
**"FROM ONLINE TO OFFLINE": THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA,
THE #OBIDIENT MOVEMENT, AND THE RISE OF PEOPLES POWER.**

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Abstract

This paper investigated how (social) media have, historically, facilitated change and transformation in societies. It appraised the use of X (formerly Twitter) by Peter Obi, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. It argued that although Peter Obi (one of the contestants in the Presidential elections) did not win the elections, he nonetheless took the Nigerian political scene by storm, using X to transmit messages that resonated with the masses of the Nigerian public. A large cohort of Nigerian youths connected with the #Obidient Movement in a way never seen in the annals of Nigeria's electoral contestations. In analysing the 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria and the role of the online #Obidient Movement in the Presidential elections, the paper discussed the history of some social movements in Iran (1979), The Philippines (1986 & 2001), Barack

Obama's Movement in America's Presidential Elections (2008), The Arab Spring (2011), and the #EndSARS protest of 2020. The paper contended that the successes recorded by these movements were largely due to the (social) media tools deployed by young supporters. Indeed, social media platforms are shaping and changing political governance in the contemporary world. This research is premised on the Frustration-Aggression theory. It also adopted a textual analysis design of X tweets to determine the types of content produced by the three Presidential candidates. The research looked at the similarities between Obi and Obama and how they connected with their countries' young people. One of the key findings of this study is that social media are essential to the enterprise of social and democratic governance today. It concluded that the messages the candidates presented and the electronic tools used struck a chord with the voters who began their activism online but later moved offline to cast their votes.

Keywords: Social Media; Change; Online; Offline; Young People; Movement; Elections

Introduction

This paper is about the positive influence of social media for good governance in Nigeria and their roles in the 2023 Presidential Elections by Peter Obi supporters known as the '#Obidient Movement'. Specifically, this article examines the Obi supporters' use of Facebook and X and how they helped to mobilise a large cohort of young people across ethnicities, religions, and ideologies. In discussing this, the paper provided a context by tracing the historical evolution of how, for example, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was spearheaded by the use of audio-recorded messages which helped galvanise social forces across large strata of Iranian society, especially the Islamic clerics that saw to the overthrow of the Sha King. Cassette recorders enabled the playing of recorded messages, the technology of the time (Kukah, 1999). By 1986 and the early 2000s, transformation in the information superhighway had led to the invention and Utilization of the cell phone. The technology-savvy young Filipinos used cell phones as weapons that rallied Filipinos across all walks of life in the revolution tagged 'People Power 2', which ousted President Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada and their corrupt governments (Juan, 2001). The recognition of the powerful role of the media in the social and political transformation of society became evident in the Arab Spring, also known as the Facebook Revolution of 2011 that began in Tunisia but later spread to other Arab countries such as Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, and Syria, among others (Guehenno, 2011).

The development of the Internet has created significant changes and opportunities that are helping to facilitate communication in the modern world (Mohammed & Suleiman, 2013). No one could have predicted the avalanche of reactions that followed the self-emulation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor. The setting of himself on fire was to spark off a wildfire that would later consume several countries in Africa and the Middle East (Anim, 2013). This article examined briefly the 2021 social media-led protest in Nigeria

named #EndSARS in the aftermath of police and other Nigerian security brutality against young, innocent Nigerians. The democratisation of the Nigerian mainstream media in 1992 (Okidu, 2011) and the advent of social media platforms have further devolved powers into the hands of the members of the public, especially young people. This has put young Nigerians in the position to chart their destinies by appropriating social media such as Facebook and X to demand accountability and good governance in Nigeria. Mehrotra (2020) has documented instances where citizens have used social media devices to organise mass protests to highlight ills in society, including the famous Arab Awakening, Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG); #EndSARS; Black Lives Matter (BLM); among others.

Theoretical Basis

This study was guided by the Frustration-Aggression theory. This theory is credited to psychologists John Dollard and his colleagues (1939); the thrust of their theory was on what drives people to violence. However, other scholars like Leonard Berkowitz (1962) and Aubrey Yates (1962) further expanded on the theory by examining how aggression is a direct outcome of failure to meet essential needs. The reality of life suggests that most of the time, people do what they want or think they are entitled to. This often leads to frustration that could, before long, snowball into violence and protests against thought to be behind it (Olley & Ekhareafu, 2013). Olley and Ekhareafu opined that contrary to popular views held by realists and biological theorists, aggression and violence are not often a result of natural reason or instinct but frustration where legitimate aspirations of people are not given to them. The denial of these legitimate aspirations could push people to express their frustration through anger and violence.

