

A SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF POLITICIANS' ENGAGEMENT ON X AND THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OUTCOME IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined politicians' engagement on X and its influence on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in South-South Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research design, data were mined and analyzed using the Meltwater software, which served as a sentiment analysis tool. The dataset comprised posts and user engagements with the four major presidential candidates—Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), Rabiun Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), and Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) during the official campaign period of 28 September 2022 to 23 February 2023. Findings revealed that politicians' engagement on X had a significant influence on political participation in the 2023 general elections, particularly in the South-South region. While Atiku Abubakar received the highest number of mentions, Peter Obi's electoral success demonstrated the critical link between online visibility and offline voter behaviour. Tinubu's strong digital mobilization contrasted with Atiku's weak vote conversion rate, reflecting a trust deficit among voters. The study concludes that digital engagement is increasingly shaping electoral dynamics in Nigeria, but its effectiveness is mediated by offline socio-political realities. It recommends that political campaigns should prioritize the creation of positive content, actively engage younger Nigerians, combine online visibility with grassroots mobilization, and proactively address negative sentiments on social media to enhance voter trust and electoral outcomes.

Keywords: Election, electoral outcomes, politicians, politics, and political engagement

Introduction

The advent of the social media has changed our world, influencing different areas of human life and politics is not an exception. The increasing use of social media platforms in politics has drastically altered the nature and extent of political engagement, especially in developing democracies like Nigeria. One of these

platforms that is especially good at shaping political narratives, public opinion, and ultimately election outcomes is X (previously Twitter). The 2023 Nigerian presidential election offered a unique context for these dynamics to be expressed, particularly in the South-South geopolitical zone. This region, which has long been

recognised for its strategic importance and diverse political allegiances, has become a battleground for digital influence efforts and sentiment-driven voter mobilisation.

Sentiment analysis tools, which employ advanced machine learning and natural language processing, have been shown in earlier studies to systematically evaluate public opinion on political candidates, exposing voter support, opposition, and apathy (Suemo et al., 2023; Attai et al., 2024; Ajueyitsi & Ekuobase, 2024). According to Suemo et al. (2023), a significant percentage of voters in the 2023 election displayed neutral or non-committal views, and shifts in campaign rhetoric and evolving political events were strongly correlated with both positive and negative attitudes.

According to the uses and gratifications theory, which has been used to explain why voters and political players choose X, it offers immediacy, a large audience, and the sense of intimacy and contact with politicians that conventional media usually does not. Additionally, social media platforms are important for contesting narratives and disseminating information. They enable politicians to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly affect public opinion, while also occasionally amplifying false information or divisive rhetoric (Eke & Amah 2025; Suemo et al., 2023). In South-South Nigeria, these digital battlefields have further intensified existing complicated elements, such as socioeconomic grievances, ethnic affinities, and past party allegiances, further impacting voter behaviour and legitimacy views.

Despite these advancements, there is a stark study gap concerning the connection between election outcomes in regional contexts like South-South Nigeria and mood and involvement quality, not simply quantity. Most prior research like Ajueyitsi & Ekuobase (2024) and Attai et al. (2023) has focused on either national social media effects or general sentiment

patterns, often overlooking the ways in which regional digital discourse and local engagement impact or reflects election outcomes (Ajueyitsi & Ekuobase, 2024; Attai et al., 2023). There is a lack of empirical research between the regional real-time evolution of voter sentiment, the granular engagement techniques of politicians on X, and the subsequent conversion of these patterns into actual election outcomes. This study closes this knowledge gap and offers insights into contemporary digital political mobilization by systematically analyzing the ways in which sentiment and interaction on X among the presidential candidates in the general election of 2023 impacted South-South Nigerian vote outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess politician's Engagement on X and the 2023 Presidential election outcome in South-South Nigeria. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To compare the extent of X engagement generated by key presidential candidates during the 2023 Nigerian general elections.
2. To analyze the sentiments within X engagements related to each presidential candidate
3. To investigate the relationship between X engagement metrics and the actual election outcomes in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
4. To identify the differential impacts of candidates' digital political engagement strategies on voter perception in South-South Nigeria.

Literature Review

Techniques of Political Communication

One of the core techniques or devices of political communication is language. Communication cannot occur without the use of language which could be symbolic, verbal or non-verbal. It is therefore the singular element of

communication without which communication cannot be said to have happened. This is because communication must be carried out using a mutually understandable language. That is, the language of communication must be one which can be understood by both the sender and the receiver.

In politics, language functions as a versatile tool, facilitating both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. In speeches, debates, and public addresses, political leaders can use verbal language to directly convey their positions and influence the public. Apart from spoken communication, nonverbal cues such as gestures, symbols, and visual cues can also convey implicit messages that significantly influence public opinion. To create messages that appeal to their target audience, political leaders employ a variety of linguistic strategies. The deliberate use of words and phrases to create connections with particular audiences, arouse emotions, and shape narratives is what defines political communication. Word choice, tone, and style are all carefully considered in political communication since they all affect the message's overall impact. Furthermore, political communication highlights the significance of both overt and covert communication techniques.

