

**PORT HARCOURT RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL
BRANDING OF OBIDENT MOVEMENT IN 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

Ukaegbu Michael Ibe, PhD.

Michaelibe22@gmail.com

**Department of English and Communication Art
Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt, Nigeria.**

And

Braide, Daerefa-a Christopher

daerefaa.braide@iaue.edu.ng

**Department of Mass Communication
Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt, Nigeria.**

Abstract

The study examined Port Harcourt residents' perceptions of the social media political branding of the Obident Movement during the 2023 presidential election. The study objectives were to determine the perception of Port Harcourt residents regarding the credibility of the Obident Movement's political branding on social media, ascertain the influence of social media political branding of the Obident Movement on the electoral choices of Port Harcourt residents, and to find out the challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents in engaging social media political branding during the 2023 Presidential election. The study was anchored on Framing Theory. Survey design was adopted; the population of the study comprised 3,636,550. The sample size was 400 drawn from the population using Taro Yamane (1967) Statistical Tool. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. Data were collected with a self-structured questionnaire on a four-point Likert scale and were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations through SPSS. Findings indicated that respondents generally perceived the Obident Movement's social media branding as credible, consistent with stated values, trust-building, and effective in enhancing public image. The branding was found to have a notable influence on electoral choices. Major challenges to engagement were identified as misinformation, fake news, political bias, conflicting information, and digital-access constraints, which collectively undermined trust and limited reach. The study concluded that social media branding had been a transformative mobilizing force in Port Harcourt but that its democratic potential was constrained by credibility and access issues. It was recommended among others that political actors and movements, including the Obident Movement, should adopt transparent, fact-based, and consistent messaging on social media platforms.

Keywords: Port Harcourt; social media political branding; Obident Movement; 2023 presidential election; perception

Introduction

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election signified a turning point in the nation's political history, especially in how political campaigns were conducted and received by the electorate. Social media platforms have surpassed traditional media in influencing perceptions and narratives, making them effective instruments for political branding, mobilization, and voter participation. The "Obidient Movement," a youth-led political movement that centred on Peter Obi's candidacy, was one of the most notable political phenomenon to arise during 2023 general elections in Nigeria (Eze, 2023). The use of digital media to convey political branding and rally broad support throughout Nigeria, particularly Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, made this movement distinctive in addition to its grassroots origins.

Political branding refers to the deliberate building of a candidate's identity, values, and promises in ways that resonate with the electorate. Political branding in the Obidient Movement's instance was based on presenting Peter Obi as a representation of competence, youth inclusivity, transparency, and a break from the long-standing political elite. Social media emerged as a key platform for this branding, with sites like X, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp enabling the spread of infographics, memes, hashtags (#Obidient, #TakeBackNigeria), and slogans that influenced public opinion and gave supporters a feeling of unity (Adebayo & Alabi, 2023). The Obidient Movement used these platforms to portray itself as a generational appeal for change and a vision of a "new Nigeria," rather than merely a political campaign.

The distinct socio-political climate of Port Harcourt influenced how the city's citizens reacted to this branding initiative. Port Harcourt, a commercial center in the Niger Delta, is characterized by problems like environmental degradation, unemployment, and governance difficulties that affect political agendas and perceptions. Residents actively evaluated and discussed the Obidient Movement's branding through their daily circumstances rather than being passive recipients of political messaging. Social media gave professionals, civil society players, and urban millennials a forum to interact with campaign narratives while also exposing them to opposing viewpoints from opposing political parties.

