Political Misinformation and Disinformation on Social Media: A Study of the 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Lagos State

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Abstract: *Social media has emerged as a highly influential platform in various facets of the society, including the political landscape. Although misinformation and disinformation have been present prior to the rise of social media platforms, the emergence and evolution of these platforms have significantly facilitated their dissemination, making it easier to access and spread them across various locations. This study examines political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. The study was anchored on the agenda setting theory, the Survey Research Method was used and the questionnaire administered via google forms served as the instrument of data collection. The study population consisted of residents from Ojo Local Government area, with a sample size of 400 respondents calculated using the Taro Yamane formula. Respondents sampled for this study were selected through purposive sampling technique. Findings showed that citizens were exposed to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. Findings also revealed that political party social media accounts, news outlets and user comments on social media all served as sources of misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. The paper recommends the establishment of media literacy programs that target the public to enhance their critical thinking skills and ability to discern deceptive information on social media platforms.*

Keywords: social media, elections, misinformation, disinformation, framing theory

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as a highly influential platform in various facets of the society, including the political landscape (Uwa & Ronke, 2023). Ab initio, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were primarily focused on nurturing social connections and keeping track of activities of loved ones (Olsson & Dahlgren, 2010). However, in this present domain characterized by consistent and ferocious adoption of the media for political activities, social media platforms have transformed into powerful instruments for political communication and involvement, providing insurmountable value in monitoring election activities and outcomes in Nigeria and other parts of the world (Dunu, 2018).

Social media, due to its extensive reach, ease of use, interactivity and user-friendly interface, has provided a myriad of benefits for the political system. Obono and Aminu (2021) avers that the advent of social media has enabled the widespread dissemination of political information. Similarly, Mamman (2019) contends that social media has become a potent tool utilized by politicians to reach potential voters through the dissemination of political campaign messages. Further amplifying this stance, Yang and Dehart (2016) connotes that social media has enabled citizens to stay informed about political development, actively participate in the political process and access political information easily. The positions of the aforementioned scholars bring to the foreground that social media has played a transformative role in the political landscape, providing formidable mechanisms for widespread dissemination of political information, effective communication of campaign messages by politicians to a broad audience, and empowering citizens to actively participate in the political process while easily accessing relevant information.

High quality information is sacrosanct for the functioning of democracy. However, the dissemination of fake news poses substantial challenges to democratic societies as it misleads citizens, thereby exerting a significant impact on the deliberative process (Hassan, 2023). While misinformation and disinformation have existed prior to recent advancements in technology, the technological revolution has provided widespread access across various regions and timeframes (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The emergence of the internet, particularly social media platforms, has significantly expedited the propagation of misinformation and disinformation. This is facilitated by the increasing population of mobile data users and the widespread accessibility of inexpensive smartphones (Hassan, 2023). However, it's crucial to note that social media isn't inherently detrimental; rather, at times, it's utilized by political entities to spread propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation with the intent to undermine specific candidates during electoral cycles.

Social media platforms, owing to their facilitation of online content creation, sharing, access, and replication, have been employed to spread false information, thereby impacting the functioning of democracies (Obono & Aminu, 2021). Like a cankering worm, political misinformation and disinformation necessitated by the advent of social media platforms, has

penetrated and eaten deeply into the roots of the political landscape of various societies, with untruths, alternative facts, blatant lies and false ideologies being ingrained into the passive audiences who serves as consumers of information in the society.

According to the Social Media Poll Report (2019), approximately 120 million Nigerians have access to the internet. This assertion is further strengthened by the Nigerian Communications Commission (2024), which disclosed that more than half of the Nigerian population are internet users, with over 20 million individuals utilizing social media platforms for leisure, social connection, and to gather information on pertinent societal issues. These figures underscore the burgeoning adoption of social media among Nigerians, transforming these platforms into potent tools for political influencers to disseminate information regarding political events, engage their audience, and stimulate participation in both online and offline political endeavours (Ahmad et al., 2019). Notably, political influencers and manipulators have increasingly exploited social media not solely for sharing political content but also for disseminating disinformation aimed at influencing public opinion (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2019).