The 2020 #EndSARS protests across the country by young people against police brutality and other criminal acts against citizens is one telling example of how sometimes, when peoples' legitimate demands are not met, frustration and violence could be the only option. The State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), as an initiative of the Federal Government of

Nigeria, was a good one. However, like most others, they could lend themselves to abuses when left unchecked. SARS was established to check the growing wave of robbery activities and Internet fraud, tagged "Yahoo, Yahoo Boys" in the country (Strong, 2020). Sadly, the SARS became a tool for the harassment of young innocent Nigerians. These harassments led to the seasons of protests witnessed in 2020, tagged #EndSARS, that went global (Dewan, 2021). According to Dewan, the #EndSARS protest went beyond the initial demand for disbanding the anti-robbery squad to demand qualitative leadership in the country. Good leadership has long been the missing link of statecraft in Nigeria today (Dewan, 2013a).

Social networking sites' ubiquity enables users to produce and transmit content. For social media-savvy young people, receiving and sending content, sharing comments, and uploading photos and videos is normal (Ogunsesan & Adeniji, 2021). The impact social media is having on people's lives is growing. Scholars (McCrae *et al.*, 2017; Aalbers, McNally, Heeren, Wit, & Fried, 2018) have postulated that since social media are now part of our daily lives, there will come a time when virtually everyone will resort to the Internet for their day-to-day activities.

Method of Study

The design of this study is Textual Analysis because Textual Analysis, by nature, is concerned with the qualitative reading of a text and pays attention to the cultural and ideological assumption of the media content (Barthes, 1975). This study purposively selected tweets posted on X by the three Presidential Candidates (Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All-Progressives Congress (APC); Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), from September 2022 to February 2023. The study analyzed the frequency and number of tweets posted by each of the three Presidential Candidates to make sense of the tweets. The reason for selecting X was because the three presidential candidates deployed it to put forward their campaign messages to the public in the lead to the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The study also analyzed how the posts

of the three Presidential Candidates speak to the key issues that mattered to the Nigerian public. X is an effective and efficient medium political candidates use nowadays because it has attracted millions of users since its emergence (Mitu, 2012).

Conceptual Clarifications

Obidient Movement: This refers to the supporters of Mr Peter Obi, the Labour Party presidential candidate in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. Obi's support group began as online activists and traversed communities (religion, ethnicity, region, profession, and so forth) (Mokye, Onwunyi & Okonkwo, 2023). Obi's supporters, who became known as "Obidients", later transformed into a "Movement." Later, it took on the name, '#Obidient Movement'. The movement gradually grew beyond the shores of Nigeria to Nigerians in the Diaspora. Membership in this movement included students, celebrities, professionals, the #EndSARS young people, and so on.

People Power: - Peoples Power is a non-violent popular protest that started in the Philippines and saw the removal of the dictator, President Ferdinand Marcos, in 1986 and Joseph Estrada in 2001. People Power has today become a metaphor for a peaceful, non-violent protest by mass citizens against bad governance across the globe. Examples of these protests dubbed Peoples Power include the Arab Spring of 2011 and the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria in 2020, among others.

Online: In computing language, online refers to a computer user or another device connecting to a network; online refers to a state of connectivity. This connectivity is enabled through a data or Internet router as part of continuous sequences of operation, which permits the user to either send, receive or interact instantly with another user. Thus, online refers to a successful connection between one or several people.

Offline: - This is the opposite of online, that is, a disconnection of the Internet or data. In this situation, the computer cannot support any online activity.

Social media is generally a term for websites and applications concerned with communication. Today, people use social media for all kinds of activities (businesses,

staying in touch with close ones, marketing their products, and so forth). Examples of social media include WhatsApp, Facebook, (X), Instagram, and Myspace.

