



Branding the Ballot: How the Labour Party Shaped Voter Behaviour in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election¹

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the Labour Party's branding strategies and their impact on voter behaviour during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Emphasising candidate positioning, digital interaction, and grassroots mobilisation, it underscores the party's attraction to youthful urban dwellers through social media and reform-based messaging. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with Labour Party officials, political analysts, and voters, together with focus group discussions and social media content. Thematic analysis showed that although digital branding invigorated urban voters, limited rural reach, driven by cultural affiliations and ethnics, limited widespread electoral outcomes. The findings underline the role of political branding in influencing voter behaviour in fledgling democracies. The study advocates for integrated approaches, incorporating digital and grassroots strategies. This paper enriches African political marketing literature, providing knowledge for parties working to improve voter participation.

Keywords:

Political Branding;
Voter Behaviour;
Digital Engagement;
Nigeria's 2023 Election;
Grassroots
Mobilisation.

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Introduction

Background

The Nigerian political environment has been largely dominated over the years by two major parties: the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). According to Punch (2023), the 2023 presidential elections, however, signalled significant change with the emergence of the Labour Party as a powerful force. This shift can be linked to broad public dissatisfaction with the entrenched political system, pervasive corruption, and worsening socio-economic conditions, creating an opportunity for alternative political narratives to gain support (Manuwa, 2022). The labour party exploited this opportunity, positioning itself as a champion of change and reform, attracting support from the youth, who comprise a major part of Nigeria's voting population (Mokuye et al., 2023).

The Financial Times (2023) contends that the rebirth of the Labour Party in 2023 is widely attributed to the widespread appeal of its presidential candidate, Peter Obi, whose reputation as a transparent-driven and reform-orientated leader resonated among voters frustrated with Nigeria's leadership failures. Obi's campaign highlighted accountability, economic reform, and infrastructural development, positioning the party as a viable alternative to the ruling elite. Besides, the Labour Party leveraged social media and local mobilisation to communicate its messages, especially among Nigeria's tech-savvy youth, who were crucial on organising and sharing campaign messages (Adekunle & Iredia, 2023).

Schneider (2004) posits that political branding, a principle originating in marketing and utilised in politics, plays an important role in influencing voter perception and behaviour. It requires developing a party's identity and values in a way that connects with particular voter demographics, using carefully crafted messaging and symbols to evoke emotional and psychological bonds (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019). The Labour Party's branding strategy for the 2023 elections framed its electoral strategy around being the party for the youth, transparency, and transformative change. The employment of social media platforms and local community involvement emphasised the party's effort to develop a brand that appeals to the youth and those disillusioned by the current political system (Akinyetun, 2022).

Despite the Labour Party's strategic branding efforts, how these efforts significantly influenced voter behaviour and impacted the election outcome remains insufficiently examined in the academic literature. Understanding how political branding influences voter behaviour, especially in an African setting like Nigeria, is important for political marketers and scholars investigating the relationship between political communication and the electoral process. This paper examines the Labour Party's branding approach and its influence on voter behaviour during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The concept of political branding became popular in political marketing, which integrates traditional marketing principles into the political discipline. It stresses the importance of developing and managing a political brand similar to commercial brand management (Scammell, 2007). According to Lees-Marshment et al. (2019), political branding entails crafting a party's identity, values, and messages to create a unique image that appeals to a targeted voter group. This image development is important as it distinguishes a political party from its competitors. Also, it develops an emotional and psychological connection with voters, promoting loyalty and influencing voter behaviour (Needham & Smith, 2015).

At the heart of political branding is the concept of identity formation, which confines itself to how parties present themselves as empathetic individuals that connect with the values, hopes, and beliefs of voters. Theories such as social identity theory suggest that individuals often associate with groups that align with their self-concept. Pointing to the idea that political parties that effectively align their brand identity with voter identities are inclined to win their support (Aaker, 1997; Needham, 2006). Branding strategies, for example, that reach out to marginalised youth, using their own language and cultural icons and symbols, can enhance the party's appeal and voter identification (Susila et al., 2019).