During election periods, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation tends to escalate, with political rivals strategically exploiting the vast reach of social media platforms to tarnish the reputations of opponents and manipulate public opinion. The digital landscape becomes a breeding ground for misleading narratives, fabricated stories, and smear campaigns, all aimed at gaining a competitive edge in the political arena. A prominent example was uncovered during the 2019 Nigerian general elections when there was a widespread circulation backed up with tampered photos across various social media platforms, suggesting that Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari is a clone. (Hassan, 2023). Similarly, another piece of fake news widely circulated on social media during the 2019 elections in Nigeria suggested that Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, a front runner and flagbearer of the People Democratic Party (PDP) made a ceasefire deal with Boko Haram in exchange for oil and land in Borno state (Obono & Aminu, 2021). Furthermore, during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria a CNN report on weapons smuggling into Nigeria during the 2011 elections was shared across various social media platforms, misleading individuals to believe it was a current event (Busari, 2019). The viral spread of disinformation, as evidenced by the aforementioned instances, has the potential to contribute to political instability, incite violence and erode public confidence in the government.

The 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State, culminating in the re-election of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, became a focal point of attention on various social media platforms. In the lead-up to the election, the digital landscape was marred by widespread misinformation and disinformation surrounding the frontrunners, with social media playing a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and disseminating misleading information before, during and after the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

Statement of Problem

In recent times, social media has become a powerful tool for political communication, offering a platform for information dissemination, public discourse, and political engagement. Unfortunately, this prominence has also paved the way for the widespread circulation of misleading content, false narratives, and deliberate misinformation aimed at influencing public opinion, swaying voter sentiment, and undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

While scholarly attention such as; Obono and Aminu (2021), Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2020), Inobemhe et al. (2020), Jimanda (2023), amongst others, has been directed towards the pervasive issue of political disinformation and misinformation on social media, there is a paucity of empirical literature in the specific context political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State. It is this knowledge gap which this current study seeks to fill the void, hence this study examines political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. However, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- To evaluate the extent at which political misinformation and disinformation on social media was spread during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.
- To discover the types of political misinformation and disinformation on social media encountered by Lagos state residents during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.
- To find out the sources of political misinformation and disinformation encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.
- To investigate how the spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced perceptions and attitudes of Lagos state residents during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.

Research Questions

- To what extent was political misinformation and disinformation spread on social media platforms during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?
- What types of political misinformation and disinformation were encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?
- What were the sources of political misinformation and disinformation encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?
- How did the spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influence the perceptions and attitudes of voters in Lagos state during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Political Participation

The suggestion that politics relies heavily on the media is grounded in the recognition of its influential role in shaping public perceptions and disseminating information. Authenticating this position, scholars such as Brugger and Milligan (2019), underscores the traditional media's crucial role in setting the public agenda and molding cognitive patterns, while Uwa and Ronke (2023) purports that the emergence of social media has further intensified and expanded this function to an unprecedented degree. Dunu (2018) strengthens the aforementioned stance by highlighting that the inclusivity of social media, coupled with its fusion of mass media and personal media formats, has created an environment where political engagement and discourse can occur with reduced hierarchical barriers among individuals from different social strata. The capability to swiftly and affordably reach vast and diverse audiences has rendered social media platforms highly appealing to political players (Uwa & Ronke, 2023).

The rise of social media has revolutionized political engagement by offering users a platform to actively participate in political discourse both online and offline (Ahmad et al., 2019). Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2020) highlight how this digital transformation has introduced new concepts such as netizenship, cyber-democracy, e-governance, and e-participation. Kellner and Bohman (2013) further elaborate on this shift, suggesting that the internet fosters a democratic postmodern public sphere, allowing citizens to engage in egalitarian discussions on societal matters. Social media platforms now serve as essential mediums for political engagement, where individuals express their viewpoints, share information, and connect with like-minded individuals (Uwa & Ronke, 2023). Additionally, these platforms empower citizens to mobilize around political causes, leading to the emergence of virtual communities capable of influencing public opinion and policy-making processes.

