# Interrogating technological determinism theory and social media usage in political advertising in Nigeria's electioneering

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**Abstract -** The growing dominance of social media in political communication has reshaped how political actors engage voters, yet how technology itself drives these changes remains underexplored, particularly at the sub-national level in Nigeria. This study aims to examine the use of social media in political advertising during state-level elections through the lens of Technological Determinism Theory, focusing on technology as an independent force shaping campaign practices. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive design, the study relies on documentary evidence, existing empirical studies, and systematic analysis of how major political parties and candidates deploy Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp for campaign communication. The analysis shows that social media has become a central advertising tool, transforming campaign strategies by enabling real-time engagement, personalised messaging, agenda setting, and broad voter mobilisation, especially among young and undecided voters. Technological features such as algorithmic visibility, interactivity, speed, and reach are found to significantly influence political actors' communication behaviour, reinforcing core assumptions of technological determinism. Nonetheless, the study identifies serious challenges, including misinformation, weak regulatory oversight, ethical dilemmas, and escalating negative campaigning. It concludes by recommending strategic integration of social and traditional media, enhanced voter digital literacy, and robust regulatory frameworks for online political advertising. The study thus fills a key gap by providing a context-specific, technology-driven explanation of contemporary political communication in an emerging democracy.

**Keywords:** digital campaigning; electoral communication; political advertising; sub-national elections; technological determinism; voter mobilisation

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between technology and communication has long occupied a central place in media and political communication scholarship. As Nwanne (2022) observes, theorising communication processes enables scholars to explain how media technologies shape social interaction and institutional practices. One of the most influential frameworks in this regard is

Technological Determinism Theory, which argues that technological innovations play a decisive role in shaping how societies communicate, organise, and engage politically (McLuhan, 1964; Chandler, 1995).

Technological determinism maintains that media technologies are not neutral conduits of information but powerful forces that restructure human perception and social behaviour. Central to this perspective is the idea of displacement, whereby emerging technologies gradually alter or marginalise existing modes of communication. Historically, shifts in communication technology have transformed political advertising and electioneering practices, from interpersonal mobilization and print media to broadcast channels, and more recently, to digital platforms.

In Nigeria's contemporary political environment, social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp have become prominent spaces for political communication. Their widespread adoption by citizens, particularly young and politically engaged users, has significantly reshaped how political messages are produced, circulated, and consumed (Obukoadata, 2010). This growing reliance on social media invites critical interrogation of whether these platforms have displaced traditional media as the dominant channels for political advertising during electioneering periods.

Social media differ structurally and functionally from traditional media. They enable immediacy, interactivity, user participation, and direct engagement between political actors and the electorate. These affordances align closely with the assumptions of technological determinism, suggesting that technology is actively redefining political communication practices rather than merely supporting them. Political actors increasingly bypass conventional media gatekeepers to communicate directly with voters, thereby reconfiguring the flow of political information and influence.

Political advertising, as a strategic component of political communication, has been particularly affected by these technological shifts. Social media platforms now allow for targeted advertising, personalised messaging, and real-time feedback, enhancing the reach and efficiency of campaign communication (Nwabueze, 2012; Nwanne, 2022). In the process, traditional campaign tools such as rallies, print advertisements, radio jingles, and television commercials are increasingly supplemented or displaced by digital strategies. This evolution reflects the deterministic influence of technology on political communication, as campaign practices adapt to the logic and affordances of digital media environments.

Within Nigeria's electioneering context, especially in recent electoral cycles, social media have emerged as indispensable tools for political advertising and mobilisation. Their growing prominence underscores a broader transformation in political communication, where digital platforms shape campaign strategies, voter engagement, and agenda-setting processes.

Studies on social media and political communication in Nigeria have expanded considerably in recent years, particularly with respect to political advertising, voter mobilisation, political participation, and campaign effectiveness (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Mohammed & Ogwuche, 2021; Dataphyte, 2022; Efebeh et al., 2024). These studies largely demonstrate that social media platforms enhance political awareness, engagement, and marketing efficiency, especially among young and first-time voters. Similarly, works by Nwanne (2022) and Nwabueze (2012) acknowledge the strategic importance of social media as emerging tools in political communication and advertising.