Some Historical Examples of Media-Inspired Protests (Changes)

As society progresses, traditional norms are being questioned and reshaped in various ways. According to Koelsch (1995), computers represent the most significant milestone in human inventions and innovations. Koelsch suggests that computers have been the driving force of change in the last 60 years. Today, the media have enabled several revolutions/social movements that have led to so much transformation in the world.

a). Recorded Audio, Telephone Messages and the 1979 Iranian Revolution: -

Like many other countries in the Middle East, Iran possesses vast oil reserves and has aimed to modernise its society based on Western ideals. This transformation was initiated by King Mohammed Reza Sha Pahlavi in the early 1950s, which garnered support from the Iranian public but sparked ire from the Mullahs and clerics (Kukah, 1999). Despite outward appearances of progress, corruption permeated the modernisation process, and cherished Iranian values were allegedly replaced with Western ones (Dewan, 2013). Consequently, the Iranians became increasingly discontent with the oppressive autocracy and perceived Western cultural imperialism. The government was authoritarian and intolerant of any dissent. There were no independent political parties or labour unions; instead, religious networks played a vital role in mobilising the society to participate in political protests. Although the Mullahs and clerics were deeply opposed to the direction things were going in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as the figure of this growing opposition despite being in exile in France by the Sha-led government.

Emerging communication technologies have been powerful tools throughout history. Even as far back as 1979. Dewan (2013) contended that Khomeini influenced political mobilisation against the Sha in Iran after his exile in France. This was achieved through the use of what

Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994, p. 20) called "small media," which provided a platform for people's voices to be heard, and it is often used as an alternative to the state-controlled mainstream media. In Iran, these small media included audiocassettes, telephones, and photocopied leaflets. The telephones provided ordinary Iranians with swift information from Khomeini from his base in France (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994). Khomeini's fiery sermons were recorded on thousands of audiocassettes and widely distributed, becoming the main agent of revolutionary communication between the religious leadership outside of Iran and the growing opposition movement within the country. His recordings were played by his army of supporters, including 90, 000 Mullahs, 50 Ayatollahs, five lower clergymen, and 11 theological trainees, along with several teachers and preachers who demanded the overthrow of the King.

The mosque represents an important place in the Muslim/Iranian community because it is a place of communal prayer, it is also like what the *forum* was to Rome or the *agora* was to Greece. The pulpit was used in the mosque by the Mullahs, clerics and preachers to mobilise social forces after listening to the recorded audio messages and sermons (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994) while the recorded sermons served as the driving force behind what would become known as the Iranian Revolution, which overthrew Peza Sha in 1979 (Kukah, 1999).

b) The People Power and the Cell Phone Revolution in the Philippines

Another media-inspired revolution of historical significance was People Power, inspired by cell phone use in the Philippines in 1986 and 2001. According to Dewan (2013a), the Philippines has had an unenviable record of being governed by corrupt leaders. The two key corrupt leaders were Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada, who ruled the Philippines with iron fists. The Philippines was very lucky to have a Church leader with the moral compass needed during a turbulent period in the person of Jamie Cardinal Sin of Manila. Cardinal Sin commanded the respect of the Filipinos across all walks of life such that when things were

getting out of hand, the country looked up to him, as usual, for leadership, and he did not fail in calling the citizens out in civil disobedience (Juan, 2001).

However, beyond the moral voice of Cardinal Sin, the cell phone was the tool the army of protesters was armed with. Cell phones, the equivalent of today's social media, were widespread across Filipino society, especially among its young people. At the time of the impeachment trial of the corrupt President Joseph Estrada on January 17, 2001, Congress agreed to set aside important evidence against him. Within about two hours of announcing the decision, fearing that President Estrada would be set free, Filipinos converged on the popular Epifanio de los Santos Avenue for a mass protest (Olley & Ekhareafo, 2013). During this time, the cell phone was said to be the ubiquitous youth fashion accessory that the youth deployed as tools of protest (Juan, 2001). Indeed, cell phones became so widespread that they became the main weapons of the revolution. For example, a protester would text his/her friends to join them at the EDSA Shrine. Although the initial response to the text messages was not encouraging, the crowd grew larger over time (Juan, 2001). The shrine of Our Lady (the Blessed Virgin Mary) was a place of prayer, but at the time of Cardinal Sin, it also doubled as the rallying point for protests after listening to his sermons and exhortations.