Another essential element of political branding is brand loyalty. Smith and French (2009) argue that just as consumer loyalty to brands is dependent upon perceived value, trust, and emotional connections, political brand loyalty emerges when voters perceive a party as a reliable proponent of their interests. Parties that develop robust, consistent branding over time are inclined to sustain voter loyalty, even in the midst of a changing political environment (Needham & Smith, 2015). This consistency also increases the trustworthiness and credibility of a party, which serves as key indicators of voting behaviour (Hennesberg et al., 2009).

Voter Behaviour in Nigerian Elections

In Nigeria, voter behaviour has historically been influenced by a complex interaction of ethnic, religious, and regional ties (Babalola, 2020). Following the country's restoration of democratic governance in 1999, elections have consistently highlighted these differences, with political parties exploiting ethnic and religious identities to galvanise support (Sanusi, 2007). Voters often support candidates who reflect their ethnic or regional identity, seeing them as better representatives of their interests (Abdulahi et al., 2023). Furthermore, vote buying and electoral manipulation have over time shaped voter behaviour, frequently undermining the impact of ideological or issue-centred voting (Osimen & Emeka, 2022).

In Nigeria, socioeconomic conditions and cultural factors significantly determine voter decisions. Economic uncertainty and pervasive poverty lead many voters to focus on immediate financial gains rather than long-term policy planning, consistently making them vulnerable to vote buying (Hoffmann & Patel, 2022). In addition, religious

associations play a critical role, as religious leaders have strong influence in mobilising voters by appealing to collective beliefs and values (Eze, 2020).

Electoral outcomes are also influenced by cultural practices, which emphasise communal unity and shape voter preference. In rural communities, for instance, social bonds deeply influence traditional leaders and voter decisions, often favouring candidates aligned with local or communal interests (Ihemeje, 2019). Despite this, the 2023 presidential elections showed a departure towards issue-based voting among younger, urban voters who are increasingly critical of ethnic and religious politics (Abdulrasheed, 2023).

Exploring global and African studies on political parties and their electoral impact offers an important perspective into the Labour Party's situation during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Studies across the globe have repeatedly revealed that political parties' branding, identity formation, and grassroots mobilisation strategies considerably determine electoral outcomes. Studies in the United States and Europe, for example, show that political parties that effectively connect their platforms with the identity and needs of voters regularly achieve greater success (Somer-Topcu, 2015). In such contexts, political parties utilise targeted branding strategies and communication techniques to create deep emotional bond with their supporters, leading to increased voter loyalty and turnout (Dean et al., 2015)

Across Africa, political parties are confronted with distinct challenges, including ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic factors that impact voter behaviour differently than in Western democracies (Basedau et al., 2011). Studies indicate that parties across African countries frequently leverage ethnic, regional, and religious identities to rally voter support. According to Norris & Mattes (2003), in many African countries, political parties target dominant ethnic groups or regions for strategic alignment to ensure votes, underscoring identity over ideology.

Notwithstanding, research also reveals that political parties in Africa make greater use of branding strategies akin to those employed by Western democracies. In South Africa, for example, the African National Congress (ANC) has continually deployed its historical legacy as a liberation party to brand itself as a party of liberation, identity, and progress (Lodge, 2004). Similarly, in Kenya, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) has sought to rebrand itself as a forward-thinking agent of change, employing social media and grassroots campaigns to align itself with younger voters (Holmquist, 2012). Such branding strategies are becoming central to African politics as parties work to engage the rising youth population, which is steadily becoming more urban and exposed to digital media (Van & Anyidoho, 2019).

Branding and the Labour Party

The Labour Party of Nigeria, originally founded in 2002 (see <https://labourparty.com.ng/>), as a platform supporting labour unions and working class interests, was largely sidelined in the country's political environment until recent years. In its early days, the party was mainly associated with the promotion of workers rights,

an equitable wage, and social justice. However, its branding efforts remained largely traditional and fell short of the vigour needed to compete against Nigerian dominant parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC), which had widespread appeal and reinforced political structure.