In this process of planning political communication, it is important that politicians follow the rules of the language. These include using the appropriate language, for the appropriate message and at the appropriate time. This is done bearing in mind that the language used can make or mar political communication. Language is so powerful that Chahbane and Zrizi (2023) noted that "it is a known fact that language can be as powerful and influential as the action itself or even more. Language can also influence people's view of the world" (p.115).

The concept of frames first appeared in the academic discourse between the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Some of the most popular early works on frames and framing are the works of Goffman (*Frames Analysis*, 1974), Tuchman (*Making News*, 1978) and Gitlin (*The Whole World is Watching*, 1980). Tuchman attempts to emphasize the sociology of news production, arguing that the act of generating news is the construction of reality rather than a representation of reality. The fact is portrayed depending on the kind of frames or windows which could be large or small, has many panes or few, and whether the glass is vague or precise, et cetera (Tuchman 1978). This implies that frames are the constructed reality which a person or journalist wishes others to see. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) cited in Yahya (2019, p.3) puts this succinctly when they explained that "frames can be associated with the act of photographing by setting appropriate boundaries, choosing contexts, selecting and manipulating light to portray certain angle of reality". On the strength of the foregoing, frames are defined as a method of constructing a fact that is subsequently provided in the form of news.

In political communication, the term "frames" refers to the deliberate presentation of facts to shape public understanding and opinion on political matters. Frames act as interpretive tools, helping individuals comprehend complex issues by emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). This selective highlighting influences the conversation to align with the communicator's objectives. For instance, in discussing economic issues, politicians may downplay concerns about income inequality while emphasizing job creation and economic growth (D'Angelo, 2002). During election campaigns, candidates craft messages to showcase their strengths and policies, impacting voter perception. Ultimately, frames shape cognitive processes, allowing political actors to control narratives and influence public opinion (Van Gorp, 2007).

Media frames, according to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), are determined at least by three determinants, i.e. cultural resonances, sponsor activities, and media practices. Dimitrova and Stromback (2008) noted that the strategic communication of political actors, journalistic norms, political ideology, and culturally rooted interpretations also influence media frames. This means that media frames are open to specific influences from other socio-cultural variables in society because structures are endogenous to the political and social world, as already noted by De-Vreese (2005).

X as a Social Media Platform

Users of the social media site X can publish 140-character tweets. We will continue to call it X, despite its original name is Twitter, for convenience even though it has been renamed and is now owned by Elon Musk, the CEO of SpaceX and Tesla. Prominent government officials, businesses, organizations, and millions of people use it to locate and share new information. Users can subscribe to receive tweets from accounts they follow on X. Messages displayed in a follower's timeline include a feed of all the accounts they have subscribed to. X has grown into an invaluable tool for connecting people looking for specific content about health and safety. X is a potent, real-time communication tool because of these brief, easily readable, public messages (Lassen & Brown, 2011).

X, as a social media platform, has fundamentally altered communication and information distribution in modern life. X, which was founded in 2006, has grown to be a popular medium for exchanging thoughts, news, and opinions in real time, all within the confines of its 280-character restriction each tweet. With approximately 330 million monthly active users as of 2021 (Soax, 2025), it has become an essential component of the social media ecosystem. One of X's key roles is to facilitate public discussions and conversations. Users

engage in debates on a variety of issues, including politics, entertainment, science, and technology. The platform allows users to express themselves simply while simultaneously encouraging engagement via features such as mentions, replies, and retweets (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Furthermore, X is an effective platform for information transmission and news sharing. Users may find and participate in discussions on breaking news and current events using hashtags and trending themes (Hermida et al., 2012). Journalists, politicians, celebrities, and organisations use X to reach large audiences quickly and directly, avoiding traditional media gatekeepers (Hermida, 2010). X's effect extends beyond individual users and into societal phenomena like activism and social movements. The platform has helped to organise protests, raise awareness of social concerns, and mobilise communities for collective action (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo has acquired traction and awareness on X, showing the platform's significance as a social change catalyst.

Utilization of X in Electoral Campaigns

Since its inception, X has evolved into a significant medium for political communication. Scholars have noted that the platform allows for direct interaction between politicians and constituents, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers (Boulianne, 2015). This direct communication fosters a sense of immediacy and accessibility, enabling politicians to convey messages quickly and efficiently. The platform's character limit encourages concise messaging, which can be particularly effective in capturing attention and conveying key points (Jungherr, 2016).

X has been instrumental in mobilising voters, particularly among younger demographics. Research indicates that social media platforms, including X,

play a crucial role in increasing political participation by providing users with information about candidates and issues (Hargittai, 2015). During electoral campaigns, candidates use X to share their platforms, engage in discussions, and respond to voter inquiries, thereby fostering a sense of community and involvement (Kreiss, 2016).

Candidates like Donald Trump, for example, used X to interact with voters directly during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, eschewing the narratives of traditional media. Trump's frequent and frequently contentious tweets garnered a lot of media attention, which helped his message get out there and be seen by more people. This phenomenon illustrates how X can serve as both a communication tool and a catalyst for media attention, shaping the electoral narrative.

