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SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN STRATEGY: STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTION OF THE 2023 KOGI STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT
This study examined social media as election campaign, with focus on stakeholders' perception on the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. In an era of information explosion and a widespread and poorly regulated social media space, elections are exposed to fake news and other harmful outcomes. The objectives of the study were to establish how the social media activities of "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" in the political communication process affect the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections, determine the impact of social media as election contest and campaign strategy on the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections and assess the use of social media in campaigns and political discussion among political parties and contestants in the 2023 Kogi State governorship election. The study adopts the Agenda Setting Theory premised on the believe that the mass media influences public perception not by dictating specific opinion, but by determining the salience of topics within public discourse. The study used a descriptive survey design, which is quantitative in nature. Due to the infinite nature of the stakeholders' population, a sample size of 400 was determined using Cochran's formula. The hypotheses were tested using the chi – square test. The test of hypothesis I showed that the "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" minimal influence on political communication process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections (X^2 = 292.1, df = 4, critical value = 9.49). Hypothesis II showed that the use of social media mildly affects the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections (X^2 = 134.9, df = 4, critical value = 9.49). Hypothesis III (X^2 =148.7, df = 4, critical value = 9.49) showed that social media platforms were used for campaigns, debates and political discussions in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. It can be concluded that social media played a moderate role in the 2023 governorship elections campaign strategy, and that the activities of Data Boys and Shekpe Boys were widely seen as increasing propaganda and online abuse. It is therefore recommended that INEC, regulators and civil society groups should set clear rules against fake news and hate speech without limiting hate speech, and should promote media literacy and fact-checking in Kogi State. This will improve the quality of information on social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Data/Shekpe Boys, Election Contest, Campaigns, Political Communication

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1.0 Introduction

Social media has shifted attention away from the traditional news media and is now a useful tool for campaign strategy and political communication in the 21st Century, and it has a strong influence on the direction of elections around the world. In the past, communication, and most importantly political communication passed through traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers. However, the shift to social media was made possible by the spread of the internet and the growth of technology, seen in apps such as Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube and Telegram. Internet penetration in Nigeria is 61.4%, higher than the global average (58.8%) and nearly double the African average (39.6%), while social media use is 30.9% (Adeniyi and Kelly, 2024). Younger users have been found to adopt social media more quickly, especially as newspaper reading is declining, and these users, aged 18 – 45 years, make up the largest share of the political and election space (Adikuru, Shedrack and Yerima, 2025).

The implication of this is increased connectivity and greater audience, mostly among the youth, who are the main users of social media. Political actors have therefore used social media as a strategy for wider political communication. As acknowledged by Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023), the increasing use of the social media platforms has changed the way people engage with information, communicate and express opinions/views about issues within the political landscape. The impact of social media on numerous parts of society has been debated, especially its effects on the election process and political participation. It has been argued that social media has an increasingly visible influence on the pattern of political communication, engagement and participation as the social media reduces barriers to political communication participation by helping individuals to express opinions and hold dialogues (Alodat *et al.*, 2023).

On the negative side, Yilmaz (2026) asserted that social media platforms work with algorithms. In most cases, algorithms create filter "bubbles and echo chambers". The implication is that there are cases of amplified misinformation, overt emotional manipulation and negative polarization of the political parties during electioneering period. This led to the exploitation of "attention economies" and visible integration of propaganda into social media political communication culture to determine political preferences and choice (Yilmaz, 2026). The manipulative tendencies of political actors during elections can be disturbing, with constant misinformation, propaganda, fake news and character assassination becoming normal in efforts to appeal to the emotions of the online audience.

Whichever side of the argument one takes, there is clear proof that social media has an impact on politics, the electioneering process and electoral outcomes. This situation is not limited to Nigeria. According to Pew Research Center (2020), cited in Adeniyi and Kelly (2024), around 60% of Americans use social media to obtain political news and information, and roughly 40% use it to engage in political discussions or distribute political content. The widespread use of social media is changing the political landscape in Africa (IseOlorunkanmi, *et al.,* 2023). Nigeria had an estimated population of 229 million, about 103.0 million internet users, 36.70 million social media users aged 18 and above, and 205.4 million active mobile connections in early 2024, equal to 90.7 percent of the total population (Data Reportal, 2024). The 36.70 million social media users are a significant part of the voting population in Nigeria. Recent publication from INEC showed increase in registered voters with over 93million registered voters mostly youth between 18 – 45 years (INEC, 2026). Increasingly, they use mobile and social media to partake in political debates, even in ways which challenge authority (Adeniyi and Kelly, 2024).

