

IMPACT OF DIGITAL MISINFORMATION ON ELECTORAL PERCEPTION: A SURVEY OF LAGOS ELECTORATES' EXPERIENCES WITH X (FORMERLY TWITTER) DURING THE 2023 GUBERNATORIAL RACE

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Abstract

This study examined the Impact of Digital Misinformation on Electoral Perception: A Survey of Lagos Electorates' Experiences with Twitter during the 2023 Gubernatorial Race. The social media has become an avenue for political engagement, the curbing of misinformation on this platform now mandates that the electoral body takes responsibility. Through the social media like X (Twitter) a number of electorates can be reached, in this regard electoral bodies needs to perform their statutory duties. The descriptive survey was adopted for the study; the study was carried out among an estimated population of 5,747,193 registered electorates in Lagos State; a sample of 384 respondents was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed that misinformation, such as fake news, manipulated media, false election result claims, and hate speech, were found to be widespread during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. Findings also revealed that digital misinformation on Twitter influenced electorates' perceptions, causing confusion, distrust in the electoral process, and biased support for certain candidates. It was recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant stakeholders should adopt a comprehensive digital communication strategy to counter misinformation in real time during elections. It also emphasized that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should integrate digital literacy and media education into voter enlightenment programs.

Keywords: Digital misinformation, Electoral perception, X (Twitter), Lagos electorates, Gubernatorial election, social media, Political communication, Digital literacy

Introduction

Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) are now central to political engagement and electoral communication in Nigeria, which enhances participation of citizens in politics. The impact of these platforms is inherently double-edged. Participatory democracy is amplified by the voice of the citizens and shaping discourse on election. On the other, they are weaponized fertile grounds for misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda that distort electoral perceptions ((Aideloje et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Ekdale, 2025).

Digital misinformation refers to false or misleading information shared on digital platforms which could be intentional or unintentional with potentials to influence beliefs and attitudes. The 2023 Nigerian general elections highlighted the pervasive role of misinformation in public opinion. Research by Attai et al. (2024) identify X (formerly Twitter) as primary arena where political discourse was distorted through fake news and manipulated contents. Similarly, Adu (2024) argue that online political discourse during the 2023 general elections were basically manipulated to incite public violence. These digital activities not only undermined the credibility of the electoral process but also contributed to confusion among electorates.

The electoral misinformation takes divers form such as fake news articles, manipulated videos and images, misleading statistics, and hate speech. Analyzing the 2023 polls, Jimada (2023), highlights how platform like Twitter and Facebook strategically promoted spread of hate speech, false claims about candidates, and misrepresentation of political events. Evaluation of candidates and political parties may be hampered when

contents on social media are left unattended. High significant utilization of Twitter has been recorded in Lagos State, this is as the result of it been an active space for debates, mobilization and spread of distorted messages. The observation by (Akinsulire et al., 2024) recorded that Twitter particularly influenced the voting choices of youths in Surulere Local Government Area. It was further revealed in their findings that the immediacy and virality of posts on the platform often led to quick dissemination of unverified claims, creating challenges for voters to distinguish between factual and misleading information. This highlights how misinformation can subtly shape perception, trust, and ultimately, voting behavior. The 2023 Enugu State gubernatorial election studied by, (Eze et al., 2025) illustrates how social media has been used beyond a mere communication tool to an influential channel for political narratives and molded.

Several scholars have examined the impact of social media on election credibility, voter mobilization, and political perception in Nigeria (Ayeni & Aweh, 2025). Similarly, Ngantem et al. (2024) noted that social media platforms were instrumental in political campaign strategies in Taraba State, giving voters impression about candidate and the political parties. Likewise, Adewale et al., (2025) in a study of audience perception of newspaper organizations' Facebook posts during the 2023 presidential election, found that biased framing and misinformation on social media created divided opinions among electorates.

These studies collectively demonstrate that digital platforms have become central to electoral communication, but they also serve as vectors for misinformation that re-shape perception. Despite these valuable insights, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the

types of misinformation that circulated on X (formerly Twitter) during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election and how these specifically influenced electorates' perceptions. While previous studies have highlighted general trends of misinformation, few have provided a detailed examination of how different forms such as fake news, manipulated visuals, or false election result claims directly affect voters' judgment and trust. Also, Onuegbu, (2024) emphasized the broader evolution of social media as a political space, misinformation types and its translation into specific perceptual outcomes among electorates in Lagos State was excluded considering the factor on the high literacy rate, political activity and technological advancement.

Statement of the Problem

In a democratic society, like Nigeria, access to accurate information is fundamental for informed electoral participation. However, social media has increasingly become a channel for misinformation, hate speech, and political manipulation rather than serve as a tool for civic enlightenment (Adu, 2024; Jimada, 2023). Records have it that during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, X (formerly Twitter) was used extensively not only for political mobilization but for spreading false narratives that distorted electorates' perceptions of candidates and electoral integrity which was a result of low digital literacy limiting voter's credibility from falsehoods (Akinsulire et al., 2024; Attai et al., 2024; Okoh et al., 2024).