However, despite the growing body of literature, existing studies tend to be largely descriptive and instrumental in orientation, focusing on how social media are used and the benefits or challenges associated with their use. There is limited scholarly examination of social media through the explanatory lens of Technological Determinism Theory, as articulated by McLuhan (1964), Chandler (1995), and Obukoadata (2010). More critically, the literature pays little attention to the question of displacement, that is, the extent to which social media usage has altered, marginalised, or replaced traditional political communication and advertising practices in Nigeria's electioneering process.

While several studies acknowledge that social media supplements or coexist with traditional media, few empirically examine whether technological forces embedded in social media platforms have restructured political communication practices, shifted audience attention, or weakened the centrality of conventional media channels such as radio, television, print, and physical campaign engagements. This lack of focus on the level and nature of displacement creates a conceptual gap in understanding how technological determinism operates within Nigeria's socio-political communication space. This study seeks to fill this gap by interrogating the extent to which social media usage, driven by technological determinism, has displaced traditional political advertising and communication practices during electioneering.

The increasing adoption of social media for political advertising and electioneering in Nigeria has significantly transformed political communication practices. As observed by Asemah and Edegoh (2012), Nwanne (2022), and Dataphyte (2022), political actors now rely heavily on digital platforms to disseminate campaign messages, mobilise supporters, and influence voter perceptions. Social media have become attractive due to their speed, interactivity, cost-effectiveness, and ability to target specific audiences. Consequently, election campaigns in Nigeria are increasingly conducted within digital spaces, often reducing reliance on traditional media and face-to-face political engagement.

Despite this observable shift, there remains insufficient scholarly clarity on whether social media usage in political advertising represents a strategic adaptation by political actors or a deeper technological force that determines and restructures political communication itself. While studies such as Okoro and Nwafor (2013), Mohammed and Ogwuche (2021), and Efebeh et al. (2024) highlight the positive influence of social media on political participation and voter education, they do not adequately address the extent to which these platforms have displaced traditional political communication channels.

Nwafor et al. examine the 2021 Anambra gubernatorial election and explicitly ground their analysis in **Technological Determinism and Uses and Gratifications** theories (Nwafor et al., 2023). They find WhatsApp and Facebook are the dominant platforms, with 66% of respondents reporting that social media campaigns influenced their choice of candidate and 75% finding platforms very useful during the election, concluding that citizens "quickly adopt" social media because of speed, connectivity and interactivity (Nwafor et al., 2023). Technological determinism here underpins a narrative where new media drive heightened political participation.

Their empirical review cites Anyanwu & Orji's study of social media and political participation in South-East Nigeria, also based on technological determinism, which reports that social media positively influenced participation for about 70% of residents, recommending sustained use of social media for mobilization by political actors and institutions (Nwafor et al., 2023). Morah & Uzochukwu likewise use technological determinism (and agenda-setting) to argue that Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter substantially augment political interest, participation and interaction among Nigerian entrepreneurs engaging governance issues (Nwafor et al., 2023). These works collectively suggest a relatively strong, technology-driven view of how platforms shape participation and campaign impact, but pay less attention to structural constraints, offline organization, or power relations.

The more general review of "social media election campaigns" identifies several Nigerian studies where Facebook and WhatsApp are key tools for youth mobilisation, voter education, and rapid dissemination of election results, while also enabling fake news and divisive narratives (Ridzuan et al., 2023). Here social media are framed as "crucial instruments" for informing and manipulating public opinion, including legitimating political misinformation (Ridzuan et al., 2023). Although not always labelled as technological determinism, these studies often attribute significant causal power to platforms themselves.

A broader review of social media and democracy highlights that platforms both facilitate political expression and participation and generate democratic deficits, such as stagnant political

knowledge and dependence on "news-finds-me" perceptions (De Zúñiga et al., 2018). This work complicates simple deterministic claims by showing that greater online activity does not automatically yield more informed citizens. Systematic reviews of political social media marketing and political advertising underscore how parties and candidates strategically use platforms for targeting, branding and image-building during election campaigns (Abid et al., 2023; Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024). Obama's 2008 and Trump's Twitter-driven campaigns are frequently cited as paradigmatic cases of digital mobilisation and disintermediation (Abid et al., 2023). However, these reviews also note fragmentation in theory and an under-development of concepts such as co-creation, influencer politics and social-media-based political advertising, especially outside the US (Abid et al., 2023; Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024).