Social media gained wide attention in Nigeria in the first decade of the 21st Century with the use of Facebook. Its use grew in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 election periods, when platforms were used widely for political communication, result collation, campaigns, predictions, propaganda and party information (Obinna, 2025). The interconnectedness of social media and elections has changed the pattern of election campaigns, political communication and party electoral strategy (Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo, 2023). One of the strategies is the use of social media to influence voters' choice and participation in the voting process and the intimidation of opposing political parties. The use of "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" was a major feature of the online space in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections (Yabagi, 2023). "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" within the social media and political landscapes, are paid by politicians and parties to promote certain agendas and to serve as online "battering rams". This is not new to the online political landscape. However, it gained prominence and popularity before the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

The major problem with social media as election contest and campaign strategy is that unlike the traditional media, which are subject to more editorial control and official regulation, social media is less controlled in Nigeria. It is noticeable that while traditional media in Nigeria operates under established regulatory frameworks like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) code, social media is not entirely unregulated; regulative drives through mechanisms such as the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act and periodic state interventions (such as the 2021 Twitter suspension) demonstrate ongoing state oversight and regulations. However, the operational challenge during electioneering lies in lagging enforcement and the velocity of user-generated content, which frequently bypasses real-time and traditional gatekeeping witnessed in the traditional media. This ecosystem facilitates the rapid dissemination of falsehoods, political propaganda, and character defamation designed to skew electoral advantages.

During the November 11, 2023 Kogi State gubernatorial election, dynamism manifested in intense ethnic profiling, deepfake videos, and conflicting misinformation campaigns primarily staged across platforms like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp. While existing literature extensively documents the general impact of digital misinformation on national elections (such as the 2019 and 2023 presidential polls), earlier studies have largely missed how sub-national, ethnically polarized states like Kogi State utilize localized digital propaganda to bypass institutional oversight. There is a distinct lack of empirical data on how digital actors in the Kogi 2023 governorship cycle specifically shifted from national political discourse to localized, identity-driven character assaults. On this basis, this study addresses this gap by investigating the nexus between social media and the election campaign and contest strategy in the 2023 Kogi State governorship election.

On this basis, the study sought to:

i. establish the effect of "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" activities on political communication process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.
ii. determine the impact of social media as election contest and campaign strategy on the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.
iii. assess the use of social media in campaigns and political discussion among political parties and contestants in the 2023 Kogi State governorship election.

Research hypotheses

Hypothesis I

H_0: "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" activities have no significant effect on political communication process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

H_i: "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" activities have significant effect on political communication process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

Hypothesis II

H_0: Social media activities as election contest strategy does not affect the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

H_i: Social media activities as election contest strategy affected the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

Hypothesis III

H_0: There is no significant relationship between social media platforms and campaigns, debates and political discussion in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

H_i: There is significant relationship between social media platforms and campaigns, debates and political discussion in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

2.0 Literature review/theoretical framework

Social media as a concept has been subjected to various definitions by scholars. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) gave a detailed account of social media, explaining that it is a group of internets–based applications built on the ideology and technology of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of ideas and information. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is user-friendly because most platforms use Web 2.0, which has more user-generated content and is easier to use that the earlier Web 1.0.

Eluagu and Onuzurike (2023) share similar understanding of social media as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), as they stress its mobile and web technology base and its role as a medium for the exchange of ideas and information. As such, Eluagu and Onuzurike (2023:4) declared that: *"The social media is a compendium of tools that are based on mobile and web technologies which serve as a means of communication, interaction or exchange of ideas among people in a virtual community or network".* In their view, Chimela, Ovute and Obochi (2015) noted that that the "mobile and web-based technologies on which social media depends create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, comment, discuss and modify user-generated content." Therefore, social media predominantly integrates technologies, social interaction, and content creation to collaboratively connect online information.

In attempting a conceptual clarification of social media, Boyd and Ellison (2007) built their definition of social network sites on a "tripod". Hence, Boyd and Ellison (2007:211) stated that a social network site is:

> *A web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.*

Oyewole and Mubarak (2023) take a broad view of elections and defines elections as the "*process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of qualified members".* The implication of this definition is that it is not limited to a nation or organized state. Hence, elections take place when leaders of any organization are chosen and leadership emerges through voting rather than selection. A critical examination of the idea put forward by Oyewole and Mubarak (2023) suggests that election is a way through which offices are allotted to individuals or group of persons with group decisions and interest of the larger member of the organization a major factor and determinant.

An empirical study by Jungherr, Jürgens, and Schoen (2019) explored the dynamics of "mediated mobilization" in their study on social media and political communication. Their study

revealed that social media facilitates political expression and engagement, especially among youths. However, their study did not situate social media political communication, engagement is translated into offline political action. This submission aligns with the outcome of the study conducted by Fujiwara, Müller and Schwarz (2024). Fujiwara, Müller and Schwarz (2024) used variation in the number of Twitter users across counties in the US induced by early adopters at the 2007 South by Southwest festival, a key event in Twitter's rise to popularity and therefore showed unrelated observable county characteristics and electoral outcomes before the launch of Twitter. The results overtly indicated that Twitter lowered the Republican vote share in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, but had limited effects on Congressional elections and previous presidential elections. Evidence from survey data, primary elections, and text analysis of millions of tweets suggests that Twitter's relatively liberal content may have persuaded voters with moderate views to vote against Donald Trump.