The strategic use of X in electoral campaigns also involves framing, where candidates present issues in a manner that aligns with their political objectives. Framing theory posits that the way information is presented can significantly influence public perception and opinion (Entman, 1993). Politicians often craft their tweets to highlight specific aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thereby shaping the narrative surrounding their candidacy (D'Angelo, 2002).

For example, during the 2020 U.S. presidential election, candidates utilize X to frame their positions on critical issues such as healthcare, immigration, and the economy. By emphasizing certain narratives, candidates could mobilize support and sway undecided voters. The ability to quickly disseminate tailored messages on X allows political actors to respond to emerging issues and adapt their strategies in real-time (Graham et al., 2016).

In the Nigerian context, political actors have similarly leveraged X (formerly Twitter) to bypass traditional media and

engage voters directly. For example, during the 2023 general elections, candidates such as Peter Obi of the Labour Party and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) frequently used X to communicate campaign messages, mobilise supporters, and counter opposing narratives. Obi's frequent tweets often focusing on accountability, youth empowerment, and good governance, gained substantial traction among young Nigerians, particularly the so-called "Obidients," and attracted significant media coverage, thereby amplifying his visibility in the electoral space (Iwuoha & Obi, 2023).

This illustrates how X functions both as a direct communication tool and a catalyst for wider media attention, shaping the public narrative of elections. In line with framing theory, Nigerian politicians also use X to present issues in ways that align with their campaign objectives. By strategically highlighting certain dimensions of governance such as corruption, insecurity, or economic hardship, while downplaying others, they influence how citizens perceive both the problems and the proposed solutions (Entman, 1993; D'Angelo, 2002).

Historically, the 2015 presidential election marked a turning point in Nigeria's digital political communication. Muhammadu Buhari, then a candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), used X and Facebook extensively to reach young voters disenchanted with mainstream media portrayals. His campaign deployed social media to frame the election around issues of corruption, insecurity, and change, thereby galvanising massive online and offline support (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013; Premium Times, 2015). By the 2019 election, Buhari's administration had institutionalised social media campaigns as a central part of electoral strategy, reinforcing X as a legitimate arena of political debate and agenda-setting (Uwalaka, 2021).

For instance, in the lead-up to the 2023 polls, candidates utilised X to frame their positions on critical issues such as fuel subsidy removal, unemployment, and national security. These frames not only helped to mobilise online communities but also swayed undecided voters who relied heavily on social media for political information (Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2016; Iwuoha & Obi, 2023). The immediacy and adaptability of X allowed Nigerian political actors to quickly respond to breaking developments, adjust their messaging in real time, and sustain digital momentum throughout the electoral period.

Hashtags play a crucial role in organizing discourse on X, allowing users to follow specific topics and engage in broader conversations. Political campaigns often create unique hashtags to promote their messages and encourage supporters to participate in discussions (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). This practice not only enhances visibility but also fosters a sense of community among supporters, as they can easily share content and engage with others who share similar interests.

Moreover, trending topics on X can significantly influence the electoral landscape. When particular issues or candidates gain traction on the platform, they can dominate public discourse and shape media coverage (Tumasjan et al., 2010). Because political actors can use X to elevate their messages and impact the larger political discourse, this phenomenon emphasises the significance of X as an agenda-setting tool.

Despite its advantages, the use of X in electoral campaigns also presents challenges. One significant concern is the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation on the platform. Studies have shown that false information can spread rapidly on X, potentially influencing voter perceptions and behaviour (Vosoughi et al., 2018). The rapid dissemination of misleading narratives can undermine the

integrity of the electoral process and create confusion among voters.

Additionally, the character limit imposed by X can lead to oversimplification of complex issues. While concise messaging can be effective, it may also result in the loss of nuance and depth in political discourse (Jungheer, 2016). This restriction calls into question the accuracy of the information being disseminated and the possibility of voter misunderstanding. X is now a crucial part of election campaigns, changing the way candidates interact and communicate with voters. The platform is an essential tool for political actors looking to rally support and sway public opinion because of its real-time nature, accessibility, and capacity to promote direct interaction. Nonetheless, the difficulties posed by false information and the possible oversimplification of intricate problems underscore the necessity of critical platform engagement.

It will be crucial for academics and practitioners to comprehend how X shapes political communication as election campaigns continue to change in the digital era. Future studies should examine how X affects election results and the political environment in general, as well as the tactics used by candidates to deal with the challenges posed by social media during their campaigns.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the technological determinism theory. According to Marshall McLuhan's theory of technological determinism, which has since been expanded upon by scholars like Neil Postman, technological developments influence social structures, behaviours, and perceptions. This theory is especially pertinent to comprehending how Nigerian politicians use X to communicate politically and how it affects the decisions that voters make. Political engagement has changed as a result of the digitalisation of political campaigns, and social media sites

like X are now essential to Nigerian political discourse. In ways that traditional media could not, politicians use X to interact with constituents, rally support, and influence public opinion. As technological determinism suggests, the medium itself influences political messaging and voter behavior, making political communication more interactive and immediate (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020).