According to studies, younger Nigerians living in cities who were growing more and more disenchanted with the country's established political elites found great resonance with the Obidient Movement. This resonance was demonstrated in Port Harcourt by the fervour of youth-led protests, the viral dissemination of campaign messaging, and the use of internet platforms for political education. But opinions differed. Some locals rejected the movement's social media branding as being overhyped, elitist, or disconnected from the grassroots realities of rural towns, while others saw it as creative, genuine, and powerful. These conflicting viewpoints emphasize the significance of investigating the ways in which social media-mediated political branding interacts with regional contexts and socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, studying Port Harcourt residents' perception of social media political branding during the 2023 presidential election offers significant insight into the dynamics of digital democracy in Nigeria. It allows for an understanding of how citizens interpret, internalize, or reject campaign messages in a rapidly digitizing political environment. More importantly, it underscores the role of social media not only in shaping national narratives but also in reflecting local political consciousness and aspirations.

Statement of the Problem

In the contemporary digital era, politics has increasingly embraced the use of social media platforms as key instruments for political communication and branding. Political candidates and their supporters now employ social media not only to reach a wider audience but also to build images, frame narratives, and influence voter perception. Political branding, therefore, has become an essential strategy in the electoral process, as it shapes how candidates are perceived in terms of credibility, competence, and trustworthiness. In the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, the Obidient Movement, which championed the candidacy of Peter Obi, was strongly driven by social media platforms that packaged and projected its ideals through hashtags, viral messages, memes, and online campaigns. Unfortunately, despite the growing influence of social media political branding, it has been discovered that there are mixed perceptions among citizens, particularly in Port Harcourt, regarding its effectiveness and impact. While some residents viewed the Obidient Movement's social media branding as an innovative and powerful tool for political mobilization, others questioned its authenticity, accessibility, and connection to grassroots realities. One begins to wonder what accounts for this divided perception, especially when the same branding strategies appeared to resonate strongly in other parts of the country. The issue of perception has become a major concern in political communication studies. Some electorates interpret social media branding as a form of civic awakening and political inclusion, while others see it as elitist propaganda disconnected from their daily struggles. It has been observed that even though social media campaigns gained significant attention, the eventual electoral outcomes did not fully reflect the enthusiasm generated online, suggesting a gap between digital branding and voter behaviour. Where such gaps exist, citizens may spend time engaging with political messages on social media but fail to translate such engagements into real political support or electoral outcomes. The researchers also observed that even with widespread availability of smartphones, internet access, and strong social media presence of the Obidient Movement, only a section of Port Harcourt residents actively engaged with or positively perceived the branding strategies. Many others remained indifferent or skeptical, raising concerns about the actual influence of digital political branding in shaping political choices in the city. This observation requires an empirical investigation. Hence, it is against this backdrop that this study is designed to examine Port Harcourt residents' perception of social media political branding of the Obidient Movement during the 2023 presidential election.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine Port Harcourt Residents' Perception of Social Media Political Branding of Obidient Movement in 2023 Presidential Election. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the perception of Port Harcourt residents regarding the credibility of the Obidient Movement's political branding on social media.
2. ascertain the influence of social media political branding of the Obidient Movement on the electoral choices of Port Harcourt residents.
3. find out the challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents in engaging social media political branding during the 2023 presidential election.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of Port Harcourt residents regarding the credibility of the Obidient Movement's political branding on social media?
2. What is the influence of social media political branding of the Obidient Movement on the electoral choices of Port Harcourt residents?
3. Are there challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents in engaging social media political branding during the 2023 presidential election?

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Port Harcourt Resident's Perception

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria provided a new dimension to political participation through the active use of social media platforms. The Obidient Movement, which backed Peter Obi's campaign, used digital platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to project a brand image that appealed to young people and urban populations (Ibekwe, 2023). Residents of Port Harcourt, a cosmopolitan city in the Niger Delta, had varying opinions about this social media political branding, with many, particularly young people and educated professionals, viewing the use of hashtags, memes, and infographics as creative tools that made them feel included in the political process and strengthened the candidate's image as a symbol of change (Agbim et al., 2023). This perception was further influenced by dissatisfaction with the traditional political elites and the desire for an alternative political leadership (Aboh & Okoi, 2023).