The transformation of the Labour Party started in the late 2010s as it realised the need to extend its appeal beyond the primary working-class constituency to attract a more diverse range of voters. The party's rebranding strategy focused on highlighting governance, transparency, and economic reforms, positioning itself alongside the increasingly influential middle class and youth populations unhappy with the existing political structure. The rise in youth activism played a role in this transformation, especially movements like #EndSARS in 2020, which emphasised the increasing call for accountability, transparency, and reform (Obadare, 2021).

The Labour Party's brand underwent a major transformation when Peter Obi, a former governor of Anambra State, renowned for his impeccable records of governance and technocratic style, became the presidential candidate for the 2023 elections. Obi's entry into the party signalled a major change in its branding strategy as the party adopted a more contemporary and youth-orientated image (Mokuye et al., 2023). The "Obident" movement, led by young voters and professionals, developed into a grassroots mobilisation effort that redefined the party's image from a small, labour-orientated party to a major force in driving change across the country. (DW, 2022). The party leveraged this momentum by using digital strategies, employing social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp to reach urban, tech-driven voters, and magnifying its message of reform and progress. (Bassey et al., 2024)

In addition, the Labour Party directed its branding efforts to emphasise inclusivity and national unity, striving to attract support from diverse ethnic and regional groups, which have historically influenced Nigerian politics. This approach differed immensely from both its past image and the strategies of its competitors. In establishing itself as a genuinely national and reform-driven alternative, the Labour Party evolved its brand identity to contest the stronghold of entrenched politics in Nigerian environment.

Research Design

I adopted a qualitative approach, making use of a case study methodology to explore the Labour Party's branding efforts and its impact on voter behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. A qualitative design allowed for thorough exploration of complicated social structures, particularly when examining perceptions, strategies, and behaviours (Creswell, 2013). The case study method is especially appropriate as it offers an in-depth exploration of the Labour Party's unique branding techniques and their influence on various voter demographics (Yin, 2028). This technique allowed me to examine different sources of data, including interviews, campaign materials, and social media contents, making it possible for triangulation and in-depth understanding of the party's strategies and voter responses (Stake, 1995).

Participant Recruitment

To present diverse perspectives on the Labour Party's branding strategies and voter behaviour, I recruited participants using purposive sampling, a method considered effective for qualitative research as it targets specific knowledge and experience (Patton, 2015). I targeted three major groups: Labour Party officials, political analysts, and voters from different demographic backgrounds. To successfully enlist participants for this study, I used a multi-pronged strategy designed to access credible opinion within the field. Recruiting efforts were originally carried out using professional networks, taking advantage of established contacts within political and academic circles to reach stakeholders directly involved in or knowledgeable about the Labour Party's branding strategies. These methods enabled me to locate important informants, such as political analysts, party officials, and active voters, capable of offering in-depth insights into the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria.

Besides, social media platforms were instrumental in the recruitment. Platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook were strategically employed to connect with politically engaged individuals and figures who had made public comments or indicated interest in political branding and voter behaviour. By focusing on particular groups and discussion threads related to the Labour Party and Nigeria's political climate, I was able to engage a larger and more varied pool of participants who could offer broad perspectives on the topic. Recommendations from early participants played a key role in the recruitment process through the snowball sampling method, which is especially successful in engaging niche or hard-to-reach participants (Patton, 2015). As initial participants proposed additional contacts within their network, this technique widened my reach, which was successful in reaching potential stakeholders and voters who might have been difficult to engage. This snowball sampling method ensured I reached voices from various demographics, including different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political alignment, thereby improving the study by incorporating a broader cross-section of opinions and experiences.

Ultimately, this recruitment strategy using multiple channels provided a well-grounded body of knowledge from participants closely connected to Nigeria's electoral environment. It offered a robust framework for examining the Labour Party's branding effect on voter behaviour (Bryman, 2016).

