorial districts: Oredo (Edo South), Etsako West (Edo North), and Esan Central (Edo Central). The population was 553,736 registered voters across the three LGAs (INEC, 2024). Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. Proportional allocation ensured fair representation: Oredo (258), Etsako West (96), and Esan Central (46). A multi-stage purposive sampling approach was employed, first by selecting LGAs based on political relevance and diversity, and then proportionally distributing questionnaires according to population sizes. Respondents were selected from age 20 and above. The primary research instrument was a 24-item questionnaire divided into demographic (Section A) and study-specific questions (Section B). Validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was established via a pilot test with 20 respondents, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81.

Data collection relied mainly on questionnaire administered face-to-face by the researcher and two assistants, ensuring high response rates. Secondary data from books, journals, and online sources supported the primary method. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics— frequencies, percentages, and thematic analysis—while hypotheses were tested with Chi-square. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and minimisation of risk. The study adhered to institutional ethics standards, ensuring objectivity, beneficence, and accuracy in reporting findings for academic and policy relevance.

DATA PRESENTATION

The researcher administered 400 copies of the questionnaire out of which 400 were returned and found useable. This means that 100% return rate was achieved.

Table 1: Persuasive Strategies Used by APC and PDP During the 2023 Presidential Election

Item	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Economic Promises	93	23.3	2.52
Religious and Ethnic Sentiments	101	25.3	
Attacks on Opposition Candidates	111	27.8	
Achievements and Experience	95	23.8	
Total	**400**	**100.0**	

The table shows that attacks on opposition candidates (27.8%) and appeals to religious or ethnic sentiments (25.3%) were the most common persuasive strategies used by APC and PDP. The mean value (2.52) indicates respondents recognised a variety of persuasive techniques, reflecting the diversity of campaign rhetoric and attempts to influence voter behaviour.

Table 2: Effectiveness of the Campaign Strategies on the Electorate

Item	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Very Effective (PDP)	145	36.3	2.05
Very Effective (APC)	140	35.0	1.99
Not Effective (APC)	142	35.5	
Not Effective (PDP)	127	31.8	
Significantly Influenced Voter Turnout	133	33.3	2.06
Slightly Influenced Turnout	156	39.0	
Not at All Influential	111	27.8	
Total	**400**	**100.0**	

This table reveals that respondents perceived both parties' strategies as somewhat effective, with PDP (36.3%) rated slightly higher than APC (35%). The mean scores (1.99–2.06) indicate that the strategies moderately influenced voters' turnout and engagement.

Table 3: Engagement Strategies Adopted by APC and PDP

Item	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Door-to-Door Campaigns	104	26.0	2.47
Social Media Engagement	101	25.3	
Public Rallies	97	24.3	
Grassroots Mobilisation	98	24.5	
Frequency of Exposure (Frequent/Very Frequent)	157	39.3	2.97
Total	**400**	**100.0**	

Door-to-door campaigns and social media engagement were considered the most effective voter engagement strategies, each recognised by about a quarter of respondents. The mean score of 2.97 reflects high levels of exposure to campaign messages, suggesting the parties effectively reached their audiences.

Table 4: Clarity and Impact of Communication Strategies Adopted by APC and PDP (RQ4)

Item	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Social Media Campaigns	89	22.3	2.52
TV and Radio Broadcasts	110	27.5	
Direct Voter Outreach	105	26.3	
Political Debates	96	24.0	
Campaign Messages Made Me More Hopeful	137	34.3	1.99
Made Me More Sceptical	136	34.0	
No Change in Perception	127	31.8	
Total	**400**	**100.0**	

Television and radio broadcasts, along with direct voter outreach, were the most impactful communication strategies. The mean of 2.52 indicates multiple channels were considered effective, while perception data (hopeful vs. sceptical) shows mixed effects on how voters viewed governance and leadership.

