

When Social Media Becomes a Problem: An Analysis of Communication Failures in Contemporary Nigerian Political Campaigns

UBONG ETETOR EBONG¹, EWAOYENIKAN, ADEKUNLE BENSON²

¹*Communication Art, University of Uyo*

²*Department of Mass Communication, Topfaith University, Mpaktak*

Abstract- This study examined the communication failures arising from the use of social media in contemporary Nigerian political campaigns, with a focus on residents of Uyo. Guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study sought to identify the forms of communication failures that occur, the internal organisational practices that contribute to these failures, and the ways in which social media affordances amplify campaign weaknesses. A survey design was adopted, with a sample size of 399 respondents determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency distributions, percentages, and tables. Findings revealed that the most prevalent communication failures included exposure to misinformation (72.7%), fake campaign promises (70.2%), delayed clarifications (67.7%), and contradictory messages (65.2%). These failures were linked to weak internal organisational practices such as poor message coordination and inadequate crisis response mechanisms. The study also found that the interactive and viral features of platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter exacerbated these weaknesses, leading to widespread distrust of political actors (75.2%) and negative perceptions of campaigns (72.7%). The study concludes that political campaigns in Nigeria are failing to meet voters' informational and participatory gratifications, thereby undermining trust and democratic participation. It recommends stronger internal communication structures, coordinated messaging, and responsible use of social media affordances to restore credibility in political communication.

images and rapid-fire rumours circulated faster than fact-checkers could respond, at times shaping public perceptions more decisively than traditional media or official statements (Al Jazeera, 2023; Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2024). That clash, between the promise of instant, participatory political communication and the peril of rapid miscommunication, is the hook for this study: social media is not merely a neutral channel for political messages in Nigeria, it has become an arena where communication failures carry real democratic costs.

Social media refer to internet-based platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and others) that enable rapid peer-to-peer sharing, audience interactivity and algorithmically curated content flows; in political contexts these affordances allow campaigns and citizens alike to bypass gatekeepers, personalise messages and mobilise supporters in real time (Okon, Ojedor & Owolabi, 2025). Scholars emphasise both structural features (networked ties, virality, platform affordances) and behavioural patterns (micro-targeting, influencer partnerships) when analysing how social media shapes contemporary campaigning.

Communication failure in political campaigns denotes any break in the transmission, reception or interpretation of campaign messages that leads to misunderstanding, misattribution or missed opportunities, ranging from poorly coordinated official messaging and mixed signals from candidates, to deliberate disinformation and platform enabled amplification of falsehoods. Failures are not only technical (e.g. outages, algorithmic biases) but also strategic and ethical: when false narratives spread faster than corrections, campaigns lose control

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Nigerian general elections demonstrated, in stark relief, how the same digital networks that can energise turnout and amplify marginal voices can also unleash confusion, anger and electoral instability. Across Twitter threads, WhatsApp forwards and TikTok clips, allegations, doctored

of their own framings and voters make decisions on flawed evidence (disinformation and information disorder literature, 2023–2024).

Modern political campaigns in Nigeria increasingly integrate digital first strategies alongside rallies and conventional media, employing social media for voter mobilisation, fund raising, rapid response and agenda setting. These campaigns are heterogeneous: grassroots movements (notably youth-led online movements), traditional party machinery and commercially contracted influence operations have all featured in recent elections, creating a complex ecology in which messages originate from multiple, sometimes conflicting, sources (studies of the 2023 campaigns highlight this multiplicity). Scholars distinguish misinformation (false information spread without intent to harm) from disinformation (deliberate falsehoods intended to deceive) and highlight the role of paid influencers, coordinated networks and micro-targeting in promulgating both. In Nigeria, research and reporting after the 2023 cycle documented organised ‘influence’ activities, including paid influencers, partisan content farms and coordinated disinformation campaigns, which complicated verification and degraded trust in both candidates and institutions.