From the Nigerian context, Okon, Ojedor and Owolabi (2024) studied the 2023 general elections in Nigeria and observed that there is a surge in political discourse on social media platforms. The results of their study therefore revealed that social media political campaigns played a significant role in persuading voters in the 2023 general elections. The study further showed that social media political campaigns are quite successful, and Twitter in particular is a main avenue of political and electioneering communication. Degodona, Rajagukguk and Sarumaha (2025) hypothesis test results indicate a significant influence of social media on students' voting decisions. 70.9% of respondents consider social media as the main factor influencing their choice, with TikTok being the most influential platform (74.2%). Additionally, entertaining and creative political slogans such as "Ok Gas 02 Tabrak-Tabrak Masuk" influenced 57.5% of respondents. These findings support the hypothesis that social media significantly affects voting decisions. The significance value in the ANOVA test is 0.001 (< 0.05), indicating that the regression model is significant. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, meaning there is an essential influence between the use of social media and voting decisions, with a contribution of 78.1%.

Ezeigbo (2024) investigated the involvement of the Nigeria youths in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria as inspired through the use of the available social media platforms, which include: WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, among others. The study found that that some of the political activities the Nigerian youths used the social media platforms to do during the election included: political advocacy, communication and discussions, campaigning, election and result monitoring, among others. Finally, the study concluded that the social media, indeed, encouraged youths participation in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Ajwang, Abboud, and Lugano (2024) drawing on original survey data, Afrobarometer data, and content analysis of social media pages of the two main presidential candidates – William Ruto and Raila Odinga – and a selection of allied political influencers' accounts, explore the use of social media in Kenya's 2022 presidential election campaigns. The researchers noted that through this strategy, the dissemination of negative information was delegated to social media influencers to avoid alienating undecided voters, while candidate's main pages were curated to publicize policy and cultivate a positive public image. In this regard, African politicians' innovative use of social media was shaped by both normative and contextual political factors.

Ayanleye (2013) on her part looks at election from the ritualistic angle because in most democracies, elections are periodic and follow a definite time period. For instance, in Nigeria, elections are held every four (4) years, and electorates choose their representatives. Based on this, Ayanleye (2013) regards elections as the main *"Ritual in democratic societies by means of*

which citizens periodically renew their commitment to the norms and institutions which embody the democratic state". Oyewole and Mubarak (2023) recognized the importance of elections in democracies firstly from the position of institutionalizing the process of succession through constitutional framework. Elections are therefore often the most acceptable way through which leaders and representatives emerge, which gives room for "systematic and peaceful change of leaders and representation". This invariably means that election provides the platform for citizens in an indirect democracy to participate in the decision-making process and the governance process of a nation.

In spite of available studies into the social media, election communication, how social media shapes campaign strategies and gets voters mobilized online. There remains notable lacuna: on how key political players view the effectiveness of social media platforms campaigns especially in view of the ground-level realities of the 2023 Kogi State governorship election. Reviewed studies provide limited contradiction. This is based on the premise that on one hand, parties and politicians allocate resources into digital platforms to reach millions of voters especially with the rise of "Data/Shekpe Boys". In another vein, the outcome on election day is often influenced by the traditional considerations evident in ethnic factor, voter apathy, voter intimidation and money politics. Therefore, there is limited real-world data on how stakeholders (campaign managers, social commentators, electoral commission, party officials and community leaders) determine the worth of online hype into actual physical ballots in Kogi State known for volatile, off-cycle election environment. Therefore, the study fills the gap by providing context-specific research that investigates how social media engagement manifests in election contest and campaign strategy.

2.1 Emergence of Data/Shekpe Boys in the Kogi State political lexicon

Kogi State politics is laced with politically related coinages and aphorisms which serve as defining phases in the electoral process of the State. Some of these coinages came with the emergence of ex-governor Yahaya Bello. Coinages such as "*EBIGO*" to represent the three major ethnic lineages (Jooji, 2022). This was a direct and literary response to represent and unify the three major ethnic lineages - Ebira, Igala, and Okun and therefore a political response to the deeply visible ethnic division and polarization that is historically and deeply entrenched (Jooji, 2022). "*Amudu chaka"* political coinage on the other hand explains the nature of unrestricted consumption of public resources (Thomas, 2022). To support this claim, Thoma (2022) argue that political actors treat state/local administration as economic investments to extract public funds for personal networks.

The terms Data Boys and Skekpe Boys, however, are recent coinages that describe the integration of the internet/social media as a platform for political communication (Kperogi, 2025). The meaning of Data Boys and Skekpe Boys depends on which side of the divide one stands. However, an overview of the coinage as described by Yabagi (2023) is as follows: "these are largely young people, educated, internet savvy and intelligent individuals officially or unofficially recruited for stipends and some of form of patronage to navigate the social media space to promote the agenda of their political principals". They are most noted in the internet space as the battling ram and attack dogs of the principals most often involved in propaganda, slandering and character assassination of political opponents (Bashir, 2026).