Furthermore, social media platforms have facilitated greater accessibility to political information for citizens and heightened their capacity to interact with political figures. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have evolved into crucial channels for accessing news and updates, enabling individuals to stay abreast of political developments (Kim & Lee, 2019). Notably, Lilleker (2012), an expert in political communication, observes that social media fosters direct interaction between citizens and political leaders, providing politicians with a means to engage with constituents and address their issues. Social media facilitates two-way communication, allowing political figures and candidates to interact with voters and receive immediate feedback. Consequently, it has become standard practice for political candidates to maintain active profiles on these platforms.

Social Media and Elections in Nigeria: An Historical Overview

The 2011 general election in Nigeria marked a pivotal moment in the country's political landscape. It represented the inaugural utilization of digital media as a political platform during the electoral process and campaigning. According to Dunu (2018), This event signified a fundamental shift in Nigeria's political history, introducing the concept of "Internet elections" or "e-electioneering". In consonance with this viewpoint, Olowokere and Audu-Bako (2019)

espoused that during the month-long election process in April 2011, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) shared nearly 4000 tweets, with a significant number addressing inquiries from voters.

Before 2011, Nigerian elections were marred by various irregularities including rigging, violence, ballot box snatching at gunpoint, intimidation of voters, and manipulation of election results, among others (Oni et al., 2013). However, the incorporation of social media during the 2011 elections played a pivotal role in significantly reducing these malpractices. The utilization led to a more transparent electoral process and increased accountability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to the public in conducting elections (Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019).

The 2011 elections marked the beginning of digitalization in Nigerian politics, but the 2015 Nigeria general election, further solidified the integration of digital media in Nigerian political culture (Dunu, 2018). Nwoke et al. (2021) notes that the opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) extensively utilized digital media to reshape the narrative and ultimately seize power from the incumbent government. Explicating further, the scholars articulated that in a bid to remain in power, the incumbent government under the leadership of former President Goodluck Jonathan annexed the power of social media to control narratives and garner support from the Nigerian populace. Despite the incumbent government's efforts to utilize social media for narrative control and garnering support, the bid to secure the reelection of President Goodluck Jonathan ultimately faltered, as the flagbearer of the opposition party, President Muhammadu Buhari emerged victorious in the 2015 Nigeria general election. One can argue that the "change" mantra, popularized across various social media platforms during the election period, played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and contributing to President Muhammadu Buhari's electoral success.

The momentum gained from the transformative role of social media in the 2015 elections carried over into the 2019 Nigeria general elections. Recognizing the potency of digital platforms, both incumbent and opposition parties strategically leveraged social media to disseminate their messages, engage with the electorate, and influence public opinion. A study by Nwoke et al. (2021) revealed that during the Nigerian 2019 general elections, various political actors extensively and effectively utilized social media. This revelation is not far-fetched as the digital landscape witnessed the widespread dissemination of political messages, as the "Next Level" slogan championed by the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari's campaign gained significant traction across various social media platforms, and the "Atikulate" mantra employed by the opposition, led by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar also popular on various social media platforms. Citizens also embraced social media as a vital tool for information gathering, staying informed about political developments, and participating in discussions surrounding the 2019 general elections.

The landscape of social media usage and adoption in Nigerian elections continued to evolve in the 2023 general elections, with the emergence of new social media platforms such as Tik Tok, introducing a fresh dimension to political communication. Also, the advancements in existing

platforms played a pivotal role in enhancing political engagement. An illustrative example is the introduction of "Spaces" on X, formerly Twitter, which provided a unique space for real-time audio conversations. This feature revolutionized political discourse by allowing candidates, political pundits, and citizens to engage in live discussions, debates, and town hall meetings.