Interviews and Focus Group Discussion

I conducted 15 in-depth interviews using Zoom to ensure convenience and reach participants across the different regions of Nigeria. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, giving the participants enough time to share their knowledge in detail (Opdenakker, 2006). The interviews included 5 Labour Party officials, 5 political analysts, and 5 voters from different socio-economic backgrounds. Besides, I organised a focus group discussion, each with 6 to 8 participants, using Zoom, targeting younger voters due to their significant influence in shaping the 2023 elections (Basil & Zekeri,

2024). These sessions lasted about 90 minutes, promoting interactive exchanges and focusing on mutual values

I analysed campaign materials, including social media posts from platforms like Twitter and Facebook, the Labour Party's election manifestos, and public speeches by its leaders. Using multiple data sources facilitated a broad and detailed understanding of the branding strategies employed while also offering triangulation to validate interview findings (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to identify themes in voter perception and behaviour, as this method is well-suited for in-depth qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis facilitated a systematic approach to coding and categorising data, revealing fundamental patterns and insights that deepen understanding of the Labour Party's branding effect.

To begin, I transcribed the interviews and focus group discussion held through Zoom. Then, I familiarised myself with the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2013). Next, I used NVivo software to code the data, generating initial codes that highlight particular facts of voter behaviour, branding strategies, and perceptions. The software helped to organise and visually present the data effectively. This process allowed me to compare codes across various demographics

I grouped the code into these broader categories: "youth engagement," "branding effectiveness," "social media influence," and "regional appeal." Next, I analysed the connection among these categories to uncover major themes like "digital mobilisation of youth voters" and "trust in political transparency." Thematic analysis facilitated the reintegration of these patterns to the research questions, presenting an encompassing view of how the Labour Party's branding strategies engaged different categories of voters.

Theme	Description	Examples
Youth Engagement	Focused on how youth responded to the Labour Party branding efforts, especially through digital channels	Increased social media participation among urban youth
Branding Effectiveness	Evaluate the perceived success of the Labour Party's branding, differentiating itself from competitors	Positive perception of candidates transparency
Social Media	Analysed the role of social media in	Viral campaigns and

Influence	shaping the spreading of Labour Party's messages	grassroot mobilisation efforts
Regional and Ethnic Appeal	Investigated how the Labour Party attempts to transcend traditional regional and ethnic divide	Inclusive messaging is seen as appealing across demographics

Using this method, I was able to achieve a systemic understanding of how branding influence voter behaviour, in line with conventional practices in qualitative political research (Brau & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this study, I rigorously followed ethical guidelines to uphold respect, confidentiality, and informed consent for all participants. Before participation, I provided each participant a detailed explanation of the objectives of the study and the procedure, stressing that participation was strictly voluntary and that they were free to back out at any time without any consequences. To uphold confidentiality, I concealed all identifiable information and confirmed the data were stored securely (Bryman, 2016). Recognising the fragile nature of political opinions and affiliations, especially in relations to Nigerian politics, I was specifically attentive to protecting participants' privacy and avoided probing for information that could put them at risk.

Findings and Discussion

To explore the Labour Party's branding strategies during the 2023 presidential elections, I asked participants important questions during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. I asked them, "What branding strategies did the Labour Party adopt to distinguish itself from other parties?" and "How did the party engage with different demographic groups, especially the youth?" The response highlighted three principal strategies: candidate positioning, social media utilisation, and grassroots mobilisation.

Candidate Positioning

The decision to nominate Peter Obi as the Labour Party's presidential candidate was a strategic effort to alter the party's perception among voters. Respondents noted that Obi's reputation for transparency and economic reforms was key in framing the party as a distinct option against the prevailing status quo (The Nation, 2022). Party officials stressed that Obi's technocratic appeal was essential in winning over middle-class and youth voters who had lost faith in the ruling parties. A party official stated:

"To build the Labour Party as a credible option for change, we concentrated on Peter Obi's track record. By presenting his key accomplishments and management philosophy, we strived to show the party's potential to address the critical

problems Nigeria is grappling with, consequently drawing the interest of voters seeking a genuine alternative in the political environment.”

This upholds the theory that political parties frequently position candidates with personal traits that connect with the target demography to build credibility (Scammell, 2007).