Empirical work on Nigeria’s recent elections connects the affordances of social media to concrete campaign outcomes: platform features (virality, private group forwarding) interact with pre-existing social cleavages and weak institutional communication to magnify misperceptions (Egbunike, 2025; INEC report, 2024). Several scholars argue that the 2023 campaigns showed a pattern where rapid, decentralised message diffusion outpaced both regulatory responses and traditional campaign control mechanisms, producing feedback loops in which mis- and disinformation spilled over into mainstream media and street-level contestation. Others emphasise the role of commercialised influence, paid actors and “data boys,” in rehabilitating or smearing political reputations online, thereby creating a hybrid information environment where intentional influence and accidental error are difficult to disentangle. Together, this literature frames social media not only as a tool for

mobilisation but as a structural contributor to communication breakdowns when left unmanaged.

Although recent studies have documented the scale of misinformation, mapped influence operations and described how social media mobilised youth participation in Nigeria, they often stop short of examining the micro mechanisms within campaign organisations that convert platform affordances into communicative failures, for example, how internal coordination deficits, message fragmentation across teams, outsourcing to informal influencers, and weak crisis response protocols interact with platform dynamics to produce specific kinds of electoral harm. The INEC report and contemporaneous analyses highlight the outcomes (rumours, trending false claims, violent flare-ups) but provide limited visibility into the internal campaign processes and decision points that could be reformed. This study therefore argues for a granular, process-oriented analysis of communication failures inside Nigerian political campaigns, bridging the gap between macro analyses of information disorder and the organisational behaviours that allow social media to become a problem. By focusing on campaign level practices and their intersection with platform affordances, the research aims to produce actionable recommendations for campaign managers, regulators and civil-society fact checkers seeking to reduce the democratic costs of digital miscommunication.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rise of social media as a dominant communication tool in Nigeria’s political landscape has created a paradox. On one hand, platforms such as Twitter/X, WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok have democratised access to information, enabling citizens to engage in real time with political actors, mobilise around issues, and amplify voices that were previously marginalised in the public sphere. On the other hand, these same platforms have become breeding grounds for misinformation, disinformation, and fragmented communication that distort political realities, erode public trust, and fuel polarisation during campaigns. This duality has transformed political campaigns into volatile arenas where the credibility of information and the integrity of democratic processes are constantly at risk. The

problem is not simply that false narratives exist, but that the architecture of social media, coupled with weaknesses in political campaign communication strategies, makes such narratives thrive and shape electoral outcomes in disruptive ways.

Scholars have attempted to respond to this challenge by examining the patterns of misinformation and disinformation that characterised Nigeria's elections. Existing studies have tracked the spread of false content, highlighted the role of paid influencers and "data boys," and analysed how social media influenced voter behaviour and youth mobilisation. Others have focused on regulatory and institutional responses, pointing out how electoral commissions and fact-checking bodies have tried, often unsuccessfully, to counter the tide of information disorder. These contributions have advanced knowledge about the scale and consequences of digital communication challenges in Nigeria. However, much of the emphasis has been on the external manifestations of the problem, such as the prevalence of fake news, the reach of disinformation networks, and the failures of institutional responses, rather than on the internal dynamics of political campaign organisations that contribute to these failures.

The gap that remains is an understanding of how the internal processes of Nigerian political campaigns themselves including weak coordination, fragmented communication strategies, overreliance on informal digital actors, and limited crisis-response mechanisms interact with the affordances of social media to create systematic communication breakdowns. Without examining the micro-level practices within campaign structures, efforts to address information disorder risk treating the symptoms while leaving the underlying organisational weaknesses untouched. It is precisely at this intersection of campaign management and digital communication that this study positions itself. The motivation for this study lies in its timeliness and urgency. As Nigeria continues to consolidate its democracy, the integrity of political communication has never been more important. Campaigns that fail to manage their messages in the digital age inadvertently contribute to public distrust, electoral

violence, and weakened legitimacy of elected governments.

By interrogating the organisational sources of communication failure, this study seeks to provide insights that can guide political actors, regulators, and civil society in designing more resilient campaign communication systems. In doing so, it asks a central, striking question: How do the internal communication practices of Nigerian political campaigns contribute to the amplification of failures on social media, and what reforms are necessary to safeguard democratic discourse in the digital era?