Politicians in Nigeria have found X to be an effective tool, particularly during election seasons. Candidates use the platform to share their political manifestos, interact directly with voters, and provide real-time campaign updates. This change is consistent with the deterministic theory that new forms of political engagement are determined by technology. The general elections in Nigeria in 2023 demonstrated how X turned into a battlefield for political mobilization, propaganda, and narratives. Political actors such as Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar maximized X's potential to drive their political messages, engage supporters, and counter misinformation (Okon & Udousoro, 2023). Political power dynamics have changed as a result of this technological revolution, since social media influence occasionally surpasses that of conventional campaign tactics.

Voters' consumption of political information and election choices are also influenced by the thesis of technological determinism. A significant section of Nigeria's voters, the country's youth, teenagers and other age group primarily rely on X for political news, debates, and opinion development. Voting decisions are frequently influenced by this dependence on digital political communication since exposure to carefully chosen content, viral trends, and influencer endorsements mould opinions about candidates. The interactive nature of X allows voters to challenge political claims, fact-check statements, and engage in political discourse, thereby democratizing political participation

beyond the confines of traditional media (Uwalaka & Nwammuo, 2022).

But technological determinism also implies that the medium itself has the power to influence political realities in ways that users cannot. The algorithmic nature of X amplifies certain voices while suppressing others, leading to echo chambers where users are exposed only to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs (Edegoh & Anam, 2022). Voters may find it more difficult to interact with different viewpoints prior to casting their ballots as a result of this selective exposure, which can further entrench political polarisation. Additionally, voter perceptions are influenced by the dissemination of false information and fake news on X, which frequently results in swayed public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research method and focused on X posts of the presidential candidates of the four major political parties—Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), Rabiun Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Voters' engagements with these posts during the presidential election campaign period, between 28 September 2022 and 23 February 2023, were mined for analysis. The selected period is significant because it represents the official campaign window approved by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), during which candidates were most active in digital mobilization and voter engagement. This timeframe also captures the intensity of online political communication, framing, and public discourse leading up to the 2023 presidential election.

The study employed purposive sampling to select data relevant to the research objectives. Since the focus was specifically on the X posts of the four

presidential candidates, their campaign-related posts and user engagements were deliberately mined and analyzed. The analysis was conducted using the Meltwater software, which systematically collected large volumes of X data including posts, comments, likes, and shares in order to uncover patterns and themes. Through this data mining technique, the researcher

identified key issues discussed by the candidates, assessed public opinions and sentiments toward their tweets, and examined the interactions between candidates and voters. This methodological approach provided meaningful insights into how politicians utilized X during the campaign period to shape public discourse and influence voter decisions.