The widespread popularity of slogans like "Obedient" "BATified", across various social media platforms during the 2023 elections in Nigeria serves as a testament to the consistent adoption of social media in Nigeria's electoral landscape. As this trend persists, it is likely that the reliance on social media for political communication will further expand, becoming an even more prominent feature in upcoming elections in Nigeria.

Social Media, Misinformation and Disinformation
The word "misinformation" and "disinformation" are often used interchangeably. This is not surprising as they are both hinged on the spread of false information which can affect a society's stability and advance propagandist ideologies. Nevertheless, it is crucial to discern the specific distinctions between these two concepts.

Providing a conceptual clarification of misinformation, Jimanda (2023) articulates that misinformation refers to inaccurate information spread without deliberate or malicious intent. Conversely, disinformation is a purposeful and well-orchestrated effort to manipulate individuals in the society by deliberately disseminating false information to deceive and sow doubt regarding verifiable facts (Oparaugo, 2021; McGonagle, 2017). According to Jimanda (2023), while both misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges to society, disinformation stands out as particularly perilous due to its deliberate orchestration, substantial resourcing, and occasional support from automated technology.

In developing nations like Nigeria, where media literacy levels are low, there has been a rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation. An early and widespread example was the dissemination of text messages during the 2014 Ebola outbreak, subtly urging citizens to bathe in large amounts of salt water as a supposed preventive measure (Chimuanya & Ajiboye, 2016; Nababa, 2016). This misinformation led to tragic consequences, with two fatalities and 20 individuals hospitalized due to excessive saltwater intake (Okafor, 2018). Following the Ebola fake news incident in 2014, the over 120 million internet subscribers have consistently encountered comparable unsolicited false information on social networking platforms (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2020).

In the political realm, the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation has reached alarming heights, with politicians strategically employing these tactics for character vilification and manipulation (Dunu, 2018). This phenomenon has escalated significantly as politicians in Nigeria and in various countries worldwide have taken political communication to a distinctly negative height (Oparaugo, 2021). They have incorporated elements of disinformation into their campaign messages, with these messages being swallowed hook line and sinker by thousands of gullible and unsuspecting voters (Hassan, 2019).

Through its efficient mechanisms for interaction and rapid dissemination of information, social media has become a potent tool for misinformation and disinformation within Nigeria's political arena. While it offers a direct means for politicians to connect with constituents, it also facilitates the propagation of distorted and unsubstantiated content, leading to detrimental outcomes such as influencing voting preferences, perpetuating biases, and prompting misguided conclusions and behaviors (Mamman, 2019).

Social media serves as a formidable instrument for politicians to engage with voters and steer discourse in their favour (Uwa & Ronke, 2023). Nonetheless, concerns arise regarding the authenticity and reliability of online content, given the current absence of mechanisms to regulate or penalize the dissemination of false or misleading information on social media. This lack of oversight complicates endeavors to combat the proliferation of political misinformation and disinformation (Çela, 2015). With a substantial segment of Nigeria's population active on social media platforms, these channels have emerged as primary avenues for political communication, exerting influence over public opinion and political socialization. The abundance of information available on social media platforms poses challenges in discerning factual occurrences, as the accessibility of the internet facilitates the effortless creation and dissemination of content, blurring the boundaries between political misinformation, disinformation, and genuine news.

Theoretical Framework
The framing theory serves as the theoretical framework utilized for this study. This theory, originally developed by Erving Goffman in 1974, is hinged on the media's role in shaping audience perception and societal disposition towards a particular issue (Msughter & Phillips, 2020). Defining framing in the communication context, Goffman (1974) cited in Asemah (2022) labelled framing as a cognitive framework for interpretation that enables people to recognize, understand, and label occurrences or life experiences. This concept was further modernized by Entman (1993) cited in Adeniran et al. (2019), where the scholar opined that to framing involves the deliberate emphasis of particular elements of perceived reality within a communication text.