c) The Facebook (Arab) Revolution of 2011 in Tunisia

Ten years after the cell phone protest in the Philippines in 2001, the Facebook Revolution also known as the Arab Spring of 2011, occurred in Tunisia. The setting and the backdrop of the Facebook Revolution in Tunisia were very much similar to the previous ones (Iranian and Philippine protests), namely, discontentment and dissatisfaction precipitated by the corruption and ineptitude of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's government (Bashri, Netzley & Greiner, 2012). The invention of the Internet is probably one of the greatest single events that have revolutionised communication. It has brought wide-ranging and cross-cutting opportunities, especially its ability to provide quick updates and appeal and more news depth and formats (Tewksbury, 2003; Koelsch, 1995).

This revolution, although it had Tunisia as its birthplace, did not end there; its waves extended well beyond Tunisia's shores to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, and Syria. When Mohammed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian street vendor of 26-year-old challenged the continued harassment of the Tunisian police on the grounds of not having a valid vending license by setting himself on fire and eventually dying from the burns, little did he know that he had, by the act of defiance, ignited a fire that would consume several Arab countries in its wake (Bahri, Netzley, & Greiner, 2012). By 2011, social media had come full stream in most parts of the world, including the Arab countries. In other countries that had undergone similar media-led protests, the Facebook protests in Tunisia and other Arab countries helped improve politics in the Arab belt. The Arab Spring was successful through the immense support of social networking sites like Facebook, X, YouTube, and so on (Olley & Ekharefo, 2013).

The #EndSARNow Social Media Protest in Nigeria

There had never been a social media-led protest that grabbed public attention like the #EndSARS protest of early October 2020 in Nigeria. Internet-based activism, also known as cyber activism, has begun to gain currency in Nigeria, especially among young people. Activism has gone beyond the physical to digital platforms (Rani, 2019). A powerful example of how social media was utilized in organising protests that later became a revolution was the Arab Spring of 2011 (Dewan, 2011). Indeed, scholars (Mehrotra, 2016; Valenzuela, Halpern & Katz, 2014) have chronicled examples of how social media tools have been used to bring about positive transformations in the global society. Although there were growing frustrations in Nigeria precipitated by the country's worsening security and economic situations, no one had foreseen the possibility of a youth social media-led protest on the scale witnessed in 2020. It was clear to many people that the Nigerian youths who were the victims of police brutality might have been inspired by the 2011 Facebook Arab Revolution (Dewan, 2021). Agboola (2013, p. 172) scored the bull's eye when he aptly observed that "The Global Internet Usage Statistics has catalogued the penetration of the

Internet and its usage, particularly in Nigeria...." Young Nigerians are among the most social media-clever young people in Africa. Statistics of young Nigerian social media users as of 2019 were 30.9 million, and this figure is projected to rise by 2023 to 36.8 million people (Olley & Ekhareafo, 2013).

As earlier noted, the crux of the #EndSARS protest led by Nigerian young people was, essentially, against the increasing brutality of a special squad of the Nigerian Police named Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Ogbemudia, Tonga, & Odoh, 2023; Dewan, 2021). The #EndSARS youth-led movement was a tactical Nigerian Police Unit put together in 1992 against the backdrop of the rising tide of criminality, such as armed robbery and kidnapping (Strong, 2020). The SARS Unit became allegedly corrupt, harassing, and criminalising young innocent Nigerians. SARS flagrant abuses became legendary to the extent that youths were tagged as fraudsters merely because they possess smartphones and laptops, and drive flashy cars, among others. Strong (2020) referred to a 2020 report by Amnesty International entitled "Nigeria: Time to End Impunity" to illustrate the notoriety of the Unit. The report accused SARS of extortion, extrajudicial killings, and torture.

Things came to a head when, on the morning of October 3, 2020, a certain Chinyelugo tweet went public that a young Nigerian was shot dead by the much-dreaded SARS. Not long after this episode of the shooting of an unidentified young man when, mobile phone recordings with the hashtag #EndSARS dominated the Internet. This first tweet before long had succeeded in mobilising a large cohort of frustrated and angry young people across 26 of the country's 36 states (Strong, 2020). Dewan observed that social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp were used by the Nigerian youths who protested police brutality across the country's State capitals. For the first time, a reluctant Nigerian government was forced to accede to the youths' five-point demands while various judicial panels set up by the government were still working to unravel the alleged causative factors of human rights abuses. Although other social media were used to highlight Police brutality on Nigerian citizens, especially young Nigerians, X. According to Obia (2020), was used in

three principal ways in the #EndSARS campaign, namely: to mobilise and coordinate the legion of protesters to increase the voice of campaigners globally; and to rebuke anyone or group who resists the movement.