Result

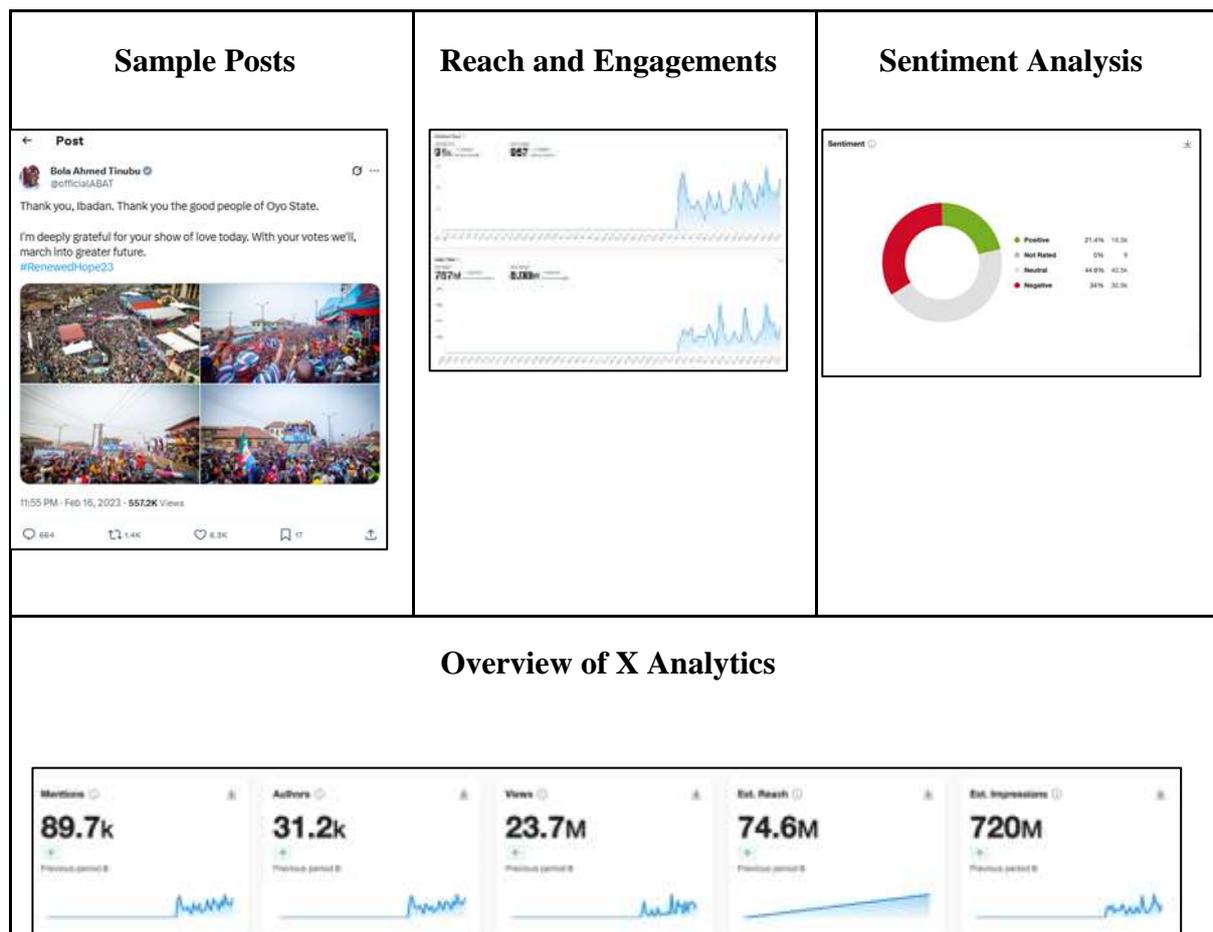


Figure 1: Bola Tinubu of All Progressives Congress (APC)

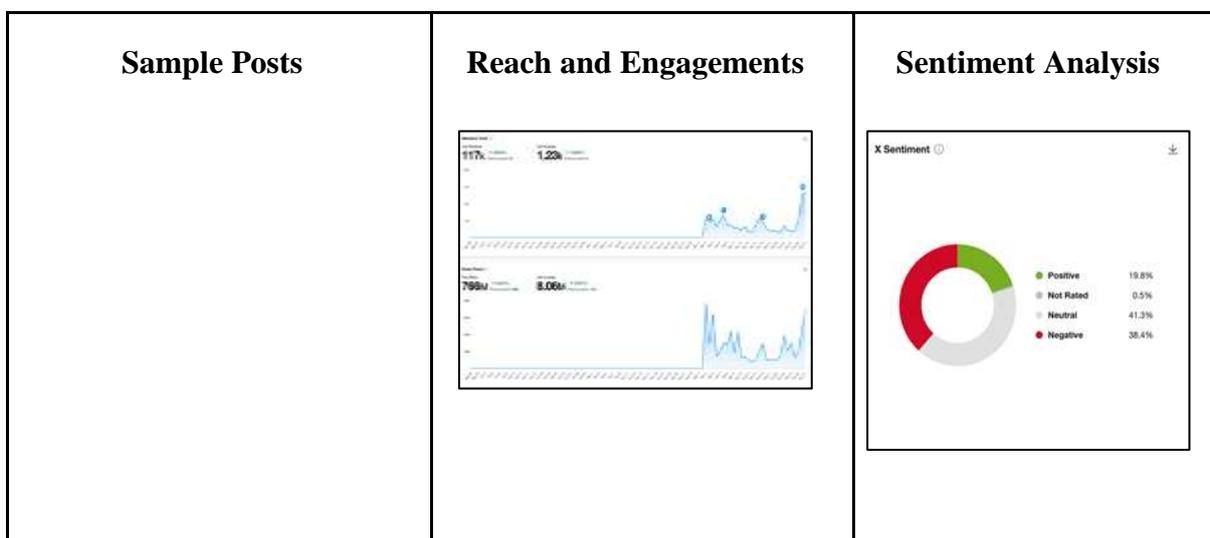
Between September 28 and February 23, 2023, 89,688 mentions of Bola Ahmed Tinubu on X were made, with a significant percentage of exchanges expressing support for his candidature. This was largely due to the upcoming general elections in Nigeria in 2023, with a significant portion of conversations focusing on his leadership style, political credibility, and chances of winning an election. Tinubu's digital presence was notably high, with an average of 957 tweet mentions per day, reaching 767 million users and an average daily reach of 8.08 million users. Sentiment analysis revealed that 21.4% of the total mentions were positive, while 44.6% were neutral. However, 34% were critical, mainly due to alleged corruption, drug-related charges, and certificate forgery scandals. Despite these negative opinions, X dominated the political

conversation during the 2023 elections, reflecting the influence of digital platforms in Nigerian politics.



Figure 2: Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP)

Between September 28 and February 23, 2023, 84,798 mentions of Peter Obi on X were made, with a significant portion driven by young people's support for his candidature. The controversy surrounding Obi's possible suspension from the Labour Party sparked debates, highlighting the influence of X on political narratives and public opinion. With an average of 569 tweets mentioned daily, X's increasing importance as a platform for political discourse and voter participation in Nigeria is evident. Sentiment analysis revealed that 30.2% of positive mentions were positive, while 34.3% were neutral. Negative mentions accounted for 35.5%, indicating opposition or concerns about Obi's tactics and candidature.