According to the framing theory, the the manner in which a message is disseminated to an audience, known as the "frame," plays a crucial role in influencing how people understand and interpret it. Framing encompasses the process through which a communicator establishes and shapes the presentation of the message. The predominant use of frames is particularly evident in how media organizations manipulate how their messages presented. Essentially, a frame outlines how media outlets, acting as gatekeepers, structure and analyze the topics, events, and concepts they address (Asemah, 2022).

In the realm of social media and political propaganda in Nigeria, "frames" refer to the specific tactics utilized to craft, present, and disseminate messages with the intention of influencing public opinion (Vosoughi et al., 2018). For example, political leaders may utilize social media platforms to portray their opponents as corrupt, inefficient, or unpatriotic, while positioning themselves as the solution to Nigeria's challenges. These frames possess the ability to shape

the perceptions and interpretations of political events and figures among social media users, thus influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Pennycook et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, political elites frequently employ social media as a means to promote their agendas and retain power. This is accomplished through the use of bots or fake accounts to spread propaganda messages, manipulate hashtags, and create echo chambers where individuals with similar beliefs reinforce each other's opinions. These strategies contribute to the spread of misinformation, disinformation, polarization, and the manipulation of public opinion, all of which have significant implications for political processes and outcomes in Nigeria. Moreover, by employing framing techniques, political elites in Nigeria can utilize social media to amplify their perspectives while marginalizing dissenting voices or constructing narratives that exploit ethnic or religious divisions to gain political advantage.

The framing theory holds significant relevance to this study as it provides a framework for examining how political actors utilize framing techniques to shape narratives, suppress dissent, and shape public perceptions of political events. This theory is also valuable to this study as it sheds light on how framing techniques employed by political actors can impact discourse on social media and political propaganda in Nigeria.

Review of Empirical Studies

Obono and Aminu (2021) investigated the impact of social media disinformation on voting behaviours during the 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria. The study was grounded in the Agenda Setting theory, and the researchers employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating Content Analysis and Surveys as the research methodologies. Utilizing purposive sampling, the researchers selected Oyo State, Nigeria, focusing on the Ibadan North Local Government Area, including Bodija, Agbowo, Ojo, and the University of Ibadan as sampling locations. The study revealed a significant prevalence of disinformation concerning the leading presidential candidates on social media platforms. Particularly, Twitter emerged as the primary channel for disseminating disinformation, often falsely attributing stories to respected individuals in society to lend credibility to the information. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended enhancing media literacy among the Nigerian populace to enable them to discern truth from falsehood in social media discourse, thereby empowering them to make well-informed decisions regarding political candidates.

Hassan (2023) investigated the influence of social media content on traditional media and the rise of disinformation during elections in Nigeria. Employing Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) as the research methods, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select key stakeholders from across Nigeria's geopolitical zones to participate in the study. The collected data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study indicated that social media content not only impacts traditional media but also exacerbates existing ethnic and religious tensions. Furthermore, the study highlighted a significant prevalence of social media disinformation during elections aimed at confusing voters and fostering apathy among the populace. The study recommended reinforcing the positive aspects of social media to mitigate the risks associated with digital disinformation.

Inobemhe et al. (2021) investigated the influence of new media on the dissemination of fake news in Nigeria. Grounded in the Inoculation theory and Conspiracy theory, the study utilized the library research method to gather data. The findings revealed that new media platforms, particularly social media, have been instrumental in spreading fake news and misinformation across critical areas such as political communication, counterinsurgency efforts, and the promotion of ethnic sentiments among Nigerians. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that both government authorities and technology companies educate the public about fact-checking mechanisms to enable them to discern false and misleading information on new media platforms.