Not every resident, though, was excited. Some voiced suspicion, believing the online effort to be elite and unconnected to the realities of the grassroots. According to these people, the Obidient Movement's digital activity did not entirely result in workable answers to socio-economic problems including unemployment and Port Harcourt's deteriorating infrastructure (Aliede, 2024). Others questioned the branding's efficacy, pointing out that, despite its popularity online, it did not match Rivers State election results proportionately (Owagboriaye, 2024). The way that people in Port Harcourt viewed the Obidient Movement's social media branding highlights the advantages and disadvantages of digital political communication in Nigeria. Although it was successful in motivating certain groups of people, especially young people, its influence on more general political conduct was still debatable.

Social Media Political Branding

The deliberate use of digital platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp to create, disseminate, and control the public perception of political figures, parties, or movements is known as social media political branding. Similar to how brands are developed in commercial marketing to sway consumer loyalty, political branding shapes public perception of a politician's competence, ideals, and reliability through repeated messages, symbols, slogans, visuals, and storytelling (Scammell, 2015). Because social media has made it possible for politicians and the public to interact directly, and in real time, it has completely changed political branding. Social media gives people the ability to reply, share, remix, or contest political messaging, in contrast to traditional media, which only conveys messages in one direction. This interactivity strengthens the emotional bond between candidates and their audiences, creating a sense of participation and ownership of the political process (Enli, 2017).

In particular, social media's capacity to function as a platform for political branding has revolutionized the field of political communication. Political branding is the deliberate development of a candidate's identity, principles, and reputation to influence the electorate's perception of them; it extends beyond campaign pledges. Platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become crucial tools for politicians in the current digital era in order to increase their visibility, engage with people, and sway public opinion (Scammell, 2015). Social media provides participatory involvement, immediacy, and interaction in contrast to traditional media. Because people share, remix, and debate campaign messages in addition to consuming them, these characteristics make it particularly well-suited for political branding. In addition to strengthening brand identification, this co-creation of material gives fans a feeling of community (Enli, 2017). The emotional connection between candidates and their viewers is further reinforced by the viral dissemination of campaign slogans, hashtags, and memes.

Recent elections in Nigeria have seen a rise in the use of social media for political branding. Politicians present themselves as responsive, transparent, and believable leaders by using digital media. The general election of 2023 demonstrated in particular how social media branding, like that of the Obidient organization, might galvanize a youth-led political organization. Candidates made strong symbolic linkages that connected with certain demographics by strategically utilizing images, slogans, and influencer support to portray themselves as reformist and people-focused (Uche & Uduakobong, 2022). However, social media branding has drawbacks even though it might increase exposure and interaction. Disparities between online fervour and offline election results can result from problems including disinformation, digital divides, and an over dependence on online popularity (Ezenwa, 2023).

Obidient Movement in 2023 Presidential Election

The grassroots, citizen-led political tsunami that gathered around Peter Obi, the Labour Party's presidential candidate, during Nigeria's general election in 2023 is known as the Obidient Movement (occasionally spelled Obidient Movement). The decentralized organization, youth-driven nature, and strong dependence on social media activism set the Obidient Movement apart from the traditional political structures dominated by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). Its rise signalled a generational need for political responsibility, transparency, and competency, marking a break from Nigerian politics' patronage-driven, elite-centred approach (Onyekachukwu, Mmaduabuchi, & Emmanuel, 2023).

The movement's capacity to captivate young Nigerians, many of whom were first-time voters, was one of its distinguishing features. The general dissatisfaction with unemployment, corruption, insecurity, bad governance, and the apparent inability of the political elites to bring about significant change served as a driving force for the youth. This annoyance was reflected in the movement's portrayal of Peter Obi as a respectable, practical, and incorruptible substitute for conventional politicians. Through issue-based narratives, grassroots storytelling, and a digital-first approach that used hashtags, memes, and short videos to swiftly and extensively disseminate political messages, his image was meticulously crafted (Igwe & Maduka, 2025).