The rise and recognition of *Data Boys* and *Shekpe Boys* in the political landscape in Kogi State reflects a change in the state's political space, which is now enabled by the internet and social media, particularly under the administration of Governor Yahaya Bello. These groups represent different factions of political loyalists and enforcers, often associated with youth social

media engagement in governance, grassroots mobilization, and sometimes controversy (Bashir, 2026). Mohammed Ahmed Yabagi, a popular political commentator in Lokoja, has written about the online and social media activities of *Data Boys* and *Shekpe Boys*. The 16 November, 2023 off-cycle elections were conducted in two states in the Federation: Bayelsa and Kogi. The more talked-about of the two polls was Kogi, which is always in the news because of its complex and intriguing political landscape (CDD, 2023). Several reasons account for this; one of them is the activities of *Data Boys* and *Shekpe Boys*. Yabagi (2023) clearly distinguishes between *Data Boys* and *Shekpe Boys* when he stated that *Data Boys are people who, according to the other (the Shekpe Boys), gets stipends and some forms of patronage for supporting the then government in Kogi State.* A better understanding of the Data Boys is presented below:

> *The Data Boys are a group of tech-savvy young individuals who use digital platforms (social media) to disseminate and spread government policies, defend political leaders, and counter negative narratives especially from the opposition. Their stock – in – trade is their strong presence on social media, where they engage in political discourse, often aggressively supporting the ruling party. The coinage, "Data Boys," emerges from the strong reliance on internet data to facilitate activism online (*Yabagi, 2023:2).

On the other hand, the Data Boys accuse the other *"Shekpe Boys"* of being loyalists who follow the wishes of Kogi State Diaspora Politicians (opposition) in return for kegs of palm wine and bottles of liquor. In another view, the Shekpe Boys represent a more physical, street-level form of political mobilization (Omale, Aliyu and Hashim, 2025). The term "*Shekpe"* refers to local liquor, metaphorically indicating a group known for being grassroots enforcers, sometimes in strong-arm tactics, mobilizing crowds for rallies and defending political interests at the community level (Omale, Aliyu and Hashim, 2025).

Kperogi (2025:42), in his 3 May Saturday Tribune column, criticized and opined "data boyhood" as a source of distorted information and facts, which agrees with some negative views of social media enthusiasts and emerging scholars. He noted:

> *I am aware that "data boyhood", that is, the mobilization of conscienceless, unprincipled and cash strapped social media denizens with internet data – a stipend – to venerate politicians (and other image conscious public figures) and smear their critics on social media is now a growing, well – oiled industry in Nigeria… there is now a symbiotic synchrony between data boys on social media and crafty, if inept, PR experts who deploy the half – cooked bunkum of data boys as raw materials to manufacture sponsored news outlets, which data boys amplify on social media in a dance of idiocy sanctioned by falsehood (*Kperogi, 2025:42).

The study is anchored on the tenets of Agenda Setting Theory traced to the work of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). The theory is premised on the believe that the mass media influences public perception not by dictating specific opinion, but by determining the salience of topics within public discourse. Agenda Setting Theory have evolved overtime to "Network Agenda Setting" which represents a shift from traditional, centralized gatekeeping to a more decentralized platforms with the emergence of social media and online platforms. In recent times, the pattern of interaction and communication between social media users lead to the formation of opinions based on agenda setting which orient people on certain topics such elections, campaigns, party manifesto etc.

With reference to the 2023 Kogi State governorship election process, stakeholders (political parties, civil society groups, politicians, electoral commission) deploy social media

platforms for dialogue, educating and mobilizing citizens for elections thereby playing important roles. It is obvious that social media platforms provide opportunities for politicians, electorates, and civil society organizations in Nigeria (Kolade, Obembe and Olufemi, 2023). Social media platforms provide a viable alternative for information dissemination and mobilization strategy through bypassing the "traditional gatekeepers" making direct spread of messages, agenda, address electorate with the help of sites such as Twitter (X), Facebook and Instagram (Wusu, *et al.*, 2023).

One of the importance of social media in the 2023 Kogi State Governorship election is that social media aided marginalized and oppressed groups, especially the politically vibrant youth demographics and women's advocates in Kogi, in voicing their concerns and advocating for their votes. However, it's important to note that not all online participation translates into offline participation, so the changes brought about by online activism and digital mobilization may not necessarily reflect in the actual 2023 Kogi State governorship election outcomes.

3.0 Research method

This study employed a descriptive survey design to achieve its objectives. Survey research is a method of obtaining research information by asking a set of pre-determined questions of a given sample of individuals drawn from a defined population. Primary data were also used, in line with the survey research design. The research design is considered appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to collect personal and general information for the purpose of explaining the impact of social media on election strategy in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State from different subsets.