Abiodun (2024) conducted research examining the influence of fake news and misinformation on political communication and civic engagement in Nigeria. Using a desk study research design, the investigation was grounded in theories such as Agenda Setting, Selective Exposure, and Social Identity. The findings underscored the substantial effects of fake news and misinformation on political communication and civic engagement in Nigeria, where they are often employed for political manipulation and incitement of violence. In response to these findings, the study suggested a comprehensive approach focusing on media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and legislative measures to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which was deemed suitable due to the large population of the study and the need to select a sample that accurately represents the entire population. The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection and was administered via Google Forms to the sampled respondents. The study focused on residents of Ojo Local Government, Lagos state, with the population estimated at 901,800 using projection methods from (www.citypopulation.de.). The Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination was utilized, resulting in a sample size of four hundred (400) respondents, with a confidence level of 95%, a 5% margin of error, and an assumed response rate of 100%. Convenience sampling technique was employed to select participants who took part in the study.

RESULTS

The analysis presented below covered data sourced through the use of an online survey administered on residents of Ojo Local Government, Lagos state. 366 responses were retrieved and valid for analysis. Hence, the data presentation is based on the number of retrieved responses.

Table 1: Demographic data

Demographic Characteristics	Residents of Ojo Local Government, Lagos State (n=366)	
Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	161	44%
Female	205	56%
Age Bracket		
18-30	253	69.1%
31-42	54	14.8%
43-55	45	12.3%
56 and above	14	3.8%
Religion		
Christian	215	58.7%
Muslim	147	40.2%
Others	4	1.1%
Marital Status		
Single	260	71%
Married	100	27.3%
Divorced	2	0.5%
Separated	4	1.1%
Widowed	0	0%

Source: Survey, 2024

The distribution of the respondents according to their gender revealed that more female respondents were sampled for this study. Findings further revealed that the majority of the population falls within the 18-30 age bracket, while in terms of religious affiliation, the data indicates a predominantly Christian population. Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents are single, followed by respondents who are married.

Table 2: To what extent was political misinformation and disinformation spread on social media platforms during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did you identify any instance(s) of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?	Yes	277	75.7%
	No	89	24.3%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
How frequently were you exposed to political	Never	32	8.7%

misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?	Rarely	76	20.8%
	Occasionally	86	23.5%
	Often	119	32.5%
	Very often	53	14.5%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
To what extent were you exposed to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?	Very Large Extent	65	17.8%
	Large Extent	103	28.1%
	Moderate Extent	149	40.7%
	No Extent	49	13.4%
	Total	**366**	**100%**

Source: Survey, 2024

Analysis from table 2 revealed that majority of respondents sampled for this study, acknowledged the identification of instances of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the Lagos state gubernatorial elections. This indicates a significant level of exposure to political misinformation and disinformation during the electoral process in Lagos state. Also, the frequency of exposure to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections varied among respondents, with the majority of respondents, disclosing that they were often exposed to misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. This suggests a considerable level of exposure to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. Furthermore, analysis from table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents sampled for this study were exposed to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections to a moderate extent. This was closely followed by who disclosed that they were exposed to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections to a large extent. These findings suggest a prevalence of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.

Table 3: What types of political misinformation and disinformation were encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I came across misleading information about political candidates on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	89	24.3%
	Agree	181	49.5%
	Neutral	58	15.8%
	Disagree	26	7.1%
	Strongly Disagree	12	3.3%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
I encountered false claims or rumours related to the electoral process on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	90	24.6%
	Agree	187	51.1%
	Neutral	52	14.2%
	Disagree	27	7.4%
	Strongly Disagree	10	2.7%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
I came across contents that aimed to manipulate public opinion or spread disinformation about specific political issues on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	103	28.1%
	Agree	169	46.2%
	Neutral	48	13.1%
	Disagree	31	8.5%
	Strongly Disagree	15	4.1%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
I witnessed the use of fake news or doctored images and videos to influence voters perceptions on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	110	30.1%
	Agree	141	38.5%
	Neutral	51	13.9%
	Disagree	48	13.1%
	Strongly Disagree	16	4.4%
	Total	**366**	**100%**