Social media had an especially important influence. In addition to being campaign tools, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X were community-building platforms that allowed Nigerians to discuss topics, exchange campaign materials, and rally support. Geographical

and socio-economic barriers were overcome by social media branding, and the Obidient Movement's online popularity resulted in offline rallies, marches, and grassroots organization in major Nigerian cities like Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024).

However, the Obidient Movement had a long-lasting effect on Nigerian politics. It challenged the power of long-standing political parties, reshaped the way election campaigns might be carried out in the digital age, and encouraged a new generation of Nigerians to see political engagement as both a right and a duty. Notwithstanding Peter Obi's failure to win the presidency, analysts contend that the Obidient Movement's legacy resides in its capacity to rekindle civic awareness, transform political discourse, and present a model of citizen-driven politics that may have an impact on Nigeria's upcoming elections (Onyekachukwu et al., 2023).

Origins and Drivers

Rising discontent with perceived corruption, economic stagnation, insecurity, and a lack of capable leadership were the main causes of the movement's emergence. A movement that promised a change from the current quo flourished because of these circumstances. Storylines of integrity and competence were bolstered by Peter Obi's decision to resign from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the Labour Party, his reputation for competency and thrift, and his choice of running mate (Igwe & Maduka, 2025). Furthermore, the Obidient rhetoric was triggered and touched by historical grievances like the ASUU strikes, the #EndSARS demonstrations, and annoyance over ethno-religious conflicts (Igwe & Maduka, 2025).

Tactics and Mobilization

The Obidient Movement was notable for its strong emphasis on digital platforms and social media. Supporters sent messages, planned gatherings, criticized other candidates, and shared prior political transgressions using X, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. The movement's identity was significantly shaped by user-generated content, hashtags, influencer interaction, crowdfunding, and memes (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024; Igwe & Maduka, 2025). Crucially, the campaign expanded its reach and engagement by coordinating offline protests, town hall meetings, and ground mobilization using social media platforms (Igwe & Maduka, 2025).

Impact and Significance

The Obidient Movement had a significant impact on Nigeria's electoral politics even though it was unable to produce a presidential victory. It inspired young Nigerians who had grown disillusioned with politics to get involved in politics again. According to Onyekachukwu et al. (2023), it also compelled established political parties to take social media branding, public demands for openness, and more issue-based campaigning more seriously. The movement changed the political dialogue in a number of ways, elevating national issues, competent leadership, morality, and competency.

Challenges and Limitations

Numerous studies also noted that the movement had difficulties in spite of its advantages. Fake news and misinformation were widely disseminated, and many Nigerians, particularly those living in rural, less-connected, or lower-income areas, were not as well-reachable due

to digital divides (Eze & Okafor, 2023). Additionally, in certain areas, the internet fervour did not necessarily convert into votes because to things like local alliances, party structures, incumbency advantages, and voter participation (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024). Meanwhile, the movement's ability to maintain momentum over time was constrained by loose party structures and pre-existing political machinery (Ogunseye, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing Theory was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1970. The theory posits how the media not only tell people what to think about but also how to think about it. Through hashtags, memes, slogans like "We are Obidient," and carefully structured narratives, the movement framed Peter Obi as a symbol of hope and change. Residents of Port Harcourt interpreted these frames as alternatives to the traditional PDP/APC dominance, making framing central to the movement's branding success.