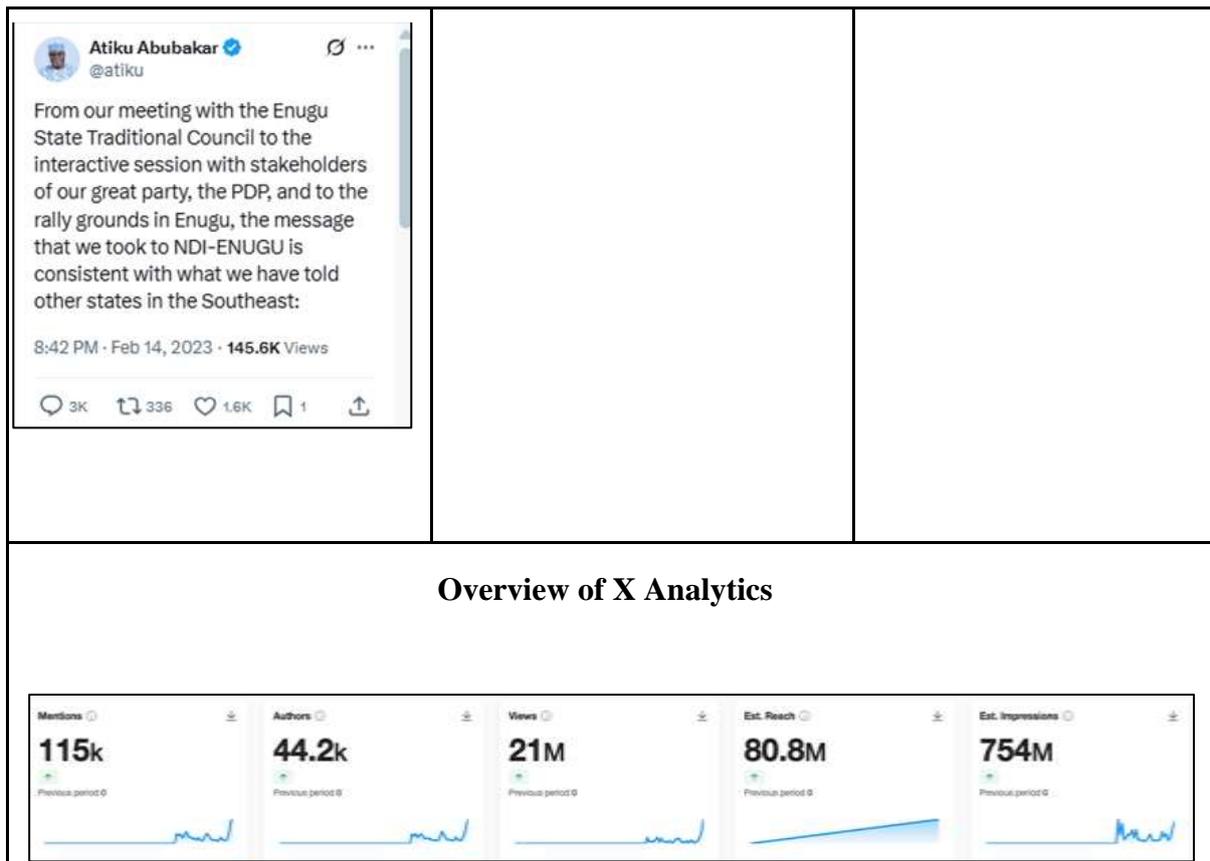
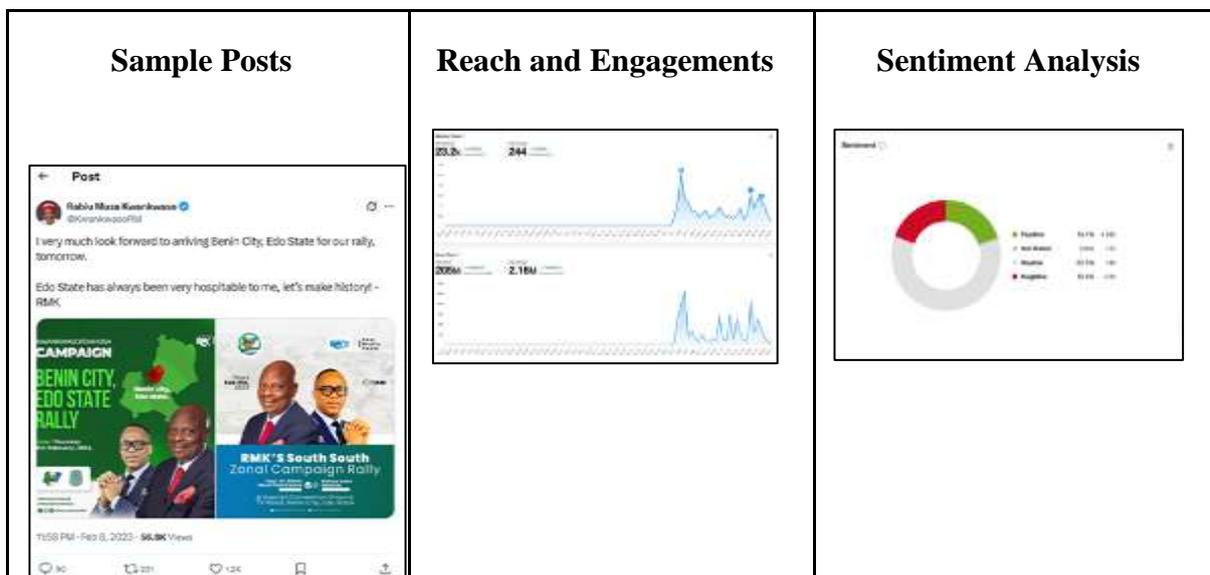