Source: Survey, 2024

Analysis from table 3 revealed that majority of respondents acknowledge encountering misleading information about political candidates on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. Also, a similar trend is observed regarding false claims

or rumors related to the electoral process, where a large portion of the respondents sampled for this study admitted encountering false claims or rumours related to the electoral process on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. Furthermore, a substantial percentage of respondents acknowledge encountering content aimed at manipulating public opinion or spreading disinformation about specific political issues on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. The data presented in table 3 also revealed a wide acknowledgement of the use of fake news or doctored images and videos to influence voters perceptions on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

Table 4: What were the sources of political misinformation and disinformation encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state?

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Political party social media accounts were the major sources of political misinformation or disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	51	13.9%
	Agree	125	34.2%
	Neutral	96	26.2%
	Disagree	79	21.6%
	Strongly Disagree	15	4.1%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
News outlets were the major sources of political misinformation or disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.	Strongly Agree	41	11.2%
	Agree	131	35.8%
	Neutral	105	28.7%
	Disagree	74	20.2%
	Strongly Disagree	15	4.1%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
Social media users' comments, tweets, and other contributions emerged as the predominant channels for disseminating political misinformation or disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State.	Strongly Agree	119	32.5%
	Agree	175	47.8%
	Neutral	39	10.7%
	Disagree	24	6.6%
	Strongly Disagree	9	2.5%
	Total	**366**	**100%**

Source: Survey, 2024

Table 4 sheds light on the sources of political misinformation and disinformation encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections. Analysis from table 4 revealed that majority of the respondents sampled for this study identified political party social media accounts as sources of political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections. Also, there was a relatively substantial acknowledgement of news outlets as sources of political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial

elections in Lagos state. However, some respondents did not perceive news outlets as sources political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state, as some respondents outrightly disagreed that news outlets acted as sources of misinformation and disinformation during the elections. Furthermore, analysis showed that social media users' comments, tweets, and contributions emerged as sources for political misinformation and disinformation, with a substantial proportion of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that that social media users comments and contributions emerged as sources for political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

Table 5: How did the spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influence the perceptions and attitudes of Lagos state residents during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced my attitudes towards specific candidates in the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.	Strongly Agree	47	12.8%
	Agree	127	34.7%
	Neutral	78	21.3%
	Disagree	83	22.7%
	Strongly Disagree	31	8.5%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
The spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced my trust in the electoral process during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.	Strongly Agree	46	12.6%
	Agree	134	36.6%
	Neutral	84	23%
	Disagree	79	21.6%
	Strongly Disagree	23	6.3%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
Exposure to misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections affected my willingness to engage in political discussions online.	Strongly Agree	53	14.5%
	Agree	150	41%
	Neutral	59	16.1%
	Disagree	81	22.1%
	Strongly Disagree	23	6.3%
	Total	**366**	**100%**
The presence of misinformation on social media made it challenging for me to make informed decisions about which candidate to support in the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections.	Strongly Agree	48	13.1%
	Agree	124	33.9%
	Neutral	51	13.9%
	Disagree	95	26%
	Strongly Disagree	48	13.1%
	Total	**366**	**100%**