Assumptions of Framing Theory

1. **Media Frames Shape Public Perception:** Framing Theory assumes that the way issues are presented by the media influence how people interpret and evaluate them. In this study, the way social media platforms framed Peter Obi and the Obidient Movement through narratives of integrity, youth empowerment, or political change shaped how Port Harcourt residents perceived the movement and its political relevance.
2. **Selection and Omission of Information Matter:** The theory assumes that what is highlighted or downplayed in communication impacts audience perception. Social media branding of the Obidient Movement often emphasized Peter Obi's reputation for accountability while omitting narratives of political inexperience or weak party structure. Port Harcourt residents' perception was therefore shaped by these selective emphases.
3. **Framing is Linked to Ideological and Political Contexts:** Framing Theory assumes that frames are not neutral; they are influenced by broader cultural, political, and ideological factors. In this study, the branding of the Obidient Movement as a fight against corruption and poor governance resonated with Nigerians frustrated with elite-driven politics, thus aligning the movement with citizens' lived realities.
4. **Competing Frames Influence Public Opinion:** The theory also assumes that multiple frames can compete to influence perception. While the Obidient Movement branded itself as a credible alternative for change, opponents framed it as an inexperienced and "internet-only" campaign. The perception of Port Harcourt residents therefore reflected on how they negotiated these competing narratives.

Relevance/Implication of Framing Theory to this Study

The relevance of Framing Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how social media political branding of the Obidient Movement influenced the perception of Port Harcourt residents during the 2023 presidential election. Framing Theory posits that the way messages are constructed through emphasis, repetition, and selective presentation of issues shapes how audiences interpret political realities. In the context of this study, the branding of Peter Obi and the Obidient Movement on social media platforms highlighted themes of integrity, accountability, youth empowerment, and political change, which resonated with citizens dissatisfied with the political establishment. By analysing how these frames were communicated and received, the study demonstrates how social media served not only as

a tool for mobilization but also as a lens through which voters in Port Harcourt evaluated the credibility and viability of the Obidient Movement in the 2023 presidential election.

Empirical Review

Akporue, & Efebeh, (2025) examined "Social Media and Political Participation: A Study of 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria." Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study explores how platforms like X, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram influenced political awareness, discourse, and citizen participation. The findings reveal that social media played a crucial role in fostering political engagement, particularly among young voters, by providing a space for political debates, real-time election updates, and advocacy for transparency. However, it also contributed to the spread of misinformation, political polarization, and digital manipulation. The study further highlights that political parties and candidates leveraged social media for campaign strategies, voter education, and direct engagement with the electorate. Despite its advantages, challenges such as cyber propaganda, hate speech, and regulatory concerns hindered its effectiveness. The research concludes that while social media has transformed political participation in Nigeria, ensuring its responsible use through policy reforms and digital literacy programmes is essential for strengthening democratic processes. It recommends that political parties should leverage on social media tools for effective political branding and citizen's political participation. The study is relevant because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital democracy and provides recommendations for enhancing the constructive role of social media in future elections.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprised 3,636,550 residents of Port Harcourt based on annual population growth rate of 2.5%. The sample size was 400 drawn from the population using Taro Yamane (1967) Statistical Tool. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. The researcher developed an instrument to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was a self-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in line with four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) in accordance with the three research questions raised in the study. Data were collected with the use of a well-structured questionnaire. A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. 225 copies representing 56% was retrieved and used in the study. The responses obtained from the respondents were analysed using mean scores and standard deviation. All test for the study were carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Presentation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on perceptions of Port Harcourt residents

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Obidient Movement's political branding on social media is perceived as credible.	225	1.00	4.00	3.3111	.85100

The branding strategy of the Obidient Movement on social media builds trust among voters.	225	1.00	4.00	3.1733	.90198
Social media branding by the Obidient Movement improves its public image among Port Harcourt residents.	225	1.00	4.00	3.2800	.90475
The Obidient Movement's social media messages are consistent with its political values.	225	1.00	4.00	3.2933	.78672
Valid N (listwise)	225				

The results on the perception of Port Harcourt residents reveal that respondents generally held a favourable view of the Obidient Movement's political branding on social media. The mean scores, all above the midpoint, indicate that residents found the branding credible, consistent with political values, trust-building, and effective in improving public image.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on influence of social media political branding