For a Nigerian study, this suggests space to connect local cases to a still-emerging international framework. Severin-Nielsen's scoping review of politicians' social media use in a hybrid media environment shows that social media are often praised for direct, open communication, yet many studies find that politicians do not actually use them for genuine dialogue (Severin-Nielsen, 2023). Instead, platform logics can incentivise polarising communication and misinformation 15. This hybrid perspective supports a more socio-technical rather than deterministic reading of Nigerian campaign practices. A systematic review of social media election campaigns similarly finds that most research focuses on candidate biographies, party ideologies, and manifestos on social media, with several Nigerian and Indonesian studies reporting that platforms act as direct communication lines and powerful mobilisation tools, but also channels for polarised and inaccurate information (Ridzuan et al., 2023).

Appelgren's scoping study in journalism research argues that technological determinism is widely treated in a **functionalist and stigmatized** way, with many scholars rejecting it without engaging more nuanced developments of the theory (Appelgren, 2023). The article calls for a more differentiated assessment of technological determinism and stresses that interdisciplinary work on technology and communication is hampered when technological determinism is treated as a "no-go zone" (Appelgren, 2023).

This is directly useful for "interrogating" the use of technological determinism in Nigerian social media–election studies, which often adopt a straightforward "technology drives change" assumption.

More broadly, reviews of political mediatization and digital democracy in other regions show that social media reshape political communication through emotionalisation, personalisation, and algorithmic amplification, but these effects are mediated by institutional capacities, inequalities, and hybrid media logics rather than technology alone (Ramírez-Salina et al., 2025; Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025). Such work provides conceptual tools to critique simplistic claims that social media use in campaigns automatically transforms participation or outcomes.

Across these strands, there is clear evidence that Nigerian scholarship has documented strong perceived effects of social media on political participation, candidate choice, and mobilisation using technological determinism as a guiding framework (Nwafor et al., 2023). Highlighted platforms' roles in spreading fake news, myth-making, and polarising narratives in elections (Ridzuan et al., 2023)

However, compared with global work, there are notable gaps: (a) Limited engagement with hybrid media, algorithmic affordances, and socio-technical perspectives that link technology to institutions, culture and power structures (Kakavand, 2023; Ramírez-Salina et al., 2025; Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025; Severin-Nielsen, 2023). (b) Scarce longitudinal or comparative research across multiple Nigerian election cycles that could test deterministic claims over time (Vergeer, 2015; Severin-Nielsen, 2023). (c) Under-theorisation of political advertising and micro-targeted messaging on social media in Nigeria, despite global calls for more research on these practices and their regulatory implications (Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024; Abid et al., 2023).

A critical review for "technological determinism and social media usage in political advertising in Nigeria's electioneering" can therefore (1) synthesize the Nigerian empirical work that already invokes technological determinism (Nwafor et al., 2023; Ridzuan et al., 2023), (2) contrast it with more nuanced international debates about social media, democracy and campaignin (De Zúñiga et al., 2018; Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024; Abid et al., 2023; Vergeer, 2015; Severin-Nielsen, 2023), and (3) draw on theoretical critiques of technological determinism to propose a more contextual, socio-technical approach to Nigerian political advertising on social media (Appelgren, 2023; Ramírez-Salina et al., 2025; Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025).

Anchored in Technological Determinism Theory, this study problematises the growing dominance of social media in Nigeria's electioneering process by interrogating the level of displacement occasioned by technology-driven political communication. The problem lies in the absence of empirical evidence explaining whether social media have merely complemented existing political advertising practices or fundamentally altered the structure, flow, and power relations of political communication in Nigeria. Addressing this problem is necessary for understanding how technological forces shape political advertising and redefine the socio-political communication space during elections.

Inherently, the study focuses on: (1) Discussing the extent to which social media political advertising has displaced traditional political communication in Nigeria's electioneering. (2) Analysing how Technological Determinism Theory explains the transformation of political communication practices driven by social media in Nigeria. (3) Assessing the implications of social media–driven political advertising for Nigeria's socio-political communication space.