Population

The population takes into consideration various participants and stakeholders with online presence involved in sensitization, campaign and political communication during the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. The known population of this study was 952 people, consisting of INEC/SIEC officials (permanent staff), party stakeholders/leaders (three major parties – APC, PDP and SDP), election observers (mainly YIAGA Africa and CIIPAD), political and social commentators within Kogi State and while the infinite population of the study include online social media audience/electorates. Because these are large, dynamic, fluid and practically infinite pool of social media audiences and participants, this population subset is seen as infinite. To incorporate this, the study defines its accessible population through snowball sampling technique to distribute structured questionnaires online.

To achieve broad representation, the study focused on one major town in each senatorial district of Kogi State namely: Lokoja (Kogi West), Okene (Kogi Central) and Idah (Kogi East). The breakdown of population is presented below:

Table 3.1: Population Distribution Table

Subset	*Population*	*Percentage*
INEC/SIECS (Permanent)	162	17.0
Party Stakeholders (Three Parties	269	28.3
Election Observers (YIAGA & CIPAD)	191	20.1
Political and Social Commentators	330	34.6
Netizens/Social Media Audience (electorate)	Infinite	-
Total	952	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Sampling technique and sample size

The study employed more than one sampling technique because of the diverse and segmented sampling frame. Sampling is the process whereby a researcher selects elements of the population that describe the characteristics of the whole population (Toluhi, 2014). A sampling technique is the method of selecting a subset of individuals from a statistical population to estimate the attributes of the entire study population. In the study, due to the diverse nature of known and unknown stakeholders, stratified and snowball sampling techniques were used to reflect a broad view in the outcome of the study. According to Toluhi (2014), stratified sampling is a method that extends the idea of simple random sampling to ensure that a heterogeneous population has its defined "strata" level taken into account in the sample, hence, the final subjects are proportionally from different strata. On the other hand, snowball sampling is a non-probability method in which present study participants make use of their own social networks to refer future subjects for a research study. This was mostly applied to social media audience/electorates subset of the population.

Because of the infinite nature of the population, the Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size thus:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot P \cdot (1 - P)}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{2^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{4.025}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{1}{0.0025} = 400$$

Breakdown of sample distribution strata goes thus:

Towns	*Known Population*	*Percent (%)*	*Sample Distribution*
Lokoja (Kogi West)	366	38.8	155
Okene (Kogi Central)	274	28.4	114
Idah (Kogi East)	312	32.8	131
Total	**952**	**100%**	**400**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Instrument of data collection

Primary data were gathered from respondents using a questionnaire. The questionnaire, as a research instrument, is a series of questions used to collect information from respondents. The questionnaire was based on a Likert Scale with five levels expressing the degree of agreement and disagreement of the questionnaire statement. The five levels include 5 = very great extent, 4 = great extent, 3 = moderate extent, 2 = small extent and 1 = no extent. The questionnaire was made up of sections. The first part had general information (bio – data) of the respondents. The second section had questions on the social media activities of Data Boys or Shekpe Boys on political communication process in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State. The third section covered questions on the use of social media as an election strategy in campaigns, debates and political discussion among political parties and contestants in the 2023 governorship elections. The questionnaire was chosen because it can reach a large number of respondents within a short time, gives respondents adequate time to respond to questions, and

provides a sense of anonymity. To ensure validity and reliability of instrument, three (3) political scientists had a review with necessary adjustment made.

Method of data analysis

The data were analyzed using simple percentages, and the chi-square test was used to test the hypothesis. The results are presented in tables and charts.

The data were analyzed using simple percentages, and the chi-square was used to test the hypotheses. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (Version 27.1). Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, with the degrees of freedom (*df*) calculated based on the dimensions of the respective contingency tables. The results are presented in tables and charts.

4.0 Data presentation and analysis

This section focuses on presenting the collected data and examining the proposed hypotheses. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 356 (89.0%) were completed and returned. Data were presented in tables and charts, and the hypotheses were tested with the chi-square test.

Frequency distribution

Section A: Demographic data

Table 4.1.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	*Frequency*	*Percentage (%)*
Male	270	75.8
Female	86	24.2
Total	356	100%

Source: Field Survey, July 2025

The gender of respondents, as presented in table 4.1.1 shows that 270 (75.8%) of the respondents were male and 86 (24.2%) were female, which suggests that males dominated the groups the study captured.

Table 4.1.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Bracket	*Frequency*	*Percentage (%)*
18 – 25 years	74	20.8
26 – 33 years	140	39.3
34 – 40 years	58	16.3
41 – 47 years	49	13.8
48 years and above	35	9.8
Total	356	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, July 2025

From the age distribution of the respondents, 74 (20.8%) were aged 18 – 25 years, 140 (39.3%) were aged 26-33 years, 58 (16.3%) were aged 34-40 years, 49 (13.8%) were aged 41-47 years, while 35 (9.8%) were aged 48 years and above.