Leveraging Social Media

Social media was another notable branding technique used by the Labour Party. I asked participants about the role of social media in the party’s campaign efforts. A substantial number of respondents, especially younger voters, emphasised that platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp were crucial to mobilising support. The Labour Party successfully used these platforms to connect voters, share campaign messages, and address negative narratives from the rival parties (Adekunle & Iredia, 2023). A youth voter remarked: “Social media enhanced our experience by establishing a sense of belonging in the movement; it amplified our voices, enabling us to engage, share ideas, and rally support more efficiently.” This finding supports research that underscores the growing importance of digital tools in modern political campaigns, particularly in engaging younger population (Opeibi, 2019)

Grassroots Mobilisation

The Labour Party also concentrated heavily on grassroots mobilisation, an approach centred on creating community networks and alliances to reach voters at the community level. I asked political analysts how successful this strategy was, and they stressed that the Labour Party’s grassroots mobilisation set it apart from its competitors. Through focusing on door-to-door outreach and community town hall meetings, the party established a direct and personal connection with voters, strengthening its image as a party of the people (Keschmann, 2013). This finding affirms the necessity of grassroots, community-focused engagement in establishing voter trust and support in emerging democracies (Jung & Long, 2023).

Voter Perceptions and Reactions

To explore voter perspectives and responses to the Labour Party’s branding activities during the 2023 elections. I asked tailored questions: “How did you perceive the Labour Party’s campaign messages?” and “Did factors like age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic standing influence your view of the Labour Party?” the responses indicated different reaction to diverse demographics to the party’s branding efforts, emphasising the effectiveness of these elements on voter perception

While analysing the impact of age on voter perception, it was apparent that younger voters were particularly amenable to the Labour Party’s branding efforts. I asked young participants to share their reasons for their support of the Labour Party. And many

emphasised the party's progressive messaging and strong social media presence as considerations that were meaningful to them. A participant stated: "The Labour Party engaged directly with voters, using their platforms to address relevant issues. This approach established a strong sense of connection and responsiveness, revealing their commitment to understanding and representing the concerns of their electorate effectively." This is consistent with research indicating that digital engagement is impactful for mobilising young voters (Opeibi, 2019). By presenting Peter Obi as a candidate for change who prioritise transparency, the Labour Party successfully engaged with this population group, that has increasingly raised its voices against systemic corruption and failed governance within Nigeria.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity remains a crucial element in Nigerian politics, and I asked voters if ethnic identity influenced their perception of the Labour Party. While there was a range of responses, many participants affirmed that ethnicity remains important, but the Labour Party branding sought to bridge these divides by advocating for national unity and inclusiveness. A middle-aged voter shared his thoughts:

"For the first time, I believed that a political party was earnestly striving to unite us beyond ethnic lines. Their message of inclusivity appealed to people from a wide range of backgrounds, cultivating a feeling of unity and common purpose that transcended our traditional divisions."

Nevertheless, some voters from areas traditionally associated with other parties acknowledged that loyalties still determine their perception, emphasising the enduring influence of ethnic identity on political behaviour within Nigeria (Orunbon & Babatunde, 2023).

Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic background was also a key factor in determining voter reaction. I asked participants how their economic realities influenced their support for the Labour Party. Many low-income voters saw the Labour Party's promise of economic reforms and anti-corruption efforts as appealing. A voter remarked: "I supported the Labour Party because they promised to create jobs that directly affect me and also fight corruption."

These findings validate that socioeconomic factors are still at the heart of voter choices, especially among the poorer populations seeking immediate economic relief (Kirchgässner, 2019).

Influence of Voter Participation on Election Outcomes

To explore the impact of the Labour Party's branding on voter participation and election outcomes, I asked participant questions like "Do you believe the Labour Party's branding factors influenced your decision to vote?" and "How effective do you think the strategies were in mobilising voters across various populations?" The responses offered valuable perspectives into how branding influences voter participation and revealed both success and limitations of the party's strategies.

