

# Impact Of Digital Misinformation On Electoral Perception: A Survey Of Lagos Electorates' Experiences With Twitter During The 2023 Gubernatorial Race

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**Abstract-** This study examined the Impact of Digital Misinformation on Electoral Perception: A Survey of Lagos Electorates' Experiences with Twitter during the 2023 Gubernatorial Race. The study was guided by four key research questions: how digital misinformation on Twitter influenced electorates' perception during the election; the types of misinformation that circulated and affected perception; the extent to which exposure to misinformation affected trust in the electoral process; and how electorates identified and interpreted misinformation on Twitter. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Based on an estimated population of 5,747,193 registered electorates in Lagos State, a sample of 384 respondents was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Findings revealed that digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced electorates' perceptions, causing confusion, distrust in the electoral process, and biased support for certain candidates. Various forms of misinformation, such as fake news, manipulated media, false election result claims, and hate speech, were found to be widespread during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. Although many respondents relied on official INEC statements, multiple news sources, and peer discussions to verify information, a considerable number still struggled to identify false content due to low digital literacy and limited use of fact-checking tools. The study concluded that the impact of digital misinformation on electoral perception among Lagos electorates was largely negative, undermining public trust and informed participation in the democratic process. It was recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant stakeholders adopt a comprehensive digital communication strategy to counter misinformation in real time during elections. Additionally, collaboration with reputable media organizations, civil society groups, and social media platforms should be enhanced to promote the timely clarification of misleading content. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should integrate digital literacy and media education into voter enlightenment programmes, while government institutions, educational bodies, and NGOs should jointly train citizens especially youths on critical information assessment and the use of fact-checking tools such as Africa Check, and FactCheckHub to strengthen electoral integrity and democratic engagement in Nigeria.

**Index Terms-** Digital misinformation, Electoral perception, Twitter, Lagos electorates, Gubernatorial election, Social media, Political communication, Digital literacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The increasing role of social media in shaping political engagement and electoral processes across Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, has become a subject of significant scholarly attention. In the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race, Twitter emerged as a major platform for political discourse, mobilization, and information sharing. However, alongside its potential for democratic participation, the platform also facilitated the widespread dissemination of digital misinformation. This phenomenon has raised concerns regarding its impact on electorates' perception of candidates, political parties, and the broader electoral process. Scholars argue that misinformation does not only distort reality but also influences political decision-making and voter confidence (Adu, 2024; Jimada, 2023).

Digital misinformation, defined as the deliberate or unintentional dissemination of false or misleading information, has become increasingly central to electoral campaigns in Nigeria. According to Onuegbu (2024), social media platforms such as Twitter have evolved from being spaces of casual interaction to contested political battlegrounds where narratives are framed and contested. During the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election, electorates were bombarded with competing claims, ranging from exaggerated policy promises to doctored videos aimed at discrediting opponents.

Studies have shown that misinformation often alters electorates' perception by shaping their evaluation of candidates. Ajasa, Arowa, David, and Nwambam (2023), in their study of youths in Surulere, Lagos, demonstrated how social media discourses significantly influenced voting preferences, with misinformation amplifying doubts about candidate integrity and capability. Similarly, Eze, Eze, Obasi, and Onwo (2025) found that electorates in Enugu were swayed by the tone and frequency of misinformation, leading to polarized perceptions that undermined rational decision-making. For Lagos electorates, Twitter not only served as a platform for real-time updates but also as a site where perceptions were manipulated through strategic disinformation campaigns.