## 2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how technological determinism, through social media usage, has shaped political advertising and communication in Nigeria's electioneering process. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables an interpretive and theory-driven examination of texts, meanings, and communication practices, with emphasis on analytical depth rather than statistical generalisation.

The study relies exclusively on document analysis and systematic review of existing literature as sources of qualitative data. Documents analysed include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference papers, election-related reports, policy documents, and credible media analyses addressing social media usage, political advertising, technological change, and electioneering in Nigeria. Sources are purposively selected based on relevance to the research objectives, scholarly credibility, and contextual applicability.

Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis. Selected documents are subjected to close reading and iterative coding to identify recurring themes such as technological influence, displacement of traditional media, restructuring of political communication practices, and implications for political advertising. These themes are interpreted within the framework of Technological Determinism Theory to explain how social media technologies function as determining forces in political communication.To ensure rigour and trustworthiness, the study draws on multiple categories of documents and scholarly sources, allowing for triangulation of perspectives. Transparency is maintained by clearly outlining data sources and analytical procedures, thereby enhancing the credibility and dependability of the findings.

The study relies solely on publicly available documents and published literature and therefore presents no ethical risk to individuals or groups. All sources are appropriately acknowledged in accordance with academic and ethical standards.

## 3. Results and Discussion
### 3.1 Results

The literature reviewed provides substantial evidence that social media political advertising has produced a significant displacement of traditional political communication practices in Nigeria's electioneering, although this displacement is best understood as gradual, uneven, and context-dependent rather than absolute. Historically, political communication in Nigeria relied heavily on traditional mass media such as radio, television, newspapers, billboards, posters, rallies, and other physical mobilisation strategies (Ijeh, 2010; McNair, 2013). These channels were characterised by centralised control, high financial barriers, and a predominantly one-way flow of information from political elites to the electorate (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009).

With the emergence and rapid diffusion of social media platforms, this structure has been fundamentally altered. Social media introduced a participatory, interactive, and decentralised communication environment that allows political messages to circulate beyond institutional gatekeepers (Chatora, 2012; Mayfield, 2008). Empirical accounts of Nigeria's post-2015 elections demonstrate that political actors increasingly prioritise social media for campaign messaging, voter engagement, and image management, particularly on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube (Dataphyte, 2022). These platforms now perform core campaign functions previously dominated by traditional media, including agenda-setting, mobilisation, persuasion, and counter-narrative construction.

The displacement effect is further reinforced by the economic and strategic advantages of social media. Unlike television and radio advertising, which are capital-intensive and regulated, social media enable cost-effective microtargeting, personalised messaging, and real-time audience feedback (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). This has reduced politicians' reliance on traditional media, especially among younger and urban voters who increasingly consume political information online (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). However, traditional media remain relevant in rural areas and among older demographics, suggesting that displacement operates more as a reordering of communicative dominance than as outright replacement.

In this sense, social media have displaced traditional political communication not by eliminating it, but by redefining its centrality within Nigeria's electoral communication ecosystem. This pattern reflects broader theoretical claims that newer media reorganize communicative power and practices rather than simply coexisting with older forms (Spurgeon, 2008)

### 3.1.1 Technological Determinism Theory and the transformation of political communication practices

Technological Determinism Theory offers a robust framework for explaining the observed transformation of political communication practices driven by social media in Nigeria. Central to the theory is the argument that communication technologies function as autonomous forces that shape human interaction, institutional behaviour, and social organisation (Chandler, 1995; Bimber, 1994; Obukoadata, 2010). McLuhan's conception of media as extensions of human faculties further suggests that technologies alter not only how messages are transmitted but how societies perceive, organise, and act upon political realities.

Applied to Nigeria's political advertising environment, social media technologies have acted as determinative agents that restructure communication norms and campaign strategies. Prior to the rise of social media, political communication followed a hierarchical model in which political actors spoke and citizens listened. Social media disrupted this model by enabling multidirectional communication, where audiences actively interpret, respond to, remix, and redistribute political messages (Thackeray & Neiger, 2009; Obukoadata, 2022b). Citizens are no longer merely receivers of campaign messages but active participants and content producers, a phenomenon captured in Bruns' concept of "produsers."