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. examine the nature of communication failures in contemporary Nigerian political campaigns within the context of social media use;
- ii. identify the internal organisational factors within political campaigns that contribute to ineffective communication and message breakdown; and,
- iii. analyse how social media platforms interact with campaign communication strategies to amplify misinformation, disinformation, and fragmented narratives.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- i. What forms of communication failures occur in contemporary Nigerian political campaigns as a result of social media use?
- ii. How do internal organisational practices within political campaigns contribute to these communication failures?
- iii. In what ways do the affordances of social media amplify the weaknesses in campaign communication strategies?

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Affordances in Political Campaigns

Social media affordances refer to the features, capabilities, and constraints built into social platforms such as virality, networked communication, private and group messaging, algorithmic feed curation, multi-media content formats (text, audio, video), and ease of sharing. These affordances shape how messages are crafted, shared and received in political contexts. In Nigeria, scholars note that affordances like instant sharing and private-group forwarding (especially via WhatsApp) magnify the speed and reach of political messaging, but also open up avenues for messages to be distorted, misinterpreted, or manipulated before reaching large audiences (Jimada, 2023; Arowolo & Ogande, 2024).

A second dimension is how affordances interact with audience behaviour. Because users can choose their sources, engage in echo chambers, retweet or share content without verifying it, social media affordances can amplify not just content volume but content polarity; that is, strongly opinionated or extreme messages tend to spread faster and wider. For example, in the study of voter mobilisation during the 2023 presidential campaign, many respondents reported seeing political content from social media that influenced their opinions, and misinformation was frequently cited as a disruptive effect (Arowolo & Ogande, 2024). Similarly, comparative studies of 2015, 2019, and 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria show that as social media usage increases, so does the incidence of polarising or misleading content. Chukwu (2025) found that misinformation and political polarisation are notable challenges that accompany enhanced social media engagement across elections.

Third, affordances also shape what kinds of communication failures are possible—or unavoidable. Platform algorithms that privilege engagement (likes, shares, comments) may favour content that provokes strong emotional reactions (outrage, fear) over balanced, factual communication. Also, the ease of creating fake or parody accounts, impersonation, and the lack of stringent verification mechanisms on many platforms provide fertile ground for disinformation campaigns (Africa Check, 2023; “#NigeriaDecides2023: Disinformation trends,” 2023). Thus, the technical and social affordances combine to lower the cost of spreading

false or misleading content, magnify reach, and make corrections more difficult in practice.

Internal Organisational Communication Failures in Campaigns

Internal organisational communication failures refer to breakdowns within a political campaign’s own structures, processes and practices, how strategies are made, how messages are coordinated among teams, and how actors inside the campaign respond to crises or feedback. These failures may occur because of insufficient coordination between different units (e.g. digital, media, fieldwork), decentralised message drafting, overlapping responsibilities, or overreliance on informal influencers with little oversight.

In Nigeria, few studies to date have analysed these internal processes in detail. Much of the literature focuses externally (what messages are spread, who spreads misinformation, how audiences receive them) rather than internally (how the campaign designs its messaging architecture). For instance, Chukwu (2025) and Okon, Ojedor & Owolabi (2025) examine how social media has reshaped political communication broadly, highlighting challenges like misinformation and polarisation; but there is little empirical work that drills into how campaign staff divisions, organisational culture, or resource constraints lead to specific communication failure modes (e.g. contradictory messages, delayed responses, misattribution).

The significance of internal failures becomes more pronounced when considering real-time campaign demands. During the 2023 election cycle, campaigns had to respond rapidly to rumours, false claims, trending narratives and events outside their control. Teams with weak crisis response protocols or poorly defined chains of command were slow or inconsistent in correcting false narratives; sometimes, responses themselves magnified confusion. Thus, internal organisational weaknesses interact synergistically with social media affordances to produce communication failures—not simply because of false content, but because campaign structures are not always configured to manage digital public spheres effectively.