Despite growing scholarship on social media and elections in Nigeria limited empirical evidence exists on how electorates in Lagos specifically identified, interpreted,

and were influenced by digital misinformation. This gap highlights the need for a focused investigation into the types of misinformation that circulated on X (formerly Twitter) and how such misinformation influenced electoral perception by analyzing Lagos voters' experience with Twitter during the 2023 Gubernatorial Race. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of misinformation dynamics and their implications for electoral integrity and democratic governance in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What type of digital misinformation were circulated on Twitter which affect the perception of electorates in the 2023 gubernatorial race in Lagos State?
2. How digital misinformation on Twitter influenced the perception of electorates' during the 2023 gubernatorial race in Lagos State?

Literature Review

Types of Digital Misinformation During Elections

Digital misinformation during election is deliberately circulated to trigger public opinions and reactions online. In the democratic context, informed political choices is based on the credibility of information. Eze et al., (2025) categorize electoral misinformation into fabricated news, doctored visuals, misleading statistics, false polls, and hate speech which spreads through a cross-platform amplification, which affects the cognitive and emotional responses of electorates.

Another prevalent form of misinformation involves misleading statistics and fabricated opinion polls. Ibrahim & Ekdale, (2025) observe that such tactics exploit psychological biases, including the bandwagon effect, where voters gravitate toward candidates perceived as popular. (Adu, 2024) notes that false stories about corruption or misconduct circulated widely on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos gubernatorial election, influencing public opinion through emotional resonance and repetition. Exposure to such fabricated news which is pervasive in Nigeria may led to dilemma on individuals who wish to exercise their political rights. Onuegbu, (2024) emphasizes that manipulated visuals tend to evoke stronger emotional reactions than textual misinformation, making them particularly persuasive.

During the 2023 Lagos elections, altered photos and videos were widely shared, leading to confusion and reinforcing existing prejudices (Eze et al., 2025). These developments highlight the growing urgency for digital literacy programs capable of equipping electorates to verify online content before forming opinions. In the Lagos 2023 election, several falsified polls circulated online, projecting overwhelming support for particular candidates, which discouraged opposing voters and altered perceived competitiveness (Adewale et al., 2025). Likewise, hate speech emerged as a destructive force, targeting ethnic and religious identities to deepen polarization. Jimada, (2023) adds that divisive messages spread across Twitter framed the Lagos race along Yoruba-Igbo lines, eroding trust and encouraging hostility. Hate speech's emotional potency allows it to spread faster than corrective information, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of misinformation and distrust (Okeibunor & Nwaoboli, 2024). Collectively, these dynamics

form a complex digital ecosystem where fabricated news, doctored media, false polls, and hate speech continuously interact to distort electorates' perceptions and decision-making processes.

Influence of Digital Misinformation During Elections

The influence of digital misinformation on electorates can be explained through agenda-setting, framing, and cultivation theories. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) posits that media influence which topics the public perceives as important. On platforms like Twitter, misinformation achieves agenda control by trending hashtags and dominating discussions. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) further explains how misinformation shapes interpretation by selectively emphasizing certain aspects of reality. Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) complements these perspectives by illustrating how sustained exposure to falsehoods cultivates distorted political realities. Adu, (2024) observed that repeated exposure to ethnic-based misinformation in Lagos fostered fear and mistrust, normalizing conflict narratives and undermining confidence in democracy.

Empirical evidence from Nigeria and beyond demonstrates how misinformation affects democratic participation. (Okeibunor & Nwaoboli, 2024) similarly reported that misinformation eroded trust in the 2023 electoral process. Across Africa, similar trends appear in Kenya and Uganda, where doctored images and false polls manipulated perceptions of electoral legitimacy (Nyabola, 2018; Taye, 2021). In developed democracies, misinformation has also influenced political outcomes: in the United States, false claims of

electoral fraud deepened partisan divisions (Berlinski et al., 2023), while in the UK, misleading claims during the Brexit campaign shaped voting decisions (Levy, 2021).

Misinformation ultimately distorts three core dimensions of electoral perception: candidate evaluation, voting choice, and political polarization. Adewale et al., (2025) emphasize that false allegations and exaggerated claims shape how voters assess candidates' credibility, overshadowing policy discussions. Akinsulire et al., (2024) add that youths' voting behavior in Lagos was heavily influenced by dominant online narratives, while (Aideloje et al., 2024) found that misinformation mobilized or demobilized voters depending on its alignment with preexisting attitudes.