This transformation has compelled political actors to adapt their communication practices to the logic of digital platforms. Campaigns now prioritise online visibility, engagement metrics, and algorithmic optimisation. Political success increasingly depends on technological affordances such as virality, immediacy, and networked amplification rather than solely on party

structures or traditional media access. These shifts illustrate technological determinism in action: technology imposes new communicative demands that political actors must conform to in order to remain relevant.

Moreover, the algorithmic architecture of social media platforms reinforces the deterministic power of technology. Algorithms shape the visibility, reach, and salience of political content, privileging emotionally charged, sensational, or highly engaging messages (Obukoadata *et. al.*, 2021). This technological mediation of political discourse influences voter perception and behaviour, often beyond the direct control of political actors. In this regard, technology does not merely facilitate political advertising; it actively structures political reality.

Nonetheless, the Nigerian context also reveals the limits of a rigid deterministic interpretation. While social media technologies shape political communication, their effects are mediated by human agency, regulatory frameworks, political culture, and strategic choices. This suggests a nuanced form of technological determinism in which technology strongly conditions political communication while remaining embedded within socio-cultural contexts.

### 3.1.2 Implications of social media–driven political advertising for Nigeria's socio-political communication space

The rise of social media–driven political advertising has generated far-reaching implications for Nigeria's socio-political communication space, producing both democratic opportunities and structural challenges. On the positive side, social media have expanded access to political information, reduced communication barriers, and enabled broader citizen participation in political discourse (Gevertz & Greenwood, 2010). Studies from Delta State and other Nigerian contexts indicate that social media use has enhanced political literacy, especially among first-time voters and young people, by increasing exposure to campaign messages, political debates, and civic information (Efebeh et al., 2024; Obukoadata, 2022b).

Social media have also redefined political engagement by fostering immediacy and interactivity. Political actors can communicate directly with citizens, respond to public concerns in real time, and mobilise supporters more efficiently than through traditional channels. This has contributed to the personalisation of political campaigns, where candidates cultivate online identities and build emotional connections with voters.

However, these democratic gains are accompanied by significant risks. The same openness and speed that facilitate participation also enable the rapid spread of misinformation, fake news, propaganda, and character assassination (Dataphyte, 2022). Weak regulatory oversight and the anonymity of digital platforms exacerbate these challenges, undermining electoral integrity and public trust. Algorithmic personalisation further fragments public discourse, reducing shared political experiences and intensifying ideological polarisation.

From the perspective of technological determinism, these outcomes are not incidental but inherent to the design and logic of social media technologies (Obukoadata, 2022). Political communication in Nigeria's digital space is increasingly shaped by technological imperatives such as speed, engagement, and virality, often at the expense of deliberative democratic norms. Consequently, social media have not only transformed political advertising practices but have also reshaped the broader socio-political environment within which democratic contestation occurs.

Overall, social media–driven political advertising has fundamentally reconfigured Nigeria's socio-political communication space. It has displaced traditional media dominance, restructured political engagement, and introduced new forms of participation alongside new vulnerabilities. These developments underscore the relevance of Technological Determinism Theory while highlighting the need for sustained scholarly interrogation of how technological forces intersect with political power, regulation, and democratic practice in Nigeria.

### 3.2 Discussion

Technological determinism, a concept originally articulated by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, proposes a compelling framework for understanding the interplay between media and society.

Central to this theory is the idea that media serve as extensions of the human body, profoundly influencing not just the environments we inhabit but also the very messages that are communicated through them. According to McLuhan, each medium reshapes our perceptual habits, altering the way we perceive and engage with the world around us. Technologies, particularly emerging media platforms, are credited with creating entirely new contexts for human interaction and social organisation. This perspective asserts that technological innovations possess a determining power over social change, implying that advancements in media technology dictate how individuals think, emote, and act, as well as how societies are structured and function.