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Influence Operations

Misinformation and disinformation are related but distinct phenomena: misinformation refers to false or misleading information shared without necessarily having the intent to deceive, whereas disinformation involves deliberate fabrication or manipulation intended to mislead (Badmus & Kilani, 2023). Influence operations are organised efforts (sometimes covert, paid, or orchestrated) that leverage both misinformation and disinformation to shape public perceptions or political outcomes.

In Nigeria's recent elections, scholars have documented numerous instances of both. For example, Badmus, Ajayi & Kilani (2023) in their pragmatic analysis of political discourse during the 2023 general election found both ordinary users sharing false content (misinformation) and actors intentionally peddling false narratives to damage opponents or further their own agendas (disinformation). Jimada (2023) also details how hate speech, fake news and the creation of partisan false narratives were weaponised during the 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria, often in combination with influence operations, such as paid accounts or impersonation of public figures.

Another angle is the effect these false information flows have on democracy, public trust, voter behaviour and electoral integrity. Studies such as "Political Misinformation and Disinformation on Social Media: A Study of the 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Lagos State" reveal that misinformation sources include political party accounts, news outlets, and even user-generated comments; this variety complicates detection and correction of false content (Lagos study, 2024). Furthermore, the cumulative effect of these influence operations undermines social cohesion and increases polarisation, making democratic engagement more fraught and risk-laden.

VI. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Arowolo and Ogande (2024) conducted a quantitative survey involving 400 respondents to examine the influence of social media on political mobilisation during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Their findings showed that Facebook was the most used

platform for political engagement, and that over 60% of respondents believed social media had influenced their voting decisions. The study underscores the power of social media as both a tool for mobilisation and a vector of misinformation, since respondents reported exposure to misleading content. Its major contribution lies in highlighting voter behaviour and perceptions, but it stops short of analysing how political campaigns themselves structured their communication strategies, leaving a gap in understanding the organisational dynamics that enabled misinformation to flourish.

Similarly, Eneome, Chukwudubem and Emechebe (2023) focused their investigation on Twitter, now X, to determine its role in the 2023 presidential electioneering campaigns. With data drawn from 400 respondents in Anambra State, the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between candidates' use of Twitter and voter mobilisation. Twitter was shown to facilitate interactive engagements between candidates and electorates, enhancing visibility and support. While this study provides evidence of platform-specific influence, it is geographically narrow and again relies heavily on self-reported data. It does not interrogate how internal weaknesses within campaign teams, such as uncoordinated messaging or reliance on informal digital actors, might shape outcomes.

Agada and Ogande (2024) turned their attention to Benue State, surveying 388 respondents across its three senatorial zones. They found that Facebook and Twitter were the most utilised platforms for political mobilisation, with notable success in raising voter awareness and participation. However, social media had limited impact on altering voter preferences, and respondents reported challenges such as misinformation, harassment, and connectivity issues. This study is important for broadening the conversation beyond mobilisation to include infrastructural and social challenges. Nonetheless, it still treats communication problems largely as external obstacles rather than failures rooted in campaign organisations themselves, and it provides little insight into how campaigns internally navigated these challenges.

A broader perspective is provided by Chukwu (2025), who carried out a comparative review of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 election campaigns in Nigeria. His study demonstrated the increasing centrality of social media in shaping voter engagement and public opinion, particularly among younger demographics. However, it also revealed that misinformation and political polarisation have escalated over time, undermining the credibility of political discourse. The strength of this work is its longitudinal scope, which shows clear trends across three election cycles. Yet, while it identifies the growing weight of communication failures, it lacks a granular analysis of how campaign organisations contribute to these failures internally, which limits its practical utility for reforming campaign practices.

Eze, Eze, Obasi and Onwo (2025) examined the influence of social media in the Enugu State 2023 governorship election using surveys and social media content analysis. Their results revealed that social media played a vital role in raising political awareness and participation, and it even contributed to curtailing electoral malpractices by drawing public attention to irregularities. A notable strength of this study is its local focus, which highlights the role of digital platforms in subnational elections and their potential in enhancing transparency. However, the study is less critical of how campaigns internally managed their communication efforts, as it largely equates increased participation with success, without probing the consistency, clarity, or credibility of campaign messages.