Barack Obama, Social Media Use, and the Journey to the White House

The election of Barack Obama to the White House in 2008 speaks to the powerful influence of social media, especially X. Obama was a little-known person before he became a Senator representing Illinois, Chicago. Even at the time he vied for the United States Presidency, not much was known of him, however through his personal charisma, candour, and social media, he became what Klein (2008, p. 20) would refer to as "...An American political phenomenon." Obama connects with people across different divides (whites, blacks, Latinos, Arabs, Hispanics, and so on).

In the 2008 US Presidential elections, *The Drum*, in its editorial asserts thus:

Leading up to the 2008 election, Barack Obama was the first presidential candidate to embrace the power of social media to build his brand. He went from a relatively political unknown to an elected official by spreading grassroots efforts, pulling the rug from underneath the political establishment. The entire landscape of the political campaign changed through his use of grassroots fundraising, social media expertise, and viral sensibilities to defeat more prominently known candidates..... He used Facebook, YouTube, X, Flickr, Myspace, Digg, Podcasts, etc (*TheDrum*, March 31, 2016).

Obama's fascination with social media changed how politics was played in America. This means that the hitherto neglected voting population, such as young people and minority ethnic communities, were made to feel important through his connection with them via social media. Historically, political contestation in the US was more about how the candidate gets his face on billboards, TV interviews, and so on (Contentgroup, 2017). Campaign advertisements on billboards and TV were not cheap at all; they were for money bags. However, with the emergence of social media, there has been a paradigm shift. Obama suddenly epitomised that change in the US political firmament and expanded his reach,

increasing and expanding his voter base. The Contentgroup argued that at the time of the 2008 Presidential elections, Facebook alone had over 20 million users and Obama's campaign on social media gave him significantly more reach than his opponent, John McCain. While it could be said that social media helped Obama's journey to the White House, even Obama himself did not anticipate that, a fact he conceded.

Three decades ago, it was thought that hardly any democracy or oligarchy could gain political power without the support of television (Fore, 1996). The aggregate power concentrated in a medium like television can make or break any politician. While that is still the case, social media have proven to have more power to bring down a politician, as was already observed earlier in the discussion on social media revolutions. In the era of social media, citizens are more inclined to produce content from their comfort zones, thus setting the agenda for public discourse. The powers of the digital social media frontiers, as seen in the way young Arabs mobilised their peers in the Facebook Revolution of 2011, the #Blacklives Matter and the #Obidient Movement, speaks to the self-empowerment of individuals in reporting issues with the use of technologies (Uwah, 2013).

Similarities between Peter Obi and Barack Obama

- When Barack Obama first threw his hat in the political ring for the position of the United States Presidency, the two most powerful social media platforms, X and Facebook were just about five years old and called by cynics as tools for jobless young people in America. In the Presidential Campaigns of 2022 leading to the elections in 2023, X and Facebook were still seen by many in Nigeria as tools for "Yahoo, Yahoo Boys," a catchphrase for jobless/criminal youths.
- Both Barack Obama and Peter Obi were younger than their competitors in the Presidential race; Obama was younger than John McCain, and Obi was younger than Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu.
- The Democratic Party heavyweights told Barack Obama, just as they had previously told John Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton, to wait. "It was Hillary Clinton's turn" on the

claim that Obama was too young (Stengel, 2008). A similar thing was told to Peter Obi in the lead to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) primaries by Atiku Abubakar and the party. Sensing the PDP would not allow him to test his popularity within the party for the presidency; Obi left the PDP for the Labour Party.