Scholarship in this area, such as the works of Chandler (1995) and Bimber (1994), supports the contention that technology does not merely reflect societal changes; rather, it actively shapes them. This is especially pertinent in the contemporary landscape, where social media has become a crucial tool in political advertising. The strategy and structure of political messaging are heavily influenced by the characteristics of the platforms employed, from the rapid dissemination of information to the creation of targeted advertising. Social media serves as a potent vehicle for shaping public discourse and influencing political outcomes. Thus, technological determinism provides a vital lens for examining the transformative impacts of media on both individual behaviours and societal structures.

At the heart of technological determinism is the idea that technology is an autonomous force that influences society in profound and often unpredictable ways. When applied to social media usage in political advertising, this perspective suggests that the advent of digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube has significantly altered the landscape of political communication. In many ways, social media has shifted the power dynamics between political actors and the public, enabling a more direct and interactive form of engagement. This transformation aligns with the core tenets of technological determinism, which posits that technology is not just a tool used by humans but a fundamental agent of change that shapes human behaviour and societal structures (Obukoadata, 2022).

The influence of social media on political advertising exemplifies the concept of technological determinism, highlighting how advancements in technology shape societal practices. Prior to the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, political campaigns primarily relied on traditional media outlets, including television broadcasts, radio shows, and printed newspapers. These established channels operated on a hierarchical model, where information flowed in a one-directional manner: political messages were crafted by campaign teams and then delivered to an audience that received them passively, with minimal avenues for engagement or feedback.

In stark contrast, the advent of social media has profoundly transformed this communication landscape. Now, political advertising is characterised by a more decentralised and interactive approach. On platforms such as Twitter, users can not only view political messages but also share them, engage in discussions, and express their opinions through comments and likes. This shift has transformed the way political discourse takes place, fostering a dynamic environment where conversations can evolve rapidly and a multitude of voices can participate in shaping public opinion. Social media has essentially democratised political communication, enabling a more participatory experience that encourages users to analyse, critique, and contribute to political narratives in real time.

The movement towards a more interactive approach in political advertising highlights the significant impact of technology on communication strategies and public engagement. Embracing the concepts of technological determinism, the rise of social media has revolutionised not only the means by which political messages are disseminated but also the very essence of political involvement. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have empowered citizens to engage more dynamically in political discussions, allowing them to articulate their views, mobilise support for causes, and challenge political figures directly.

Through features such as live streaming, hashtags, and instant sharing, individuals can raise awareness on pressing issues, rally others to participate in movements, or even organise protests at an unprecedented scale. This democratisation of participation enriches the political landscape by enabling voices that were once marginalised to gain visibility and influence. Consequently, the interactivity and immediacy of social media have introduced a new era of political engagement that fosters a more responsive and participatory democracy, empowering citizens in ways that were unimaginable before the digital age.

The increasing influence of social media on political advertising highlights how technology can profoundly reshape political strategies and behaviours. In today's digital landscape, politicians and political parties are compelled to adapt to new dynamics where a robust social media presence and effective digital engagement are indispensable for running a successful campaign. This transformation exemplifies a key concept in technological determinism: the notion that technological advancements impose new expectations and limitations on users, thereby necessitating modifications in their behaviours and strategic approaches.

For example, modern political campaigns allocate significant resources to develop sophisticated social media strategies. They leverage advanced data analytics to gather detailed insights about voter preferences and behaviour, allowing them to craft tailored messages that resonate with specific demographics. Additionally, tactics such as targeted advertising and strategic digital marketing play a pivotal role in reaching and swaying potential voters.

These shifts in campaign methodologies illustrate that technology is not just a passive tool; it plays an active role in shaping how political messaging is constructed and disseminated (Obukoadata *et. al.*, 2021). The necessity to adopt these innovative techniques underscores how the evolution of technology directly influences the principles and practices of political advertising, leading candidates to reinvent their engagement strategies to remain competitive in this rapidly changing environment.

Moreover, the influence of social media on political advertising illustrates a profound intersection of technology and public perception, underscoring how digital platforms can steer political outcomes. The underlying algorithms that govern social media sites play a pivotal role in shaping the visibility and dissemination of political content, affecting not only what users encounter in their feeds but also how they interact with this information. This phenomenon of algorithmic oversight serves as a clear example of technological determinism, which posits that technological advancements can dictate human behaviour by manipulating attention and moulding perceptions.