Misinformation manifests in diverse forms, including fabricated news stories, manipulated images, false polls, and hate narratives. Jimada (2023) emphasizes that the 2023 Nigerian elections were marked by deliberate social media hate campaigns, particularly on Twitter, where ethnic and religious narratives were exploited to polarize electorates. In Lagos State, this was especially significant due to the city's multi-ethnic composition, which became a focal point for divisive rhetoric. Research by Attai et al. (2024), which applied sentiment analysis to Twitter discourse on the 2023 elections, revealed that misinformation narratives often spread faster than verified news, partly due to algorithmic amplification and user retweets. Common forms included false claims about election results, misleading opinion polls, and deepfakes designed to delegitimize candidates. Ibrahim and Ekdale (2025) argue that these forms of information disorder were not incidental but strategically deployed to influence voter behavior. In Lagos, electorates were particularly exposed to claims that questioned the credibility of electoral bodies and exaggerated candidates' failures or achievements, thereby affecting their evaluative judgments.

Trust is a critical determinant of democratic legitimacy. Exposure to misinformation has been shown to erode confidence in institutions, particularly electoral management bodies. Ayeni and Aweh (2025) note that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced severe challenges during the 2019–2023 electoral cycle, with social media misinformation intensifying doubts about its neutrality and competence. In Lagos State, electorates' trust in the process was undermined by false claims of vote manipulation, inflated turnout figures, and premature declarations of winners. Audu (2024) links online political discourse with heightened electoral violence and reduced confidence in governance, noting that electorates who perceive elections as rigged or manipulated are less likely to participate in future polls. This aligns with Adewale, Aondover, and Ubah (2025), who argue that reportage of electoral misinformation across social media platforms not only distorts perceptions but also lowers overall confidence in democratic institutions. Thus, misinformation does not merely confuse electorates it actively reshapes their trust in the electoral process, a concern central to this study.

While misinformation is pervasive, electorates adopt different strategies to navigate the information ecosystem. Ngantem, Nyitse, and Kente (2024) note that in Taraba State, electorates relied on a mix of traditional media, peer discussions, and official electoral communication to verify social media content. Similarly, Ugochukwu and Obiukwphd (2023) found that electorates in the South-East resorted to fact-checking initiatives, such as Dubawa and Africa Check, though these efforts were not always sufficient to counter deeply entrenched political biases. In Lagos State, electorates interpreted misinformation differently depending on their digital literacy, political alignment, and trust in sources. Some electorates used multiple news outlets to verify Twitter claims, while others relied on influencers and political actors whose credibility they already endorsed. According to Folarin, Adesina, Thomas, and Semiu (2022), puncturing disinformation bubbles requires hybrid approaches, combining media literacy, fact-checking, and real-time correction. Yet, many Lagos electorates admitted difficulty in distinguishing between misinformation and legitimate political discourse, highlighting the vulnerability of democratic processes in digitally mediated elections.

The broader influence of social media on political behavior in Nigeria provides context for understanding the Lagos gubernatorial race. Aidelajo, Sylvester, and Jacintha (2024) argue that social media has become indispensable for voter mobilization, shaping not only turnout but also partisan loyalties. In Lagos, political parties and candidates weaponized Twitter to promote campaign messages, discredit opponents, and engage directly with electorates. Okebunor and Nwaoboli (2024) highlight how social media campaigns simultaneously curtailed pre-election violence and amplified political tensions, revealing its double-edged role in democratic governance. Furthermore, Ibrahim and Ekdale (2025) note that political campaigns actively responded to information disorder by adopting counter-narratives, though these were often less effective than the speed at which misinformation traveled. For Lagos electorates, this created an environment of constant contestation, where truth and falsehood blurred, leaving them susceptible to manipulated perceptions.