Figure 3: Atiku Abubakar of Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP)

Between September 28 and February 23, 2023, 116,610 mentions of Atiku Abubakar on X were made, with a significant increase in discourse due to the upcoming Nigerian general elections. Critics of his history of switching parties sparked debates about his credibility and political consistency. X's growing significance as a forum for public opinion formation and voter mobilization during Nigerian election campaigns is evident. Public perceptions of Atiku Abubakar vary, with 19.6% of positive mentions and 41.6% of neutral stances. Negative mentions account for 38.3%, indicating strong opposition and concerns about his electoral viability and political credibility.



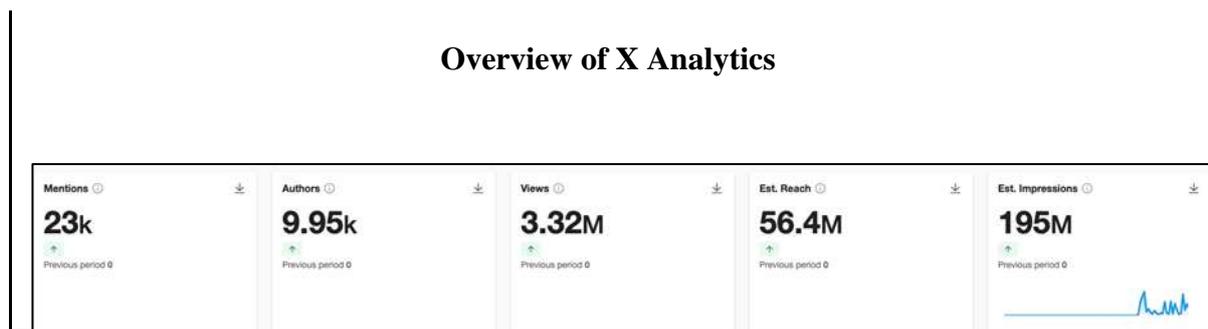


Figure 4: Rabi Kwankwaso of New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP)

Between September 28 and February 23, 2023, there were 23,008 mentions of Rabi Kwankwaso on X, with a significant portion of interactions indicating support for his candidature, particularly among Northerners. His political clout in Kano State, where he had previously held the position of governor, played a significant role in the interaction. Kwankwaso had a moderate online presence in 2023, with 244 tweet mentions per day and an average daily reach of 2.16 million users. Sentiment analysis revealed that positive mentions made up 19.7% of the total, while 60.3% of discussions showed a neutral stance. The majority of mentions were critical, indicating disapproval and doubt about Kwankwaso's chances of winning the election.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of X Engagements on Presidential Candidates' Campaign Posts – Nigeria 2023 Elections

Candidate	Mentions	Avg. Daily Mentions	Total Reach	Avg. Daily Reach	Positive Sentiment (%)	Neutral Sentiment (%)	Negative Sentiment (%)	Dominant Sentiment
Bola Tinubu (APC)	89,688	957	767 million	8.08 million	21.4%	44.6%	34%	Neutral
Atiku Abubakar (PDP)	116,610	1,227	766 million	8.06 million	19.6%	41.6%	38.3%	Negative
Peter Obi (LP)	84,798	569	342 million	2.29 million	30.2%	34.3%	35.5%	Positive/Negative (Tied)
Rabi Kwankwaso (NNPP)	23,008	244	205 million	2.16 million	19.7%	60.3%	19.4%	Neutral

Atiku Abubakar received the most negative sentiment (38.3%), despite having the highest mention volume (116,610). At 30.2%, Peter Obi had the highest positive sentiment, even though his overall reach was less than that of Tinubu and Atiku. Bola Tinubu's average daily engagement and strong digital reach were indicative of a well-run online campaign that was heavily aided by APC structures. With engagement primarily in the North and a largely neutral discourse at 60.3%, Rabi Kwankwaso had the smallest digital footprint.