Table 4.1.3: Educational Level of Respondents

Qualification	*Frequency*	*Percentage (%)*
Diploma	29	8.1
Bachelor's Degree/HND	210	59.0
Master/PGD Degree	84	23.6
Ph.D	33	9.3
Total	**356**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, July 2025

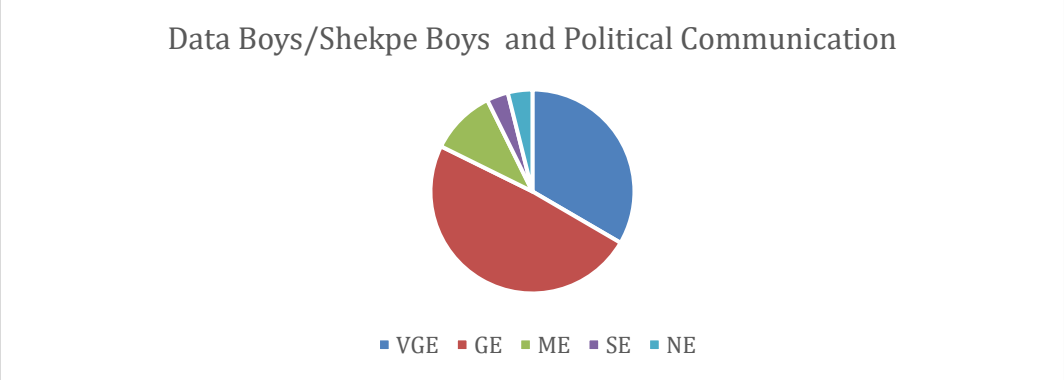
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Data on educational qualification show that first-degree/HND holders are the majority of respondents, with 210 (59.0%). Respondents with Master's/PGD qualifications were 84 (23.6%) and those with a Ph.D were 33 (9.3%), while only 29 (8.1%) were diploma holders. This suggests that the respondents had the education and awareness to understand and answer the questions in this research.

Table 4.2.1: Data/Shekpe Boys Social Media Activities and Political Communication

S/N	*Statement*	*VGE*	*GE*	*ME*	*SE*	*NE*	*Total*
a.	Data/Shekpe Boys social media activities influence 2023 governorship political communication	18 (5.1%)	57 (16.0%)	156 (43.8%)	102 (28.7%)	23 (6.5%)	356 (100%)
b.	Data Boys/Shekpe Boys expands online political communication	119 (33.4%)	174 (48.9%)	37 (10.4%)	12 (3.4%)	14 (3.9%)	356 (100%)
c.	Data Boys/Shekpe Boys act as social media trolls, cyberbullies and attack dogs	45 (12.6%)	120 (33.7%)	94 (26.4%)	83 (23.3%)	14 (3.9%)	356 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, July 2025



Pie Chart Representation of Table 4.2.1 (b): Data/Shekpe Boys and Political Communication

On the social media activities of Data/Shekpe Boys as an election campaign strategy in the 2023 governorship elections, the largest group of respondents, 156 (43.8%) indicated to a moderate extent, 18 (5.1%) to a very great extent, 57 (16.0) to a great extent, 102 (28.7%) to a small extent and 23 (6.5%) to no extent. This implies that the social media activities of Data/Shekpe Boys had only a mild to moderate influence on the 2023 governorship election in Kogi State.

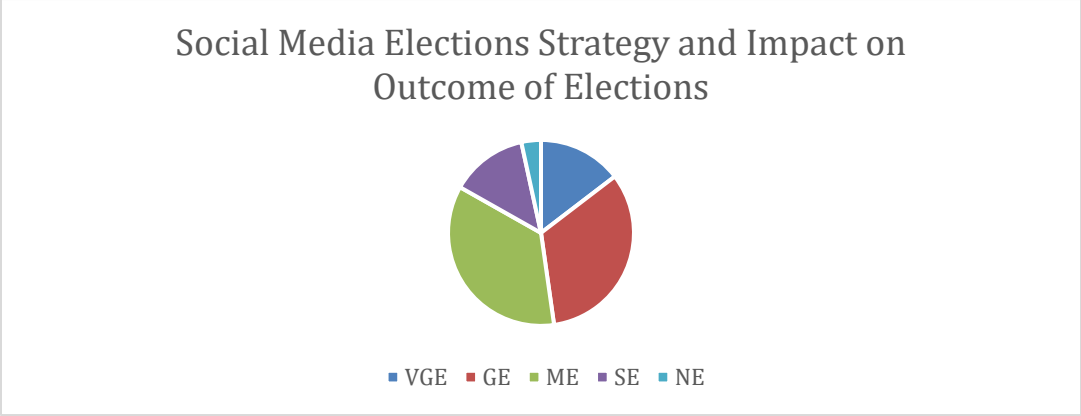
On whether Data/Shekpe Boys expand online political communication, 174 (48.9%) indicated to a great extent, 119 (33.4%) to a very great extent, 37 (10.4%) to a moderate extent, 12 (3.4%) to a small extent and 14 (3.9%) to no extent. It can be deduced from this outcome that data/shekpe boys moderate influence political communication in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State.