This study is theoretically significant because it situates digital misinformation within the broader discourse of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. As Nigeria's democracy becomes increasingly mediated by digital technologies, understanding the impact of misinformation on electorates is not only timely but also necessary for safeguarding electoral integrity. This study also builds on scholarship that links misinformation with political polarization, institutional distrust, and electoral manipulation (Adu, 2024; Jimada, 2023). Practically, the study provides insights into electorates' vulnerability to misinformation, the specific forms of falsehoods they encounter, and their coping mechanisms. For electoral management bodies, media practitioners, and policymakers, understanding electorates' responses is critical for designing interventions that promote credible elections in Lagos and beyond.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In democratic societies, electorates should have access to accurate, balanced, and timely information to make informed political choices. In advanced democracies, digital technologies and social media platforms have been harnessed to expand civic engagement, enhance transparency, and facilitate direct interaction between candidates and electorates (Ibrahim & Ekdale, 2025). For instance, in developed countries such as the United States and parts of Europe, social media has been increasingly integrated into electoral campaigns in ways that promote accountability and citizen participation, while efforts to combat misinformation through fact-checking initiatives and regulatory frameworks have been more institutionalized (Folarin, Adesina, Thomas, & Semiu, 2022). This ideal framework suggests

that social media, particularly Twitter, should be a tool that empowers electorates with credible information, thereby strengthening democratic participation.

However, the reality in many developing democracies, including Nigeria, departs sharply from this ideal. Instead of serving as a platform for objective political discourse, social media has become a breeding ground for misinformation, hate speech, and divisive propaganda (Jimada, 2023; Adu, 2024). During the 2023 general elections, studies revealed that Twitter was used not only for mobilization but also for coordinated disinformation campaigns that manipulated electorates' perceptions of candidates and electoral institutions (Attai et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Ekdale, 2025). Unlike in developed contexts where misinformation detection tools are more advanced, electorates in Nigeria often lack adequate digital literacy to distinguish between accurate information and deliberate falsehoods (Ugochukwu & Obiukwphd, 2023).

In Lagos State, the situation was particularly complex. As the nation's economic hub and one of its most politically competitive states, Lagos became a focal point for disinformation during the gubernatorial race. Research indicates that electorates in Surulere, for example, were heavily influenced by political narratives circulated on Twitter, which shaped their voting preferences and deepened polarization (Ajasa, Arowa, David, & Nwambam, 2023). Similarly, hate campaigns targeting ethnic identities were widely circulated online, further undermining confidence in the electoral process (Jimada, 2023). While existing scholarship has examined the impact of social media on elections at the national level (Adewale, Aondover, & Ubah, 2025; Eze, Eze, Obasi, & Onwo, 2025), there remains a paucity of empirical studies focusing specifically on how electorates in Lagos interpreted, responded to, and were influenced by misinformation on Twitter during the gubernatorial contest.

This gap underscores the need for localized research that moves beyond general assessments of social media in Nigerian elections to examine the lived experiences of electorates in Lagos State and on specific social medium like Twitter. By addressing how misinformation influenced perception, the types of misinformation prevalent, its impact on trust in the electoral process, and how electorates attempted to identify or interpret it, this study seeks to fill a critical void in the existing literature.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the ways digital misinformation on Twitter shaped electorates' perception of candidates and political parties in the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race.
2. To identify and analyze the dominant types of misinformation on Twitter that influenced electorates' perception during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race.
3. To assess the extent to which exposure to misinformation on Twitter eroded or reinforced electorates' trust in the electoral process during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race.
4. To explore the strategies electorates used to identify and interpret misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Concept of Electoral Perception and How Electorates Form Opinions based on Digital Narratives

Within the Nigerian context, electoral perception has become a decisive factor in determining political outcomes, particularly in urban centers such as Lagos where youth populations dominate online spaces. Ajasa, Arowa, David, and Nwambam (2023) found that young electorates in Surulere, Lagos, formed strong impressions about gubernatorial candidates through social media engagements rather than through party manifestos or traditional media. This finding underscores the centrality of perception in contemporary electoral politics, where "what people think happened" may matter more than "what actually happened."