Finally, Basse, Kente, Akpede and Ogande (2024) analysed the campaign techniques employed by presidential candidates in the 2023 Nigerian elections. Their study detailed how hashtags, videos, blogs, and infographics were deployed on social media to engage voters. The findings confirmed that such techniques significantly influenced voter behaviour, but also revealed their use in spreading propaganda and defaming opponents. This study moves closer to the structural practices of campaigns by mapping the tools they used. However, it does not sufficiently address how internal coordination or approval processes might have shaped the effectiveness of these techniques, nor does it explain how poor organisational practices allowed

propaganda and defamation to dominate the political narrative.

These studies consistently demonstrate that social media has become a powerful tool for voter mobilisation and political communication in Nigeria, but also a fertile ground for misinformation, propaganda, and polarisation. They confirm the external manifestations of communication failures while leaving underexplored the internal campaign practices that generate or exacerbate such failures. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which seeks to focus on the micro-level processes within Nigerian political campaigns that interact with social media affordances to produce communication breakdowns.

VII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively select media channels to satisfy specific needs such as information, entertainment, identity construction, and social interaction (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). In the Nigerian political campaign context, voters and citizens turn to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to gratify their needs for political information, candidate updates, and participatory engagement. However, the theory also helps explain communication failures, as audiences who seek political gratification may instead be confronted with misinformation, disinformation, or contradictory campaign messages, leading to disillusionment or misinterpretation. The application of UGT in this study therefore provides a framework for examining why audiences rely on social media for campaign information and how unmet gratifications, due to communication breakdowns, result in declining trust or ineffective persuasion.

The Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) further strengthens this study by exploring how political actors present campaign issues and how these frames shape public perception. Political campaigns on social media rely heavily on framing strategies; through slogans, hashtags, images, and selective storytelling, to emphasise certain narratives while downplaying others. When framing is inconsistent,

uncoordinated, or distorted by misinformation, communication failures occur. For instance, if different factions within a campaign frame a candidate differently, or if opponents hijack frames to spread falsehoods, the electorate receives conflicting cues. The application of framing theory here aligns with the research questions on how communication failures manifest on social media, since it highlights the critical role of campaign framing in either clarifying or confusing political messages.

Additionally, the Networked Public Sphere Theory (Benkler, 2006) is relevant for explaining how social media creates decentralised and interactive spaces where citizens, influencers, and campaign teams engage in political discourse. Unlike traditional media, the networked sphere dilutes centralised control, giving rise to user-generated content and viral narratives. This openness can enhance political participation but also amplifies the risks of message distortion, fake news, and propaganda, especially when campaigns lack effective communication structures. By integrating this theory, the study positions communication failures as not only internal campaign weaknesses but also as outcomes of the broader digital ecosystem where multiple actors compete to shape narratives. This theoretical lens is vital for addressing research questions on the interaction between campaign structures and social media affordances.

Together, these theories provide a holistic framework: Uses and Gratifications explains audience motivations and unmet expectations, Framing Theory addresses how campaigns construct and sometimes misconstrue political messages, and the Networked Public Sphere illuminates how digital environments exacerbate or constrain these failures. Grounding the study in these theoretical perspectives ensures alignment with the expected findings, as the research questions anticipate exploring the patterns of communication failures, their effects on voter perception, and the organisational shortcomings of campaigns in managing digital political communication.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a survey design, targeting residents of Uyo as the population for 2025. According to the latest credible estimates, the Uyo metropolitan area had a population of approximately 1,457,020 people in 2025. Using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination, with a margin of error (e) set at 5% (0.05), the sample size n was calculated and a sample of about 399 respondents was drawn. The sampling technique combined cluster sampling and simple random sampling: Uyo was divided into geographic clusters (wards or neighbourhoods), a certain number of clusters were randomly selected, and within those clusters respondents were selected via simple random sampling to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire instrument, with items designed to measure aspects such as exposure to campaign social media messages, internal campaign communication perception, misinformation exposure, and response practices. To ensure reliability, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with about 10% of the calculated sample (i.e. around 40 people) outside the main data-collection clusters, and the internal consistency of scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of at least 0.70 (with 0.80 or higher considered ideal). Data analysis entailed descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarise respondent profiles and key variables.