Table 5: Voters' Perception of Media Messages and Campaign Strategies (RQ5)

Item	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Voted in the 2023 Election	320	80.0	1.20
Economic Situation Influenced Vote	176	44.8	1.94
Misinformation Affected Candidate Perception	176	44.8	2.03
Willing to Participate in Future Elections	129	32.3	1.95
Found Campaigns Appealing (Charisma & Promises)	171	42.8	2.92
Found Campaigns Unappealing (Negativity, Lack of Policy)	212	53.1	2.45
Total	**400**	**100.0**	

The majority of respondents (80%) participated in the 2023 election, and many reported that economic conditions and misinformation influenced their voting decisions. Despite dissatisfaction with some campaign aspects, most voters expressed willingness to participate in future elections, reflecting continued political engagement.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to the study's research questions, theoretical foundations, and existing literature. It interprets how the data illuminates the persuasive, engagement, and communication strategies used by the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, and how these strategies shaped voter perception, behaviour, and participation. The discussion draws on Media Dependence and Rational Choice Theories to explain voters' decision-making processes and the relationship between campaign communication and electoral outcomes.

RQ1: What were the persuasive strategies used by APC and PDP in the 2023 presidential election?

Findings from Table 1 reveal that attacks on opposition candidates (27.8%) and appeals to religious and ethnic sentiments (25.3%) were the most dominant persuasive strategies, followed by economic promises (23.3%) and highlighting achievements and experience (23.8%). The mean score (2.52) suggests respondents recognised a wide range of persuasive techniques, reflecting a mixture of both positive and negative campaign rhetoric. This aligns with findings by Owen (2017) and Omenugha and Oji (2018), who observed that Nigerian political campaigns often rely on emotive and divisive appeals rather than purely issue-based communication.

From the perspective of Media Dependence Theory, these findings show that voters relied on mediated information to form judgements about candidates in a politically uncertain environment. Campaigns therefore became critical sources of cues that shaped political attitudes, even when the messages were polarising. Moreover, the prominence of ethnic and religious

rhetoric underscores the enduring influence of identity politics in Nigeria, despite ongoing calls for issue-based campaigns and national integration.

RQ2: What is the effectiveness of the strategies on the electorate in the 2023 presidential election?

As shown in Table 2, both parties' campaign strategies were perceived as moderately effective, with the PDP rated slightly higher (36.3%) than the APC (35%) in terms of overall campaign effectiveness. Additionally, 33.3% of respondents reported that campaign strategies significantly influenced voter turnout, while 39% indicated slight influence, and 27.8% said there was no influence. The mean scores (ranging between 1.99 and 2.06) further confirm a moderate level of strategic impact on the electorate.

These mixed outcomes indicate that while campaign efforts motivated civic participation, they did not uniformly convert to voter conviction or behavioural change. In line with Rational Choice Theory, this suggests that voters weighed their personal and economic interests before making decisions, irrespective of campaign persuasiveness. The data therefore demonstrates that persuasion alone was insufficient; rather, strategic effectiveness depended on how well parties connected campaign promises with voters' lived experiences and expectations.

RQ3: What were the engagement strategies adopted by APC and PDP in the 2023 presidential election?

Table 3 shows that door-to-door campaigns (26%) and social media engagement (25.3%) were perceived as the most effective voter engagement strategies, followed closely by public rallies (24.3%) and grassroots mobilisation (24.5%). The high mean score of 2.97 indicates frequent exposure to campaign messages, suggesting the parties successfully reached diverse segments of the electorate through multiple channels. This finding supports Anyanwu and Orji (2020), who noted that the combination of traditional mobilisation and digital interaction enhances participatory engagement in Nigerian politics. The data demonstrates that hybrid strategies—merging online and offline approaches—were central to effective outreach. While digital engagement offered immediacy and visibility, personal contact through community networks sustained authenticity and trust, which are vital in Nigeria's socio-political context.

RQ4: What is the clarity and impact of the communication strategies adopted by APC and PDP in the 2023 presidential election?

According to Table 4, television and radio broadcasts (27.5%) and direct voter outreach (26.3%) were perceived as the most impactful communication strategies, followed by social media campaigns (22.3%) and political debates (24%). These channels were valued for their accessibility and message clarity. However, respondents were divided on how campaigns shaped perceptions: 34.3% reported becoming more hopeful, 34% became more sceptical, and 31.8% experienced no change. The mean score (2.52) indicates that while multiple media were effective, the emotional response to campaign content varied. This duality echoes Apuke and Tunca's (2018) argument that social and traditional media play both clarifying and distorting roles in election communication. Clarity was compromised by conflicting narratives, inconsistent messaging, and the spread of misinformation, leading to mixed voter sentiments. Nonetheless, the presence of clear, direct communication through broadcast media enhanced credibility and

accessibility, reinforcing the enduring power of traditional platforms in shaping voter understanding.