Similarly, Adu (2024) concluded that perception of electoral events is shaped not only by formal campaign communication but also by online discourse, memes, hashtags, and the rapid circulation of narratives. This digital mediation, according to Adu (2024) means that perception is susceptible to manipulation, distortion, and reinforcement within echo chambers, especially in highly polarized societies. The formation of electoral opinions in the digital era is heavily influenced by online narratives, which according to Attai et al (2024) in the sentiment analysis of Twitter discourse during Nigeria's 2023 general elections revealed that electorates' opinions were shaped less by official announcements and more by trending hashtags and viral tweets that framed candidates in particular lights. Jimada (2023) notes that misinformation campaigns in Nigeria often rely on emotionally charged content, such as stories of betrayal, corruption, or ethnic bias, which resonate with deep-seated identities and grievances. Once electorates internalize these narratives, they are more likely to base their voting choices on perceived truths rather than verified facts. This aligns with international findings, where studies in the United States and Brazil showed that exposure to politically motivated falsehoods online significantly altered public opinion about candidates (Guess et al., 2020).

### 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives: Influence of Digital Misinformation on Electorates' Perspective

The influence of digital misinformation on electorates' perception can be best understood through classical and contemporary communication theories. Among the most prominent are agenda-setting, framing, and cultivation theories, each of which provides critical insights into how electorates form attitudes in the digital age.

Agenda-setting theory posits that media may not tell audiences what to think but significantly influences what they think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of misinformation, agenda-setting is observed in how falsehoods dominate online discourse, making certain issues appear more important than others. On Twitter, coordinated disinformation campaigns frequently push hashtags into trending lists, creating the illusion of widespread concern. For example, Attai et al. (2024) demonstrated how misinformation-driven hashtags shaped the salience of electoral violence and ethnic divisions in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. This artificial amplification of issues can distort electorates' perception of candidates by elevating trivial or fabricated controversies over substantive policy discussions.

Framing theory extends the agenda-setting function by emphasizing how issues are presented and interpreted. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting aspects of reality and making them more salient in a communication text to promote a particular interpretation. In Nigeria, misinformation often frames candidates in ways that reinforce stereotypes or prejudices. Jimada (2023) highlighted how misinformation campaigns during the 2023 elections framed opponents as corrupt, tribalistic, or incompetent, thereby influencing electorates' cognitive and emotional responses. The framing of candidates through doctored images, selective statistics, or misleading headlines has a profound effect on how electorates perceive their viability, regardless of factual accuracy.

Cultivation theory provides an additional lens, focusing on the long-term cumulative effects of exposure to misinformation. Originally developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) to analyze television's role in shaping perceptions of reality, cultivation theory has been adapted to digital environments. Continuous exposure to falsehoods online cultivates distorted realities where electorates internalize misinformation as truth. Adu (2024) observed that repeated exposure to violent narratives on social media during the 2023 elections cultivated a perception among some Nigerians that electoral violence was inevitable, thereby eroding confidence in peaceful democratic participation. In Lagos, electorates repeatedly exposed to ethnic-based misinformation came to perceive the gubernatorial contest less as a competition of policies and more as a struggle between groups, illustrating the cultivation effect of misinformation.

### 2.3 Understanding Digital Misinformation Types

Digital misinformation refers to false, misleading, or manipulated information circulated online, often deliberately to influence public perception or voting behavior. In the electoral context, misinformation can take various forms, ranging from fabricated news stories to doctored multimedia content. Eze, Eze, Obasi, and Onwo (2025) categorize misinformation in Nigerian elections into five main types: fabricated news, doctored images or videos, misleading statistics, false polls, and hate speech. Similarly, Jimada (2023) emphasizes that misinformation campaigns are strategically designed to exploit emotional vulnerabilities, such as fear, anger, or ethnic bias, to manipulate electorates' perceptions.

Understanding these types is critical because each exerts distinct cognitive and emotional effects on electorates. Fabricated news presents completely false events or claims as factual, often targeting candidates or political parties. Doctored multimedia, including altered images or deepfake videos, can visually misrepresent events, lending credibility to false narratives (Attai et al., 2024). Misleading statistics and false polls manipulate quantitative information to suggest trends that do not exist, shaping perceptions of candidate viability or popularity. Hate speech, often disseminated alongside these other forms, exacerbates ethnic, religious, or partisan divisions and can intimidate electorates from engaging with the electoral process (Ajasa et al., 2023).