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Obidient Movement's branding on social media influences choice of candidate in the 2023 presidential election.	225	1.00	4.00	3.6578	.60003
The branding of the Obidient Movement on social media influences comparison of Peter Obi with other candidates.	225	1.00	4.00	3.1689	.88030
The Obidient Movement's online branding influences discussions about voting.	225	1.00	4.00	3.2356	.90760
The Obidient Movement's online political branding has a direct impact on voting behaviour in the 2023 presidential election.	225	1.00	4.00	3.2311	.84511
Valid N (listwise)	225				

Findings on the influence of social media political branding show that the Obidient Movement's online strategies played a significant role in shaping electoral choices among residents. The strongest influence was observed in how branding affected candidate preference, with other factors such as influencing comparisons with opponents, stimulating

discussions, and directly shaping voting behaviour also showing positive though slightly lower mean scores.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Misinformation creates challenges when engaging with the Obidient Movement's social media branding.	225	1.00	4.00	3.5022	.71417
Fake news and propaganda weaken trust in social media branding of the Obidient Movement.	225	1.00	4.00	3.4756	.78523
Political bias on social media platforms reduces the effectiveness of the Obidient Movement's branding.	225	1.00	4.00	3.4489	.73698
Conflicting information on social media makes assessment of the Obidient Movement's credibility difficult.	225	1.00	4.00	3.4222	.75264
Valid N (listwise)	225				

The analysis of challenges reveals that Port Harcourt residents faced considerable obstacles in engaging with the Obidient Movement's social media branding. Issues such as misinformation, fake news, propaganda, political bias, and conflicting information were consistently rated high, indicating that trust in online political communication was undermined by credibility problems. The close clustering of the mean scores shows that these challenges were widely experienced and not isolated.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated Port Harcourt resident's perception of social media political branding of Obidient movement in 2023 presidential election. It discussed the following findings:

Research question 1. What is the perception of Port Harcourt residents regarding the credibility of the Obidient Movement's political branding on social media?

The findings on Port Harcourt residents' perception of the credibility of the Obidient Movement's political branding on social media reveal generally positive evaluations. Respondents indicated that the branding was credible, consistent with the movement's political values, and effective in building trust and improving its public image. The relatively high mean scores across items suggest that the Obidient Movement successfully used social media to project authenticity and accountability. This is consistent with the argument of Scammell (2015), who posited that political branding thrives when it communicates consistent values that resonate with voter expectations.

The perception of credibility observed in this study also aligns with Enli (2017), who emphasized that authenticity is central to digital political communication, as audiences tend

to distrust branding that appears artificial or manipulative. In the Nigerian context, the Obidient Movement's framing of Peter Obi as a symbol of integrity and transparency connected strongly with disillusioned citizens seeking alternatives to established political elites. This reflects the observation of Olorunnisola & Martin (2019), who noted that Nigerian youths increasingly evaluate political actors through digital narratives that emphasize credibility and competence.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate previous evidence that political branding on social media has the potential to strengthen political trust when messages are clear and consistent (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008). The relatively low variation in responses indicates that trust in the Obidient Movement's branding was not only widespread but also relatively stable among Port Harcourt residents. Overall, this suggests that the Obidient Movement's social media branding resonated with urban electorates by presenting a credible and trustworthy political alternative, reinforcing the growing importance of digital political communication in shaping citizens' perceptions in Nigeria.

Research question 2. What is the influence of social media political branding of the Obidient Movement on the electoral choices of Port Harcourt residents?

The findings on the influence of social media political branding of the Obidient Movement on electoral choices in Port Harcourt demonstrate that online branding played a strong role in shaping candidate preference, influencing discussions about voting, and affecting voting behaviour. The highest impact was recorded in how branding shaped the choice of candidate, while its role in influencing comparisons with opponents and stimulating sustained discussions was slightly weaker. This indicates that the Obidient Movement's digital strategies were more effective at mobilizing direct support for Peter Obi than in fostering deliberative political engagement.