Source: Survey, 2024

Analysis from table 5 revealed that majority of respondents sampled for this study acknowledged that the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced their attitudes towards specific candidates in the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. Additionally, data from table 5 revealed that majority of respondents sampled for this survey disclosed that the spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced their trust in the electoral process during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. This signifies a formidable impact of political misinformation and disinformation on respondents trust in the electoral process. Furthermore, a substantial portion of respondents agreed that exposure to misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections affected their willingness to engage in political discussions online, thus implying a significant impact on residents' willingness to engage on online channels during the election period. Regarding decision-making, analysis from table 5 revealed that majority of the respondents found it challenging to make informed choices about which candidate to support in the elections due to the presence of misinformation and disinformation on social media.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research objective was aimed at evaluating the extent at which political misinformation and disinformation on social media was spread during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. In the quest to attain this research objective, the researcher found out that majority of the respondents sampled for this study acknowledged the identification of instances of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. This finding aligns with the viewpoints of Obono and Aminu (2021) who opined that due to their support for online content creation, posting, access and replication, social media have become veritable tools for political misinformation and disinformation. Furthermore, findings revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents sampled for this study were exposed to political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections to a large extent. This finding is in tandem with the perspective of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2014) who notes that political influencers and manipulators have increasingly leveraged social media not only for sharing political information but also for spreading misinformation and disinformation in order to sway public opinion.

The second objective in this study was geared towards finding out the types of political misinformation and disinformation on social media encountered by Lagos state residents during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. The study findings in this regard revealed that majority of respondents sampled for this study was exposed to various types of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the Lagos state elections misinformation. These include; misleading information about political candidates, false claims related to the electoral process, and content designed to manipulate public opinion. Additionally, respondents disclosed that the use of fake news or manipulated images and videos emerged as prevalent tactics during the election period. This finding tallies with the viewpoint of Dunu (2018) who notes that the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation on social

media has reached alarming heights, with politicians strategically employing these tactics for character vilification and posting misleading information about political rivals. The finding is also in consonance with the viewpoint of Hassan (2023) who contends that during election periods, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation tends to escalate, with political rivals strategically exploiting the vast reach of social media platforms to tarnish the reputations of opponents and manipulate public opinion through the use of doctored images to create narratives aimed bringing distrust to the electoral process and also for other negative means.

The third objective of this study aimed at finding out sources of political misinformation and disinformation encountered by Lagos state residents on social media during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. The study findings in this regard revealed that political party social media accounts, news outlets and social media users comments and contribution all emerged as sources for political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. This discovery is in accordance with the concept of framing theory, which pertains to the particular techniques used to craft, present, and convey messages with the intention of influencing public opinion. Within this framework, political figures may utilize their social media platforms and media channels to depict their adversaries as corrupt, inept, or disloyal, while positioning themselves as the remedy to Nigeria's issues. These frames hold the potential to influence how social media users perceive and interpret political events and figures, thus shaping their attitudes and behaviours (Pennycook et al., 2020).

The fourth research objective examined how the spread of political misinformation and disinformation on social media influenced perceptions and attitudes of Lagos state residents during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections. The study findings in this regard revealed that the impact of political misinformation and disinformation on residents' attitudes and perceptions was evident, as a significant number of respondents reported changes in their attitudes towards specific candidates, reduced trust in the electoral process, challenges in making informed decisions about whom to support, and notable effects on their willingness to engage in political discussions online. This finding is in line with the viewpoint of Busari (2019) who notes that the viral spread of misinformation and disinformation has the capacity to erode public trust in the electoral process. This discovery aligns with Mamman's (2019) assertion regarding Nigeria's political environment, where social media facilitates the spread of distorted and unverified information. This phenomenon results in adverse effects such as influencing voting choices, fostering bias, heightening voter disengagement, and promoting inaccurate interpretations and behaviours.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the findings gotten in this study, the researcher concludes that there was a high prevalence of political misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial elections, with political party social media accounts, news outlets and social media user's comments and contribution all acting as sources for political misinformation and disinformation during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby given:

- During election period, government agencies, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations should create media literacy programs that target the public. This would enhance their critical thinking skills and ability to discern deceptive information on social media platforms.
- Social media platforms should create advanced algorithms and fact-checking mechanisms aimed at checkmating the spread of political misinformation and disinformation. especially during critical events such as elections.
- Independent fact-checking organizations should be established to aid the verification of information shared on social media during elections.
- Political advertising should be regulated by relevant authorities. This is because, monitoring and regulating the content of political adverts on social media platforms will contribute to preventing the spread of misleading information during elections.

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