### 2.4 Understanding Information Interpretation in Political Contexts

On digital platforms like Twitter, interpretation is influenced by both content characteristics such as language, visuals, and framing and audience factors, including prior knowledge, political affiliation, and media literacy (Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2020).

In elections, electorates are confronted with an overload of information, often comprising verified news, opinion pieces, satire, and misinformation. Onuegbu (2024) notes that social media amplifies the speed and reach of both factual and false content, forcing users to make rapid judgments about credibility. In Lagos during the 2023 gubernatorial election, voters were exposed to thousands of tweets daily, ranging from campaign announcements to fabricated claims about candidates' personal lives, requiring constant discernment to avoid being misled (Ajasa et al., 2023).

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research methodology to examine the impact of digital misinformation on electorates' perception during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race. Quantitative research was considered appropriate because it allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data to establish trends, frequencies, and relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). This approach enabled the study to systematically measure electorates' exposure to misinformation, types of misinformation encountered, and perceptions of electoral trust in a structured manner. Descriptive survey research design was employed to gather data from the electorates. The descriptive survey design was considered suitable as it facilitated the collection of first-hand information from respondents regarding their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of digital misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State. The design allowed for quantitative analysis using structured questionnaires and statistical methods, ensuring that data could be presented using frequencies and percentages.

The population of the study consisted of registered electorates in Lagos State who were eligible to vote in the 2023 gubernatorial election. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), the estimated number of registered voters in Lagos State was approximately 5,747,193. The focus on electorates ensured that data captured reflected those directly affected by digital misinformation and capable of forming perceptions about candidates and the electoral process. Based on the estimated population of

5,747,193 electorates in Lagos State, a sample of 384 respondents was selected. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure proportional representation of electorates across different local government areas and demographic characteristics. This approach increased the reliability and generalizability of the findings within Lagos State. The researchers distributed the questionnaires physically and online where appropriate, providing clear instructions on how to respond.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1 Response Rate**

Distributed Copies	Retrieved copies	Percentage
384	220	57.3%

**Source: Primary Data 2025**

Out of the 384 questionnaires distributed, 220 were successfully returned, yielding a response rate of 57.3%. This high rate strengthens the reliability and validity of the study's results, as it reflects strong participation from the target population. Generally, a response rate exceeding 30% is regarded as excellent in survey research, making the 57.3% achieved in this study significantly above the acceptable threshold for representativeness and data credibility.

#### 4.1 Influence of Digital Misinformation on Perception

The respondents were asked to indicate how digital misinformation on Twitter influenced their perception during the 2023. A list of items was provided for them to tick as applicable. This is presented in table 2 as follow:

**Table 2: Influence of Digital Misinformation on Perception**

S/NO.	Influence of Digital Misinformation on Perception	Frequency	Percentage
1	It made me doubt the credibility of candidates	130	59.1%
2	It influenced my support for a particular candidate	124	56.4%
3	It reduced my trust in the electoral process	145	65.9%
4	It created confusion about political parties' agendas	123	55.9%
5	It had no influence on my perception	78	35.5%

**Source: Primary Data 2025**

Findings from Table 2 revealed that a majority of the respondents agreed that digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced their perception during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. Specifically, 65.9% of the respondents indicated that misinformation reduced their trust in the electoral process, while 59.1% stated that it made them doubt the credibility of candidates. In addition, 56.4% admitted that misinformation influenced their support for a particular candidate, and 55.9% reported that it created confusion about political parties' agendas. These findings suggested that over half of the electorates were psychologically and politically affected by false or misleading information circulating online, thereby shaping their attitudes and voting preferences.