Table 2: Triangulation of X Engagements on Presidential Candidates' Campaign Posts with Actual Vote Casts in South-South Nigeria in 2023 Nigerian general elections

Candidate	X Mentions (X)	Positive Sentiment (%)	Negative Sentiment (%)	South-South Actual Votes	South-South Vote %
Peter Obi (LP)	84,798	30.2	35.5	1,210,675	42.4%
Bola Tinubu (APC)	89,688	21.4	34.0	799,957	28.0%
Atiku Abubakar (PDP)	116,610	19.6	38.3	717,908	25.1%
Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP)	23,008	19.7	19.4	17,167	0.6%
Others	—	—	—	111,933	3.9%
Total Valid Votes	—	—	—	2,857,640	100%

***South-South Votes Figures are sourced from INEC Database (2023)**

Despite receiving fewer mentions (84,798) than Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi led the South-South region with 42.4% of the vote, bolstered by the highest positive X sentiment (30.2%). Atiku Abubakar received 25.1% of the vote, the most mentions (116,610), the lowest positive sentiment (19.6%), and the highest negative sentiment (38.3%). Bola Tinubu received 28.0% of the vote, 89,688 mentions, and a positive sentiment of 21.4%. With 0.6% of the vote and balanced sentiments close to 19.7%, Rabiu Kwankwaso had little influence. This implies that electoral success in this area, particularly for Peter Obi, was highly connected with favourable sentiment regarding X.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the data of X engagements on presidential candidates' campaign posts during Nigeria's general elections in 2023 provide valuable information in keeping with the study's objectives. The X analytics data reveal that among the leading presidential candidates, Atiku Abubakar received the highest number of mentions, followed closely by Bola Tinubu (89,688) and Peter Obi (84,798), while Rabiu Kwankwaso trailed with 23,008 mentions.

The relatively balanced mix of positive, neutral, and negative sentiments across all four candidates, especially the high neutral sentiment for Kwankwaso (60.3%) and Atiku (41.6%), reflects the analytical tendencies of the survey respondents, many of whom had tertiary

education and were likely able to interpret campaign messages critically (Chiluwa, 2015). Tinubu's campaign saw high digital reach (767 million) and an average of 957 daily tweets, which may be attributed to the APC's strong digital mobilization—an effort reflected in the online activity of his numerous party supporters.

X data suggested that Peter Obi had notable positive visibility on X (30.2%) with balanced engagement. This aligns tightly with his commanding 42.4% actual vote share, confirming both digital appeal and offline support. Bola Tinubu, while having a strong X presence with high reach and engagements (89,688 mentions), recorded 28.0% in the region—substantial but clearly secondary to Obi. Survey insights also highlighted digital mobilization and organized APC campaigns impacting his uniform mentions

but less converted votes. Despite being the most mentioned candidate on X (116,610 mentions), Atiku Abubakar garnered only 25.1% of South-South votes. His high presence but lower vote translation underscores the survey finding of digital skepticism; the negative sentiment on his messages may have diluted electoral conversion, reflecting what's seen in South-South results. Kwankwaso remained a neutral figure both digitally and electorally, suggesting that Northern-heavy support bases and minimal X traction did not translate to votes in the South-South.

The results corroborate the research's guiding theory—the technological determinism theory. According to the theory of technological determinism, technology has an impact on cultural values and social structures. This perspective is supported by the study's evidence of X altering political engagement, but the results also highlight the influence's limitations because of offline sociopolitical realities, digital divides, and user scepticism. The study of innovation diffusion theory (IDT) looks at how new technologies affect behaviour and proliferate within populations. IDT's theory of innovators and early adopters driving diffusion is supported by demographic data showing that younger, better-educated Nigerians are early adopters of X for political reasons. Overall, the results of the 2023 Nigerian election show a complicated media landscape in which X serves as a contested space as well as an empowering platform, supporting and challenging theories regarding the media's role in political influence and participation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that politicians' engagements with followers on X had a significant and multifaceted influence on political participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, particularly in the South-South region, where Peter Obi's interactions with X users stood out prominently. Even though Atiku Abubakar

received the most mentions, Peter Obi's electoral win demonstrated the critical relationship between internet appeal and offline votes. Tinubu's campaign's strong digital mobilizing stands in stark contrast to Atiku's poor vote conversion rate, which is indicative of voter mistrust. These results lend credence to ideas of technological determinism and innovation diffusion by showing how digital platforms influence political behaviour, which is moderated by offline socio-political variables and demographic dynamics.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Political parties should not only focus on generating high mentions and visibility on X but also invest in trust-building strategies that can translate online engagement into actual votes.
2. Political campaign strategies should account for socio-political realities, demographic differences, and digital skepticism. Tailoring engagement to different groups—especially beyond young, educated X users—can broaden impact and ensure inclusivity in political communication.
3. Candidates who gain strong positive sentiment online should consolidate this momentum with robust offline mobilization to maximize digital appeal into electoral success.
4. Political campaigns must strategically manage public sentiments by swiftly countering misinformation, addressing dissent, and responding to criticism on social media platforms. Proactive reputation management on platforms like X can lower cynicism and boost voter trust, especially in regions like South-South Nigeria where there is a significant degree of digital mistrust.

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