- Although the Democratic Party in America and the PDP in Nigeria were not ready for both Obama and Obi, they knew that the voters, especially the young voting population who were social media savvy were.
- Both Barack Obama and Peter Obi represented a paradigm shift in the political consciousness of the young voting population that swept through their countries (Stengel, 2008).
- Obama and Obi expanded the political space to embrace people of diverse races, religions, ages, ideologies, and so forth, which was a great departure from the old politics of exclusion.
- Both Obama and Obi did not have the enormous funds their competitors had. Hence, they relied on the grassroots for support, that is, the bottom-up approach instead of the top-down approach; a philosophy that would later prove rewarding in their campaign successes. This differs from the operations of Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu whose decision-making rested with a coterie of friends and associates (Stengel, 2008).
- Obama and Obi counted on small donors, including students for their fundraising campaigns, unlike their opponents, the Republican John McCain, Atiku Abubakar, and Ahmed Tinubu, who had well-established fundraising bases (Okonkwo, 2022).
- The Obama and Obi's teams consisted mainly of volunteers, among which some of them were living off the land. Indeed, in the case of Obi, farmers and students would pay their way to the venues for his political rallies without expecting any "brown envelopes" as was the case with the other presidential candidates. This contrasted sharply with the Clinton, McCain, Abubakar and Tinubu supporters, that were purportedly out to make money off their candidates. It was reported that Obama's team of "volunteers were asked to take along their food when they were canvassing" (Stengel, 2008, p. 71).

- Obama's Pastor, Rev Wright, almost scuttled his chances for the presidency. Rev. Wright was allegedly used when he claimed that Obama could be dangerous to White American interests. Similarly, Obi was linked to the proscribed southeastern agitators, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) whose leader is Nnamdi Kanu by some opposition politicians (Okonkwo, 2022). That, initially, sowed the seed of fear and doubts, especially in the minds of his Northern supporters. However, like Obama, Obi, too, overcame whatever odds and obstacles placed in his way.

Analyze s of the Tweets of the Three Presidential Candidates in the 2023 Elections

The table below shows the frequency and proficiency of the Tweets made by the three Presidential Candidates leading to the 2023 elections in Nigeria, namely, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi.

Table 1: Pre-Election Tweets Posted by the Three Presidential Candidates in the Lead to the 2023 Elections

		2.5 million followers	5.2 million followers	4.7 million followers	%
	Month	Bola Tinubu	Atiku Abubakar	Peter Obi	
1	September 2022	66 0.0026%	140 0.0023%	283 0.0040%	
2	October 2022	58 0.0023%	98 0.0019%	363 0.0077%	
3	November 2022	54 0.0022%	97 0.0019%	333 0.0070%	
4	December 2022	57 0.0023%	128 0.0025%	72 0.0015%	
5	January 2023	47 0.0019%	159 0.0031%	247 0.0053%	
6	February 2023	49 0.002%	79 0.0015%	256 0.0054%	
7	Total	0.013%	0.013%	0.033%	

Source: Dewan 2024

Table 2: Showing the Analysis of the Tweets Posted by the Three Presidential Candidates

	Tinubu	Atiku	Obi
Frequency	Tinubu tweeted daily within the period studied. Of the three Presidential candidates who tweeted, Tinubu had the least tweets.	Atiku tweeted daily within the period studied. He tweeted more than Tinubu based on the period under consideration.	Obi also tweeted daily about the period studied. He had the highest tweets to communicate his campaign messages compared to his two competitors.
X Followers	Tinubu had 2.5 million followers on his X handle.	Of the three Presidential candidates, Atiku had the highest number of followers on his X handle with 5.2 followers.	Next to Atiku was Obi with 4.7 followers.
Keywords/hashtag	The keywords in Tinubu's X were #Renewed Hope23, #BAT, #Emilokan.	Under Atiku are the following: Recover Nigeria, Prosperity, Economic transformation, Mission, and Better Nigeria.	The following were Obi's keywords/hashtags: #Obidient Movement, consumption to production, multi-dimensional poverty,

			unemployment, corruption, insecurity, take back Nigeria.
Average number of views	Tinubu had the least engaging appearance on X	Compared to Tinubu, Atiku had a more engaging appearance on X	Of the three Presidential candidates, Obi had a more engaging appearance on X