Table 4.2.1 (c) sought to know whether the social media activities of Data/Shekpe Boys can be described as those of social media trolls, cyberbullies and attack dogs: 45 (126%) indicated to a very great extent, 120 (33.7%), to a great extent, 94 (26.4%) to a moderate extent, 83.3%) to a small extent and 14 (3.9%) to no extent. This means that nearly half of the respondents (46.3%) see Data/Shekpe Boys as trolls, attack dogs and cyberbullies to a great or very great extent.

Table 4.3.1: Social Media Impact on the Outcome of Elections

S/N	*Statement*	*VGE*	*GE*	*ME*	*SE*	*NE*	*Total*
a.	Social media largely influence the outcome of election for political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State	52 (14.6%)	118 (33.1%)	126 (35.4%)	48 (13.5%)	12 (3.4%)	356 (100%)
b.	Social media play significant roles in ensuring transparency, fairness and equity in the 2023 governorship election in Kogi State.	20 (5.6%)	75 (21.1%)	57 (16.0%)	177 (49.7%)	27 (7.6%)	356 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, July 2025



Pie Chart Representation of Table 4.3.1 (a): Social Media Elections Strategy and Impact on the Outcome of Elections

On the influence of social media on the outcome of elections in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State, 52 (14.6%) indicated to a very great extent, 118 (33.1%) to a great extent, 126 (35.4%) indicated to a moderate extent, 48 (13.5%) to a small extent, while 12 (3.4%) indicated no extent. This implies that the choice of candidates in the 2023 governorship election in Kogi State was moderately or mildly influence by social media.

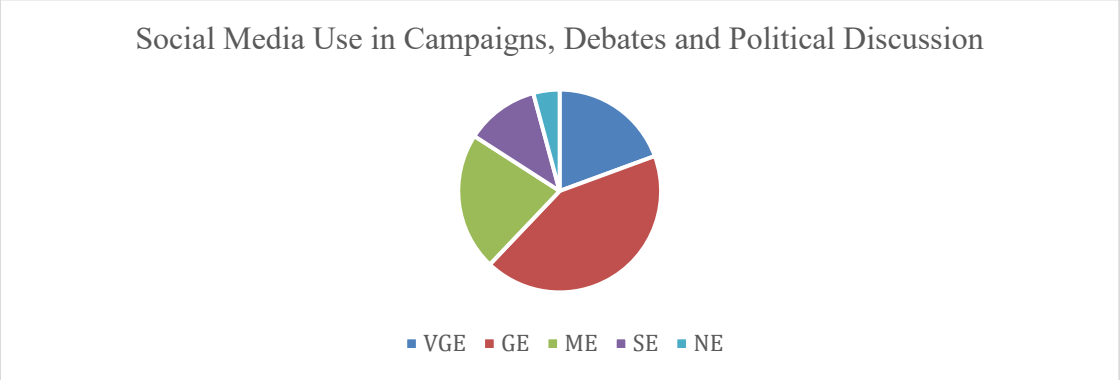
On the role of social media in ensuring transparency, fairness and equity in the 2023 governorship elections, Table 4.3.1. (b) shows that the largest group, 177 (49.7%), indicated a

small extent, 75 (21.1%) indicated a great extent, and 57 (16.0%) indicated a moderate extent. Only 20 (5.6%) indicated a very great extent, and 27 (7.6%) indicated no extent. It can therefore be deduced that social media only played a marginal role in promoting transparency, fairness and equity in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State.

Table 4.4.1: Social Media Use in Campaigns, Debates and Political Discussion

S/N	*Statement*	*VGE*	*GE*	*ME*	*SE*	*NE*	*Total*
a.	Parties predominantly make use of social media for manifestos, campaigns and debates in the 2023 Governorship Elections.	69 (19.4%)	152 (42.7%)	78 (21.9%)	42 (11.8%)	15 (4.2%)	356 (100%)
b.	Political office aspirants effectively made use of social media platforms to interact and engage voters of different spectrum to convey their manifestos and messages.	33 (9.3%)	75 (21.1%)	201 (56.5%)	37 (10.4%)	10 (2.8%)	356 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, July 2025



Pie Chart Representation of Table 4.4.1 (a): Social Media Use in Campaigns, Debates and Political Discussion

On the predominant use of social media for manifestos, campaigns and debates in the 2023 governorship elections, 69 (19.4%) of the respondents said these platforms are used to a very great extent, 152 (42.7%) to a great extent, 78 (21.9%) to a moderate extent and 42 (11.8%) to a small extent, while 15 (4.2%) said to no extent. The implication of these responses is that parties predominantly make use of social media for manifestos and debates in the 2023 governorship elections in Kogi State to a great extent.