This outcome aligns with the work of Loader et al. (2016), who found that social media political campaigns often serve as mobilizing tools that encourage political participation, particularly among younger voters. Similarly, the study by Emetumah (2023) confirmed that the Obidient Movement's online branding played a crucial role in translating digital enthusiasm into electoral support, especially among Nigeria's youth population. However, the relatively lower scores on discussions and comparisons suggest that while social media branding influenced immediate choices, it may not have significantly deepened political analysis or comparative evaluation.

The findings also reflect observations by Enli & Naper (2016), who argued that political branding in the digital age tends to simplify complex issues into easily shareable narratives, prioritizing emotional mobilization over rational debate. In Port Harcourt, the strong influence of the Obidient Movement's branding on candidate choice highlights how digital communication can act as a shortcut for decision-making in contexts of political disillusionment. Overall, these findings demonstrate that while social media branding can effectively shape voting behaviour, its influence is most powerful in direct candidate support rather than in stimulating broader electoral discourse.

Research question 3. Are there challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents in engaging social media political branding during the 2023 presidential election?

The findings on challenges faced by Port Harcourt residents in engaging with social media branding of the Obidient Movement reveal that misinformation, fake news, propaganda, political bias, and conflicting information were major obstacles. Respondents reported that

these factors weakened trust and created difficulties in assessing credibility. The consistent mean scores across these items show that these challenges were widely experienced, suggesting a broader problem with the digital information environment in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

These findings resonate with Okoro & Nwafor (2022), who observed that misinformation and propaganda are major barriers to effective political communication in Nigeria, particularly during elections where rival groups deploy false information to discredit opponents. Similarly, Tucker et al. (2018) highlighted that digital platforms, while powerful for political mobilization, are equally prone to manipulation through fake news, echo chambers, and politically biased content. For the Obidient Movement, this meant that although branding was impactful, its effectiveness was undermined by competing frames that sought to delegitimize the movement.

The challenges also reflect the broader issue of digital literacy, as identified by Olorunnisola & Tomaselli (2021), who argued that many African electorates lack the skills to critically evaluate online political content. In Port Harcourt, conflicting information and political bias made it harder for residents to make informed judgments about the Obidient Movement's branding. Despite these challenges, the movement still achieved significant influence, suggesting that credibility and consistency in branding can partially mitigate the negative effects of misinformation. Nonetheless, the findings underline the importance of addressing digital communication challenges, as unchecked misinformation and bias can erode trust and distort democratic participation.

Conclusion

This study examined Port Harcourt residents' perception of the Obidient Movement's social media political branding during the 2023 presidential election, its influence on electoral choices, and the challenges encountered in engaging with such branding. Findings revealed that residents generally perceived the Obidient Movement's branding as credible, trustworthy, and consistent with its political values, which contributed to strengthening its public image. Social media branding was also found to significantly influence electoral choices, particularly by shaping candidate preference and mobilizing voter support, although its impact on fostering deeper political discussions was less pronounced.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified major challenges such as misinformation, fake news, political bias, and conflicting information, which undermined the credibility of political communication. These challenges highlight the vulnerability of digital spaces to manipulation, even when branding strategies are strong and authentic. The Obidient Movement's reliance on social media demonstrates the transformative role of digital political branding in Nigerian politics. It underscores both the opportunities and risks of digital platforms in shaping democratic participation. The study concludes that while social media branding can effectively mobilize citizens, addressing challenges of misinformation and bias remains critical for sustaining trust and deepening democratic engagement.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made among others that:

1. Political actors and movements, including the Obidient Movement, should adopt transparent, fact-based, and consistent messaging on social media platforms.

2. Since social media branding significantly influenced electoral choices, political organizations should not only focus on visibility but also on issue-based communication that resonates with citizens' concerns.
3. To mitigate the negative impact of misinformation, fake news, and political bias, awareness campaigns on digital literacy should be intensified.