The data collected points to a clear correlation between the Labour Party's branding efforts and high voter participation, especially among youth and urban populations. I asked young voters how branding influenced their participation, and many noted that the party's persistent use of social media and messages of reform motivated them to vote. A youth voter had this to say: "The Labour Party's campaign on social media instilled a sense of belonging and compelled me to vote because I was convinced we could drive a change." The Labour Party's branding promoted a feeling of responsibility and urgency among the voters, resulting in higher participation rates in urban areas where there is a concentration of youths.

I explored the connection between these branding efforts and their impact on electoral success by asking participants if they believed the Labour Party's branding made a measurable impact on election outcomes. Respondents remarked that although the Labour Party attracted huge support, especially in metropolitan locations like Lagos and Abuja, its impact was less significant in rural areas. A political analyst said:

"In urban areas, the Labour Party's message found a strong audience, successfully addressing major challenges and connecting with voters. However, it had troubles establishing a foothold in rural communities where deeply rooted political loyalties and ethnic affiliations continue to dominate, limiting its engagement and effectiveness in these areas."

These limitations suggest that while the Labour Party's branding strategies successfully engaged digitally connected voters, they were unsuccessful in bridging the gap between rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, some voters noted that while the Labour Party's branding successfully communicated its vision of reform and transparency, without the necessary political networks, the party struggled to convert this enthusiasm into votes in certain regions. "Despite this strong message, the party did not have the local structure to mobilise votes in rural areas," a participant observed. This indicate that while branding is a significant asset, it must be complemented by proper support to achieve wider electoral success (Lees-Marshment, 2011).

Comparative Analysis with Other Political Parties

To understand the Labour Party's branding strategies compared to those of other major parties in the 2023 elections in Nigeria, I asked the interviewees, "How did the Labour

Party's branding differ from the strategies used by the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP)?" and "What aspect of these strategies was least effective?" The respondents pointed out the important differences and similarities in branding strategies, exploring the competitive framework of the 2023 elections.

The Labour Party's branding focused on positioning itself as a reformist youth-centred alternative, while the APC and PDP relied extensively on established political networks, ethnic bonds, and regional allegiances. I asked participants how these approaches differed, and many of them pointed out that the Labour Party differentiated itself by prioritising transparency, economic reforms, and anti-corruption initiatives. A respondent remarked: "The Labour Party's messaging seemed invigorating and attractive, particularly to young people disillusioned with the status quo." This strategy contrasts significantly with the APC and PDP, which continue to rely on established narratives (Chioma and Sopuruchi, 2024).

Respondents also stressed that APC and PDP relied on traditional campaign methods. Like rallies and local political alliances. Conversely, the Labour Party made greater use of social media and grassroots mobilisation to connect with voters, especially in urban areas. One political analyst emphasised that "While the APC and PDP were strong on-the-ground in the rural areas, the Labour Party's digital-first approach was evidently crafted to engage a youthful segment of the urban population."

The Impact of Social Media on Voter Behaviour

To study the impact of social media in reinforcing the Labour Party's branding messages during the 2023 elections in Nigeria, I asked participants these questions: "How did social media platforms influence your perception of the Labour Party?" and "Do you think the Labour Party's use of social media was effective in engaging voters?" The responses reflected the major impact of social media on voter behaviour, especially among younger and urban population

I discovered that Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp were major platforms where the Labour Party successfully communicated its branding messages. When I asked voters about the influence of these platforms on their level of engagement, many respondents noted that the Labour Party's active presence on social media increased their feelings of connection to the party and its campaigns. A respondent mentioned: "The Labour Party's presence on Twitter was a significant shift; it felt like they were engaging with us directly, unlike other parties that depended on mainstream media." This perspective corresponds with studies indicating that social media platforms are remarkably effective for political engagement, particularly among young voters who prefer digital over traditional media (Xenos et al., 2014).

Party officials I interviewed stressed that the Labour Party employed social media to share campaign messages and develop interactive and participatory content. The "Obidient" movement, an initiative championed by youth supporting Peter Obi, thrived on those platforms, where users organised rallies, distributed campaign visuals, and participated in live discussions on political matters. When I asked about the effectiveness

of those strategies, a party official had this to say: “We deliberately used social media to create a sense of community and urgency, especially among young voters.”