In the realm of political advertising, this dynamic becomes particularly pronounced. By prioritising certain content types, especially those designed to provoke a strong emotional reaction or that present sensational narratives, social media platforms can significantly sway public opinion and influence voting behaviours. For instance, posts that elicit intense emotions, whether fear, anger, or joy, are often favoured by algorithms due to their potential for generating greater user engagement. Such content not only dominates user feeds but also shapes the collective discourse around elections, ultimately holding the power to sway electoral results. As a result, the strategic use of emotionally charged or sensationalised content could lead to a distorted understanding of candidates and issues among the electorate, emphasising the critical role that technology plays in the modern political landscape.

The implications of technological determinism in the context of social media usage for political advertising are extensive and profound, affecting not only individual campaigns but also reshaping the landscape of politics and society as a whole. As technology advances, so too do the strategies and tactics employed in political advertising, leading to a dynamic interplay between digital innovation and political engagement.

The rapid evolution of digital technologies, including advanced artificial intelligence algorithms that can analyse voter behaviour with unprecedented precision, and immersive

augmented reality experiences that engage audiences in novel ways, indicates that political campaigns are continually adapting to leverage these new tools. For instance, AI-driven data analytics allow campaigns to tailor messages to specific demographics, while augmented reality can create immersive experiences that resonate more deeply with potential voters.

This relentless progression highlights the deterministic perspective that sees technology as a fundamental catalyst for societal transformation. As technology rewrites the rules of political communication, it profoundly influences how campaigns interact with the public, ultimately reshaping the processes of political engagement and interaction. Consequently, we witness a continuous cycle of technology-driven change that not only alters campaign strategies but also transforms the very fabric of democratic participation (Obukoadata *et. al.*, 2021).

However, the relationship between technological determinism and social media usage in political advertising is not without its complexities and criticisms. While technological determinism emphasises the power of technology to shape society, it often downplays the role of human agency and the socio-cultural contexts within which technology is developed and used. In the case of social media and political advertising, this means acknowledging that while technology has a significant impact on political communication, it is also shaped by human choices, policies, and cultural norms. For instance, the use of social media in political campaigns is not solely determined by the technological capabilities of digital platforms but is also influenced by the regulatory environment, political culture, and the strategic decisions of political actors.

Critics of technological determinism contend that this perspective can foster a one-dimensional understanding of social change, often neglecting the significant role of human agency and resistance in shaping outcomes. When we examine the interplay between social media and political advertising, it becomes clear that technology indeed alters the landscape of political communication; however, it does not intrinsically govern the resultant behaviours or outcomes in political spheres.

Voters, activists, and political figures possess a robust capability to resist, challenge, or even subvert the pervasive influence of technology. They can engage with social media platforms not just as passive consumers but as active participants who align their actions with their personal values and objectives. For instance, although social media is frequently utilised to disseminate misinformation or sway public opinion in a particular direction, it also serves as a dynamic arena for grassroots mobilisation, fostering civic engagement and advocating for democratic principles. This dual potential highlights the agency individuals have in harnessing social media as a vehicle for positive change, emphasising that technology itself is not the sole driver of political realities.

The interplay between technological determinism theory and the utilisation of social media in political advertising underscores the profound influence technology wields over political communication and civic engagement. Social media platforms have dramatically reshaped the landscape of political advertising, introducing complex new dynamics surrounding interaction, participation, and influence, all of which resonate deeply with the core principles of technological determinism.

At the heart of this relationship is an intricate web of interactions between technological innovation and human agency. On one hand, advancements in digital technology, such as data analytics, targeted advertising, and real-time engagement, serve as powerful catalysts that redefine how political messages are crafted and disseminated (Obukoadata *et. al.*, 2021). Political actors leverage these technologies to reach audiences with unprecedented precision, tailoring their campaigns to specific demographics and interests, which can significantly sway public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Conversely, the impact of technology is not unilateral; it is profoundly shaped by the socio-cultural contexts in which these technologies are employed. The strategies that political actors adopt are often reflective of societal values, norms, and historical contexts, which in turn influence how technology is integrated into the political framework. For instance, the emergence

of social media as a primary platform for political discourse has been fueled by shifting public expectations of transparency and engagement, forcing politicians to adapt their communication strategies to stay relevant.