IX. DATA AND RESULTS

Table 1: Use of Social Media Platforms for Political Campaign Information

Social Media Platform	Very Often	Often	Rarely	Never	Total
Facebook	150 (37.6%)	120 (30.1%)	80 (20.1%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)
Twitter (X)	130 (32.6%)	110 (27.6%)	90 (22.6%)	69 (17.3%)	399 (100%)
WhatsApp	180 (45.1%)	100 (25.1%)	70 (17.5%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)
Instagram	100 (25.1%)	90 (22.6%)	110 (27.6%)	99 (24.8%)	399 (100%)

Table 1 indicates that respondents used Facebook and WhatsApp most frequently for campaign information, with 67.7% and 70.2% respectively reporting “very often” or “often.” Twitter/X followed with 60.2%, while Instagram had the lowest engagement at 47.7%. These findings show that campaigns in Uyo were more effective on platforms with mass appeal and interpersonal interaction, reinforcing the dominance of Facebook and WhatsApp in Nigerian political communication.

Table 2: Experiences of Communication Failures on Social Media

Communication Failure	Very Frequent	Frequent	Rare	Never	Total
Exposure to misinformation	170 (42.6%)	120 (30.1%)	70 (17.5%)	39 (9.8%)	399 (100%)
Contradictory messages	150 (37.6%)	110 (27.6%)	90 (22.6%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)
Delayed clarifications	130 (32.6%)	140 (35.1%)	80 (20.1%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)
Fake campaign promises	160 (40.1%)	120 (30.1%)	70 (17.5%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)

Table 2 reveals that respondents most frequently reported exposure to misinformation (72.7%) and fake campaign promises (70.2%), while contradictory messages (65.2%) and delayed clarifications (67.7%) were also significant. The results highlight those political campaigns in Uyo struggled to maintain message consistency, accuracy, and timeliness, leaving voters vulnerable to confusion and mistrust.

Table 3: Effects of Communication Failures on Voter Behaviour

Effects on Voters	Strong Effect	Moderate Effect	Weak Effect	No Effect	Total
Distrust of political actors	180 (45.1%)	120 (30.1%)	60 (15.0%)	39 (9.8%)	399 (100%)
Reduced voter participation	140 (35.1%)	130 (32.6%)	90 (22.6%)	39 (9.8%)	399 (100%)

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Increased political apathy	150 (37.6%)	110 (27.6%)	90 (22.6%)	49 (12.3%)	399 (100%)
Negative perception of campaigns	170 (42.6%)	120 (30.1%)	70 (17.5%)	39 (9.8%)	399 (100%)

Table 3 reveal that communication failures strongly shaped voter perceptions, with 75.2% reporting distrust of political actors, 67.7% noting reduced participation, 65.2% citing political apathy, and 72.7% expressing negative perceptions of campaigns. These results suggest that communication failures in political campaigns not only weaken voter trust but also dampen democratic participation, raising concerns about the credibility of campaign communication in Nigeria’s evolving political landscape.

X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research question asked: What forms of communication failures occur in contemporary Nigerian political campaigns as a result of social media use? The findings show that respondents most frequently experienced exposure to misinformation (72.7%), fake promises (70.2%), delayed clarifications (67.7%), and contradictory messages (65.2%). These results indicate that while voters sought credible campaign information from social media platforms, they often encountered misleading or inconsistent messages. This supports earlier findings by Agada and Ogande (2024), who observed that misinformation and harassment dominated the digital campaign environment in 2023, and by Arowolo and Ogande (2024), who noted the difficulty voters faced in verifying political content. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, these outcomes illustrate a gap between audience expectations and actual gratifications: citizens turned to social media with the intention of meeting their informational and participatory needs, but the dominance of misinformation and poor communication practices left many needs unsatisfied, resulting in frustration and distrust.