Source: Field Content Analysis, 2023

From Table 1 above, and for the 6 months (September 2022 to February 2023) Peter Obi posted more on his X handles with 33%, while Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu's tweets represent 13% each. Obi had the highest number of tweets; this was perhaps his way of encouraging Nigerians to imbibe the reading culture. His frequent use of the X could imply his being the younger of the three presidential candidates and more youth-friendly. In Table 2 above, Atiku used different communication strategies to highlight the country's endemic problems and how they can be overcome. Tinubu used more videos and photos that neither touched on the issues nor proffer solutions to them. All three Presidential Candidates had views/hashtags. Under Obi were the following: #Obidient Movement, consumption to production, multidimensional poverty, unemployment, corruption, insecurity, and a new Nigeria. Atiku's hashtags included recovering Nigeria, prosperity, and achieving economic transformation. Tinubu's hashtags were #RenewedHope23, #BAT, and #Emilokan. On average views and audience reach, Obi had 1 million, implying that he had a better grasp of the issues and was far more engaging than his two competitors. Atiku and Tinubu were far below Obi in the views and audience; Tinubu had 300k views and Atiku had 200k views. Overall, Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, said that the engagement of the Nigerian

public via social media platforms was better than that of Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

According to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2023), the 2023 presidential elections, particularly saw an upsurge of about 40% in the Nigerian youth population's engagement in the political process, especially those within the youth brackets of between 15-39 on both online and offline (Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, and Okeke, 2023). Experts contend that there is a nexus between the country's youth-dominated #EndSARS Movement and the groundswell of support Peter Obi, the flagbearer of the Labour Party known as the #Obidient Movement got. To this category of young Nigerians, the Labour Party presidential candidate represented hope for a better Nigeria that had become seemingly hopeless. This hope is predicated on two ethical values: transparency and accountability, the two key missing links in Nigeria's political statecraft.

Conclusion

Social media penetration in Nigeria has continued to increase all the time. As this penetration grows, one noticeable trend is that news prioritisation and direction are steadily slipping away from the traditional media to the whims and caprices of the news consumers (Adelakun, Aliede, Brikins, Enwerem, & Abutu, 2021). The hitherto monopoly that news media professionals in the mainstream media had enjoyed, especially in the news direction has now become a shared value. The members of the public are infusing saliency on the messages that affect them, unlike the passive onlookers that they were before. Thus, reflecting on the historical evolution of the media to the new media type that now rests in the hands of citizens, young people, globally, are the new foot soldiers on the frontline of democratic reforms. This research has established how tape recorders, the citizens' technology of the late 1970s in Iran; the cell phones of the mid-80s and early 2000s in the Philippines; the social media of 2011 in the Arab World; the #Black Lives Matter Movement of 2020 in America; the #EndSARS protest; and the #Obidient Movement in 2023 in Nigeria, have empowered young people across the globe to lead the way in the drive towards the

deepening of their country's democracy. This showed how the army of young people armed with social media is not only a force to reckon with but that the old political order characterised by bad governance cannot continue for much longer.

Drawing examples from the 2023 Presidential Elections, this paper avers that, although Peter Obi had a message that resonated with teeming Nigerian young people, his supporters (the #Obidient Movement), used social media to transmit the message that galvanised the Nigerian voting public. The conclusion is that due to the flexibility of social media (Facebook and X), Obi gave the two political veterans (Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu) a good fight. This was made possible for a range of reasons. Firstly, the Nigerian public was already tired of the old brand of politicians (who represented the old order) and needed a dynamic and credible political leader. Secondly, the old brigade represented a failure in public estimation; hence, there was a need for a younger political leader who understood and could connect with the younger generation. Peter Obi, thus, appears to epitomise the new generation that young people want.

This research has also buttressed how the presidential candidates of the Labour Party, All Progressive Congress, and Peoples Democratic Party utilized social media platforms (Facebook and X) to reach a vital part of their constituencies: resilient young Nigerians who are a major voting bloc. The support group of each presidential candidate in the 2023 elections were initially online, Tweeting and sharing messages (adverts, videos, and other media content). However, these supporters became visible offline as the Independent National Electoral Commission began to unfold the election timetables. The #Obidient Movement, the online activists within and outside the country, was dismissed as threats by the APC and PDP. Indeed, APC and PDP members had alleged that most #Obidients only existed online since they were not registered as voters and were not likely to influence the outcomes of the presidential elections meaningfully. However, as the election results showed, the #Obidients were not only registered but moved from Online to Offline and voted massively for their Presidential candidate, Peter Obi, in the 2023 elections.

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