As we witness continuous advancements in digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and augmented reality, the relationship between technological determinism and social media in the realm of political advertising will undoubtedly remain a critical area of exploration. This evolving dynamic promises to yield crucial insights into the future trajectory of political communication, the nature of democratic participation, and how citizens engage with their political landscape. Understanding this relationship is essential not just for political advertisers but also for voters who navigate an increasingly complex media environment.

## 4. Conclusion

This study set out to interrogate the extent to which social media–driven political advertising, viewed through the lens of Technological Determinism Theory, has displaced traditional modes of political communication in Nigeria's electioneering space. Drawing on documented scholarly evidence and contextual analyses of Nigeria's electoral cycles, the study demonstrates that social media has not merely supplemented traditional political communication but has fundamentally restructured it. The displacement observed is both functional and symbolic: traditional media no longer serve as the primary arena for political messaging, agenda-setting, and voter engagement, while digital platforms increasingly define the rhythm, tone, and reach of political communication.

The findings affirm that social media political advertising has significantly altered the architecture of Nigeria's electioneering. Traditional channels such as radio, television, newspapers, and outdoor advertising, once central to campaign communication, have been partially displaced by platforms that offer immediacy, interactivity, micro-targeting, and virality. While these legacy media remain relevant, especially in reaching rural and older demographics, their dominance has been weakened. Social media now shape campaign narratives, influence public perception in real time, and provide political actors with direct access to voters without the mediation of institutional gatekeepers. This displacement aligns closely with Technological Determinism Theory, which posits that technological innovation restructures social practices and redefines institutional power relations.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study demonstrates that Technological Determinism provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding the transformation of political communication in Nigeria. Social media technologies have imposed new communicative logics - speed, algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, and participatory content creation - that compel political actors to adapt their strategies accordingly. Campaigns are now structured around digital affordances, including data analytics, targeted messaging, and continuous audience interaction. In this sense, technology does not merely facilitate political advertising; it actively shapes campaign behaviour, message construction, and voter engagement patterns. The Nigerian experience illustrates that technological change precedes and conditions shifts in political communication practice, lending empirical weight to deterministic arguments within media theory.

However, the study also reveals that this technologically driven transformation is not neutral in its consequences. The displacement of traditional political communication by social media has generated complex implications for Nigeria's socio-political communication space. On one hand, social media-driven political advertising has expanded participation, lowered barriers to entry for political communication, and amplified previously marginalised voices, particularly among young voters. It has enhanced political visibility, accelerated information flow, and fostered interactive engagement that was largely absent in traditional campaign models.

On the other hand, the study underscores critical challenges arising from this shift. The same technologies that democratise access also facilitate misinformation, propaganda, emotional manipulation, and political polarisation. Algorithmic amplification prioritises sensational and emotive content, often at the expense of issue-based discourse, thereby reshaping political engagement into a contest of visibility rather than deliberation. The absence of effective regulatory frameworks for online political advertising in Nigeria further compounds these challenges, allowing unethical campaign practices to flourish with minimal accountability. These outcomes suggest that technological displacement, while transformative, produces uneven democratic gains.

Importantly, the study addresses a key scholarly gap by moving beyond descriptive accounts of social media use in Nigerian elections to critically assess the depth and implications of displacement occasioned by technological determinism. Existing studies largely document the adoption and effectiveness of social media in political campaigns; this study advances the discourse by interrogating how and why technological forces reconfigure political communication structures and power relations. By foregrounding displacement as an analytical concept, the study contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of digital political communication in emerging democracies.

In conclusion, social media–driven political advertising has become a defining force in Nigeria's electioneering, displacing traditional political communication in form, function, and influence. Technological Determinism Theory effectively explains this transformation by highlighting technology's capacity to reshape political practices and communication environments. However, the implications of this shift are ambivalent, simultaneously expanding democratic participation while intensifying communicative distortions. The study, therefore, calls for a more intricate engagement with digital political communication, one that recognises technological power while foregrounding ethical responsibility, regulatory intervention, and critical media literacy. As Nigeria's political communication landscape continues to evolve, understanding the dynamics of technological displacement remains essential for safeguarding democratic integrity and meaningful political participation

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