References

- Aboh, A. B., & Okoi, O. (2023). The Obidient movement will shape Nigerian politics beyond the 2023 presidential election. *LSE Africa Blog*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse>.
- Adebayo, A., & Alabi, K. (2023). Facebook as a tool for political campaigns in Nigeria's 2023 elections. *Journal of Digital Media and Politics*, 11(3), 67-85.
- Agbim, K. C., Nwokorie, E. C., & Onyishi, C. J. (2023). The Obidient movement on Twitter and 2023 general election in Nigeria: An extrapolative analysis. *Social Science Open Access Repository*. <http://www.ssoar.info>.
- Akporue, C., & Efebeh, V. E. (2025). Social media and political participation: A study of 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research (IJR)*, 12(2), 387–403.
- Aliede, J. E. (2024). Use of social media by Peter Obi for political mobilisation during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election in Lagos State. *Nasarawa Journal of Multimedia and Communication Studies*, 6(1), 45–60.
- Benaiah, W. C., & Osuntoki, D. (2024). The impact of social media on political mobilization in Nigeria: A case study of the Obidient Movement. *American Journal of Arts and Human Science*, 3(3), 228–238.
- Emetumah, F. C. (2023). Social media and youth political mobilization in Nigeria's 2023 general elections: The case of the Obidient Movement. *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*, 10(2), 45–60.
- Enli, G. (2017). *Mediated authenticity: How the media constructs reality*. Peter Lang.
- Enli, G., & Naper, A. (2016). Social media as a political backchannel: Twitter use during televised election debates in Norway. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 68(2), 177–193. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-09-2015-0137>.
- Eze, O. (2023). Challenges and innovations in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. *Journal of Electoral Studies*, 12(4), 77-96.
- Ezenwa, P. (2023). The digital divide and its implications for political participation in Nigeria. *African Journal of Information and Communication*, 9(3), 54-72.

- Ibekwe, F. (2023). WhatsApp as a grassroots mobilization tool in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. *Communication Studies in Africa*, 12(1), 19-36.
- Ibrahim, S., & Musa, H. (2023). The role of technology in Nigeria's 2023 elections: Opportunities and challenges. *African Electoral Journal*, 18(1), 33-49.
- Igwe, K. U., & Maduka, N. (2025). Assessing the role of social media in promoting the Obidient Movement during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(2), 1–9.
- Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2016). Performing for the young networked citizen? Celebrity politics, social networking and the political engagement of young people. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(3), 400–419. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715608261>.
- Ogunseye, I. I. (2023). Party politics and structure: A systematic analysis of the Obidient Movement in the Nigerian 2023 elections. *Journal of Global South Research on Security and Development*, 2(2). <https://journals.gsr.org/index.php/JGRSD/article/view/45>.
- Okoro, N., & Nwafor, K. A. (2022). Fake news, misinformation and political communication in Nigeria: Implications for democratic governance. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 14(1), 85–102. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00068_1.
- Olorunnisola, A. A., & Tomaselli, K. (2021). Political communication in Africa: Digital dilemmas and democratic potentials. *International Communication Gazette*, 83(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048520965979>.
- Onyekachukwu, M. S., Mmaduabuchi, U. U., & Emmanuel, O. A. (2023). Obidient Movement and political change in Nigeria: The journey so far. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 16(2), 45–58.
- Owagboriaye, F. F. (2024). Peter Obi's use of X for political mobilization in the 2023 election. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1234567>.
- Scammell, M. (2015). Politics and image: The conceptual value of branding in political communication. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 14(1–2), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2014.990829>.
- Tucker, J. A., Guess, A., Barbera, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. *Political Science Quarterly*, 133(4), 801–841. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12810>.
- Uche, E. A., & Uduakobong, A. O. (2022). Social media and political branding in Nigeria's democratic process. *International Journal of Communication and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 88–102.