Therefore, digital misinformation during elections manifests through multiple interrelated forms fabricated news, doctored media, misleading statistics, and hate speech, all amplified by algorithmic networks and cross-platform sharing. These falsehoods exploit emotional and cognitive biases, manipulating how electorates perceive candidates, make voting choices, and engage with the democratic process.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research method. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data directly from electorates regarding their experiences and perceptions of digital misinformation on X (formerly Twitter) during the election. The study population comprised all registered electorates in Lagos State, totaling approximately 5,747,193 according to INEC (2023). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample of 384 respondents were selected through a stratified random sampling technique to ensure

proportional representation across local government areas and demographic groups. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered both physically and electronically. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages.

Results

Table 1: Types of Misinformation on Twitter

S/N	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1	Fake news articles about candidates	145	65.9%
2	Edited photos or videos (deepfakes, memes)	122	55.5%
3	False election result claims	145	65.9%
4	Misleading statistics or polls	123	55.9%
5	Hate speech or inciting messages	124	56.4%
6	None of the above	79	35.9%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The analysis in Table 1 revealed that several forms of digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced electorates' perceptions during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. The most prevalent types of misinformation each recording above 50% response rate were fake news articles about candidates (65.9%), false election result claims (65.9%), hate speech or inciting messages (56.4%), misleading statistics or polls (55.9%), and edited photos or videos such as deepfakes and memes (55.5%). These findings indicate that the majority of respondents were exposed to a wide range of deceptive or manipulated information that shaped their opinions and understanding of the election process.

This study conforms with (Adu, 2024; Akinsulire et al., 2024; Eze et al., 2025) reporting the social media were utilized for political misinformation. The implications of these findings are profound for democratic governance and voter education in Nigeria. The prevalence of diverse forms of misinformation suggests that electorates are operating within an information ecosystem where truth and falsehood coexist, making it difficult for voters to form rational, evidence-based judgments. These challenges the integrity of democratic participation, as decisions are influenced not by policy debates but by emotional manipulation and sensationalism. Without coordinated efforts to combat misinformation, the integrity of Nigeria's electoral system and the quality of political engagement risk being further compromised in future elections.

Table 2: Influence of Perception on Digital Misinformation

S/N	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1	It made me doubt the credibility of candidates	130	59.1%
2	It influenced my support for a particular candidate	124	56.4%
3	It reduced my trust in the electoral process	145	65.9%
4	It created confusion about political parties' agenda	123	55.9%
5	It had no influence on my perception	78	35.5%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Findings from Table 2 revealed that a majority of the respondents agreed that digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced their perception during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. Specifically, 65.9% of the respondents indicated that misinformation reduced their trust in the electoral process, while 59.1% stated that it made them doubt the credibility of candidates. In addition, 56.4% admitted that misinformation

influenced their support for a particular candidate, and 55.9% reported that it created confusion about political parties' agendas. These findings suggested that over half of the electorates were psychologically and politically affected by false or misleading information circulating online, thereby shaping their attitudes and voting preferences.

Conversely, only 35.5% of the respondents claimed that digital misinformation had no influence on their perception. This implies that a smaller portion of the electorate either maintained strong political convictions or exercised higher levels of media literacy in filtering misleading online content. According to (Attai et al., 2024; Jimada, 2023; Okeibunor & Nwaoboli, 2024) misinformation spread through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook often manipulate public discourse of hate speeches by framing political narratives in biased or deceptive ways leading to emotional reactions confusion about political issues, and polarization among voters, which ultimately impacts their electoral choices due to pre-election misinformation and propaganda.

The implications of these findings are both social and institutional. Socially, the prevalence of misinformation weakens the electorate's ability to make informed choices, fostering polarization and emotional decision-making rather than rational political evaluation. This distortion of perception can lead to the reinforcement of political biases, misinformation-induced conflicts, and decreased civic participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for the electoral regulatory bodies

1. It is recommended that the National Orientation Agency (NOA), in partnership with social media platforms, implement digital media monitoring and regulation frameworks that detect and flag misleading content swiftly.
2. Political and campaign teams should be subjected to strict penalties for deliberate disinformation, while journalists and influencers should be encouraged to adopt ethical online communication practices to safeguard the integrity of political discourse.
3. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant stakeholders should develop a comprehensive digital communication strategy to counter misinformation in real time during elections. Collaboration with reputable media outlets and social media companies should be strengthened to ensure prompt clarification of misleading information and to promote verified electoral updates to the public.
4. Electoral management bodies, media regulators, and civil society organizations need to promote digital literacy and fact-checking initiatives to help voters identify and resist misleading information thereby promoting integrity and sustaining democratic governance.

Conclusion

Based on the study findings, it has been concluded that the impact of digital misinformation on electoral perception among Lagos electorates during the 2023 gubernatorial race was largely negative. False information circulating on Twitter distorted voters' understanding of political issues, influenced their opinions about candidates, and

weakened their trust in the electoral process. Misinformation fostered confusion, cynicism, and political apathy, thereby undermining democratic participation and the credibility of electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

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