On the use of social media for political interaction and engagement, Table 4.4.1 (b) shows that 33 (9.3%) indicated a very great extent, 75 (21.1%) indicated a great extent, while the largest group, 201 (56.5%), indicated a moderate extent. Also, 37 (10.4%) indicated a small extent and 10 (2.8%) indicated no extent. It can therefore be deduced that political office

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aspirants only moderately use social media platforms to engage and interact with the voters to convey their manifestos and messages directly.

Test of hypothesis

Hypothesis I (recall) Table 4.2.1 (b): Data/Shekpe Boys and political communication)

Options	*O*	*E*	*O – E*	*(O – E)²*	*(O – E)²/E*
VGE	119	71.2	47.8	2,284.8	32.1
GE	174	71.2	102.8	10,567.8	148.4
ME	37	71.2	-34.2	1,169.6	16.4
SE	12	71.2	-59.2	3,504.6	49.2
NE	14	71.2	-57.2	3,271.8	46.0
Total	**356**				292.1

X^2 = 292.1

X^2 tab = 9.49 (df = 4, α = 0.05)

Decision Rules: If X^2 calculated is greater than X^2 tabulated reject Ho otherwise accept Ho. Since X^2 calculated (292.1) is greater than X^2 tabulated (9.49) reject Ho. Therefore, the activities of "Data Boys or Shekpe Boys" influence on political communication process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

Hypothesis II (racall Table 4.3.1): Social media elections strategy and impact on the outcome of elections)

Options	*O*	*E*	*O – E*	*(O – E)²*	*(O – E)²/E*
VGE	52	71.2	-19.2	368.6	5.2
GE	118	71.2	46.8	2,190.2	30.8
ME	126	71.2	54.8	3,003.0	42.2
SE	48	71.2	-23.2	538.2	7.6
NE	12	71.2	-59.2	3,504.6	49.2
Total	**356**				**134.9**

X^2 = **134.9**

X^2 tab = 9.49 (df = 4, α = 0.05)

Decision Rules: If X^2 calculated is greater than X^2 tabulated reject Ho otherwise accept Ho. Since X^2 calculated (134.9) is greater than X^2 tabulated (9.49) reject Ho, it can be concluded that the use of social media mildly affects the outcome of the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

Hypothesis III (recall Table 4.4.1 social media use in campaigns, debates and political discussion)

Options	*O*	*E*	*O – E*	*(O – E)²*	*(O – E)²/E*
VGE	69	71.2	-2.2	4.8	0.07
GE	152	71.2	80.8	6,528.6	91.7
ME	78	71.2	6.8	46.2	0.6
SE	42	71.2	-29.2	852.6	12.0
NE	15	71.2	-56.2	3,158.4	44.4
Total	**356**				**148.7**

X^2 = 148.7

X^2 tab = 9.49 (df = 4, α = 0.05)

Decision Rules: If X^2 calculated is greater than X^2 tabulated reject Ho otherwise accept Ho. Since X^2 calculated (148.7) is greater than X^2 tabulated (9.49) reject Ho, in conclusion,

social media platforms were used for campaigns, debates and political discussion in 2023 Kogi State governorship elections.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of the study allow the following conclusions to be drawn. Respondents see social media as widely used for campaigns, debates and political discussion in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections, although it influences on voters' choices and election outcomes was mostly moderate. The advent of social media as mass communication platforms has further changed the dynamics of political communication with overall impact on the political process. Hypothesis I shows that the activities of Data/Shekpe Boys have a noticeable but modest influence on political communication. This may be because many political parties and politicians used internet-savvy youth to dominate the online political space to gain popularity, followers and invariably electoral advantage. However, the study found that 46.3% of respondents see Data/Shekpe Boys as trolls, cyberbullies and attack dogs to a great extent. This is a recent phenomenon in the Kogi State political lexicon.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that social media is a viable alternative to traditional media for mass political communication and election contest and campaign strategy, as seen in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. This is premised on visible uses of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (X) etc. for political campaign, debates and discussion which, to a moderate extent, shaped information processing, election outcomes and political communication in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. Social media has made the spread of information and news easier through platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube, and political actors now use them for campaign, debates and the spread of manifestoes. The implication is that social media has a moderate influence on the outcome of elections and the electoral process in the 2023 Kogi State governorship elections. This development is not limited to Kogi State as studies show that Nigeria and even developed countries like the USA use social media as a cheap means of spreading political information and news.

Based on the findings of this, the following recommendations for policy considerations are made:

i. INEC, the National Broadcasting Commission and civil society groups should agree on and enforce clear rules against fake news, hate speech and paid online abuse during elections, without limiting free speech, especially as the country prepares for the 2027 elections.
ii. Political stakeholders should be sensitized on responsible use of social media. This should reduce the negative activities of Data/Shekpe Boys and promote positive and vibrant political communication, such as campaigns and debates, without fear of cyberbullying or character assassination.
iii. INEC, civil society groups and the media should run fact-checking and media-literacy programmes so that voters can identify false information before and during elections.
iv. Future studies should include voters directly and use mixed methods to measure the real effect of social media on voting.

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