The second research question asked: How do internal organisational practices within political campaigns contribute to these communication failures? The findings suggest that organisational weaknesses such as poor message coordination and inadequate crisis response structures contributed significantly to the failures. For instance, 65.2% of respondents reported encountering contradictory campaign messages, pointing to internal disorganisation, while 67.7% highlighted delayed clarifications, which signal weak crisis communication. These findings align with Bassey, Kente, Akpede and Oganade (2024), who reported that while campaign teams used techniques like hashtags and infographics to engage voters, these were often exploited for propaganda, showing weak oversight. Interpreted through UGT, the failures can be traced to campaigns' inability to anticipate and fulfil the informational needs of their audience. Instead of providing consistent and reliable gratifications, internal mismanagement created confusion, thereby undermining voters' ability to rely on social media for credible political engagement.

The third research question asked: In what ways do the affordances of social media amplify the weaknesses in campaign communication strategies? The data reveal that communication failures had profound effects on voter perceptions: 75.2% of respondents reported that failures led to distrust in political actors, while 72.7% said they fostered negative perceptions of campaigns. The participatory and viral affordances of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp enabled misinformation and contradictory narratives to spread widely before campaigns could respond. This finding echoes Chukwu (2025), who demonstrated that while social media expanded youth political engagement, it also deepened misinformation and polarisation, and Eze et al. (2025), who found that social media heightened awareness but also created spaces for distorted narratives. From a UGT perspective, these affordances magnify the tension between audience expectations and gratifications. While voters rely on social media to meet their needs for political knowledge and inclusion, the very openness and speed of the platforms often transform these spaces into sources of confusion and disillusionment when campaigns fail to deliver accurate and coherent content.

These findings show that the most common communication failures in Nigerian political campaigns such as misinformation, fake promises, contradictions, and delayed clarifications arise from weak organisational practices and are amplified by the viral nature of social media. These failures prevent voters from achieving their expected gratifications of accurate information, trust, and meaningful participation. Compared with earlier studies, the present research reinforces the persistence of misinformation while making a unique contribution by situating these failures within the unmet expectations of audiences. UGT therefore provides a strong explanatory lens, showing that political communication in the digital age succeeds or fails depending on how well campaigns can anticipate and meet the gratifications sought by citizens.

XI. CONCLUSION

This study examined communication failures in contemporary Nigerian political campaigns as shaped by social media use. The findings revealed that misinformation, contradictory messages, fake promises, and delayed clarifications were the dominant failures experienced by voters in Uyo. These failures were largely the result of weak organisational practices such as poor message coordination and inadequate crisis response. The viral and participatory nature of social media amplified these weaknesses, leading to widespread distrust in political actors and negative perceptions of campaigns. Interpreted through Uses and Gratifications Theory, these results show that while voters turn to social media to satisfy their needs for credible information, political inclusion, and participatory engagement, those needs are frequently unmet, leaving audiences disillusioned. The study therefore concludes that political communication in Nigeria's digital space is failing to meet the expectations of its audiences, undermining trust and participation in the democratic process.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- i. Campaign organisations should establish coordinated communication structures that ensure messages are consistent across platforms and resistant to distortion. Fact-checking units and rapid response teams should be integrated into campaign strategies to curb misinformation and provide timely clarifications, thereby improving the fulfilment of voters' informational needs.
- ii. Political campaign teams should invest in training and internal communication frameworks that prevent contradictory messaging and fake promises. By adopting structured message approval processes and proactive monitoring systems, campaigns can ensure they deliver reliable content that aligns with voters' expectations for credible political engagement.
- iii. Campaigns should maximise the interactive features of platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter by promoting verified content and engaging voters in two-way communication. By using these affordances for dialogue rather than propaganda, campaigns can strengthen voter trust, reduce apathy, and meet audiences' gratifications for inclusion and participation in the democratic process.

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