RQ5: What are voters' perceptions of media messages and campaign strategies adopted by the PDP and APC in the 2023 election?
As shown in Table 5, 80% of respondents voted in the 2023 election, indicating high civic participation. However, 44.8% strongly agreed that Nigeria's economic situation influenced their voting decisions, while another 44.8% reported that misinformation affected their perception of candidates. Although 53.1% found certain aspects of the campaigns unappealing—such as negative campaigning and lack of clear policies—a notable proportion (42.8%) appreciated aspects like charismatic leadership and clear promises. Importantly, despite campaign fatigue, 32.3% of respondents expressed definite willingness to participate in future elections, with many others indicating possible participation.

These findings suggest that while voters were critical of manipulative or unclear communication, they still demonstrated enduring democratic commitment. The results affirm Rational Choice Theory's position that voters' perceptions are guided by practical and contextual considerations—particularly economic realities—more than by party loyalty alone. Similarly, Media Dependence Theory helps explain how continuous exposure to political messaging shaped perceptions, even amidst misinformation. Overall, the electorate emerged as both media-influenced and discerning, reflecting a politically aware yet cautious voter population.

Overall, the study demonstrates that persuasive, engagement, and communication strategies by APC and PDP during the 2023 presidential election were multifaceted but variably effective. Persuasion often relied on emotional and identity-based appeals; engagement combined traditional and digital tactics; and communication was powerful yet occasionally distorted by misinformation. Voter perceptions reflected both awareness and scepticism—showing that Nigerian voters are influenced by media narratives but still capable of critical evaluation. These findings confirm that the success of political marketing in Nigeria depends not only on message reach but also on credibility, relevance, and the socio-economic realities shaping electoral choices.

CONCLUSION
Findings revealed that persuasion largely took the form of attacks, ethnic/religious appeals, and economic promises, but also included positive image-laundering techniques such as apologies and achievements. Effectiveness was mixed: campaigns mobilised participation but also polarised opinions, with many voters expressing both hope and scepticism. Engagement relied on a hybrid of digital platforms and traditional door-to-door mobilisation, reflecting Nigeria's evolving campaign dynamics. Clarity of communication was undermined by vague policies, negative tactics, and widespread misinformation, although traditional media such as TV and radio retained influence. Voter perceptions highlighted a fragmented and polarised electorate shaped by economic conditions and exposure to fake news, yet there remained a strong indication of continued democratic commitment. Overall, the findings affirm Media Dependence Theory and Rational Choice Theory by showing that voters rely on mediated content in uncertain contexts and make decisions based on self-interest and perceived credibility of campaign strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Political parties should prioritise issue-based persuasion over ethnic and religious appeals. Campaigns should focus on policy-driven messages that promote inclusivity and national unity to minimise polarisation.
2. Parties and electoral bodies should integrate structured civic education into campaigns to boost turnout and ensure voters are guided by informed choices rather than emotional or divisive appeals.
3. While door-to-door mobilisation remains effective, parties should continue expanding digital strategies with more interactive, fact-based, and inclusive content to engage younger, tech-savvy electorates.
4. Campaign organisations must adopt transparent messaging, backed by fact-checking collaborations with media outlets. Stronger regulatory oversight and digital literacy initiatives can help voters navigate fake news.
5. Since economic issues significantly shaped voting decisions, parties should provide concrete, verifiable economic policies and demonstrate accountability in their promises to restore trust and credibility.

Ethical Clearance
Ethical consent was sought and obtained from all participants involved in this study. The respondents were duly informed that the exercise was strictly for academic purposes and that their participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality of responses was ensured throughout the research process, and all ethical standards of academic research were duly observed.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions
Momoh Usman conceived the study and designed the research framework. Dr. Daniel Ekhareafo collated and organised the data, handled the analysis, and contributed to the interpretation of results. Professor Ezekiel Asemah supervised the entire research process, refined the theoretical and methodological aspects, and edited the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and are jointly responsible for the content and similarity index of the study.

Availability of Data and Materials
The datasets supporting the conclusions of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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