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the impact of the Labour Party’s branding strategies on voter behaviour as well as the final outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. My analysis reveals that the Labour Party’s branding strategies, especially its application of social media, candidate positioning, and grassroots mobilisation, played a major role in shaping voter engagement and outcomes, particularly among younger and urban demographics. By framing Peter Obi as a reform-minded and transparent candidate, the Labour Party skilfully resonated with the frustration and ambitions of Nigerian youth, leading to higher voter participation from this group (Chioma and Sopuruchi, 2024).

The strategic application of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp by the Labour Party reinforced its branding message, creating an engaged online community and rallying support. These platforms offered a successful means to communicate directly with voters, creating an atmosphere of belonging and active participation, especially for young people knowledgeable with technology (Fishr et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the Labour Party’s branding significantly shaped the election outcome, but it also faced limitations because of its weaker grass-roots engagement in rural areas and reliance on digital platforms. This underscores the need to narrow the rural-urban divide in order to increase voter participation.

Theoretical Implications

The knowledge gained from this research contributes to the increasing scholarship on political branding in Africa, showcasing how branding strategies can be modified to suit specific socioeconomic and cultural settings. Participants emphasised that the Labour Party’s focus on youth mobilisation and digital engagement is consistent with global political marketing theories that advocate for the importance of digital and grass-roots engagement in building solid voter-brand relationships (Vaccari, 2016). Notwithstanding, my analysis demonstrates that these theories have to be contextualised for the Nigerian and African environment, acknowledging that rural areas frequently experience limited digital access and that ethnic and regional affiliations continue to affect how voters behave. (Fortune, 2021). This implies that even though digital branding is important, political marketing theories in Africa must acknowledge this unique socio-political dynamics to craft strategies that are more effective and inclusive.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

In line with these findings, I recommend that political parties in Nigeria and indeed Africa consider a hybrid branding strategy that combines digital approaches with

grassroots mobilisation to effectively reach a broader demographic. When I asked participants what strategies they found most effective, many suggested that parties like the Labour Party could strengthen their outreach by building local connections and alliances that complement their digital engagement efforts. A voter stated: “While social media is powerful, it cannot replace the trust built through direct community engagement, especially in rural areas.”

To strike a balance, political parties should commit resources in a mix of online and offline branding efforts, ensuring that their online messages are bolstered by a visible presence in communities through local offices, townhall meetings, and collaboration with influential figures within the community (Kumar et al., 2017). Besides, to connect with a more varied audience beyond urban youths, parties must adapt their messaging to highlight concerns that resonate with rural and older voters, such as local economic initiatives and traditional values (Zynep, 2014).

Limitations of Study

I acknowledge limitations in this study that may have influenced the findings. First, the sample size is a notable limitation. Though I conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a varied range of participants, the number of respondents was relatively small. This could affect the generalisation of the findings, as having a larger sample size would allow for a more accurate representation of voter behaviour across Nigeria’s diverse demographic spectrum. (creswell, 2013).

Another limitation is the dynamic nature of the political environment. Political branding and voter behaviour can change quickly due to evolving socioeconomic political factors. For instance, voter sentiments and perceptions may evolve quickly due to emerging political events, economic crises, or shifts in party strategies (Bryman, 2016). Considering the changing political environment in Nigeria, my findings only provide a snapshot in time and would not adequately reflect long-term voter behaviour or the effects on branding. I recognise that the constantly changing nature of the political environment can impact the stability and consistency of the data collected.

In addition, using self-reported data from interviews raises the possibility of response bias, as participants might offer opinions that align with social expectations or political agendas. Despite using triangulation methods by integrating data from multiple sources like social media analysis and campaign materials, the inherent limitation must be recognised when drawing conclusions from the findings. (Yin, 2018).

In order to address these limitations, future studies should expand the sample size to represent a wider array of demographic groups and examine voter behaviour over an extended timeframe to more effectively capture the evolving dynamics of political branding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

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