Conversely, only 35.5% of the respondents claimed that digital misinformation had no influence on their perception. This implies that a smaller portion of the electorate either maintained strong political convictions or exercised higher levels of media literacy in filtering misleading online content.

The findings of this study revealed that digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced the perception of electorates during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. This outcome reinforces the growing consensus among scholars that online misinformation plays a central role in shaping political attitudes and decision-making processes. According to Attai et al. (2024), misinformation spread through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook often manipulates public discourse by framing political narratives in biased or deceptive ways. This distortion of information leads to emotional reactions, confusion about political issues, and polarization among voters, which ultimately impacts their electoral choices. Similarly, Jimada (2023) emphasized that during the 2023 Nigerian general elections, hate speech, false news, and manipulated content were widely circulated on social media, significantly influencing public perception of political parties and candidates.

The present study also aligns with Adu (2024), who explored the influence of online political discourse on electoral violence and information operations in Nigeria's democratic landscape. Adu found that exposure to online misinformation contributes to distrust in electoral institutions and the erosion of democratic values. This parallels the finding that misinformation reduced electorates' trust in the electoral process, showing that false or exaggerated political narratives can undermine citizens' faith in governance and democratic outcomes. Okeibunor and Nwaoboli (2024) similarly argued that social media, while a tool for civic engagement, also becomes a channel for spreading pre-election misinformation and propaganda that heightens voter anxiety and skepticism. Such manipulative content often blurs the line between verified information and political propaganda, leaving voters vulnerable to deceptive narratives.

The implications of these findings are both social and institutional. Socially, the prevalence of misinformation weakens the electorate's ability to make informed choices, fostering polarization and emotional decision-making rather than rational political evaluation. This distortion of perception can lead to the reinforcement of political biases, misinformation-induced conflicts, and decreased civic participation. Institutionally, the findings suggest that electoral bodies, political actors, and media regulators must intensify efforts to counter misinformation through digital literacy campaigns, transparent communication, and collaboration with social media platforms

to flag or remove false content. Strengthening public trust in credible information sources is essential for promoting electoral integrity and sustaining democratic governance. Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for proactive strategies to mitigate the psychological and political effects of misinformation in Nigeria's evolving digital democracy.

#### 4.2 Types of Misinformation

The respondents were asked to indicate the types of misinformation on Twitter that affected their perception during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race. A list of items was provided for them to tick as applicable. This is presented in table 3 as follow:

Table 3: Types of Misinformation

S/NO.	Types of Misinformation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Fake news articles about candidates	145	65.9%
2	Edited photos or videos (deepfakes, memes)	122	55.5%
3	False election result claims	145	65.9%
4	Misleading statistics or polls	123	55.9%
5	Hate speech or inciting messages	124	56.4%
6	None of the above affected me	79	35.9%

Source: Primary Data 2025

The analysis revealed that several forms of digital misinformation on Twitter significantly influenced electorates' perceptions during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. The most prevalent types of misinformation each recording above 50% response rate were fake news articles about candidates (65.9%), false election result claims (65.9%), hate speech or inciting messages (56.4%), misleading statistics or polls (55.9%), and edited photos or videos such as deepfakes and memes (55.5%). These findings indicate that the majority of respondents were exposed to a wide range of deceptive or manipulated information that shaped their opinions and understanding of the election process.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of respondents, 35.9%, indicated that none of the above types of misinformation affected them. This suggested that while a minority of electorates were either not influenced or were able to discern misleading information, the majority were affected by some form of digital misinformation circulating on Twitter during the election period.

The findings of this study demonstrated that various forms of digital misinformation, such as fake news, manipulated media, false election results, and hate speech, circulated widely on Twitter and significantly affected electorates' perceptions during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race. This outcome corroborates the argument of Eze, Eze, Obasi, and Onwo (2025), who found that social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, were major sources of politically motivated misinformation during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Their study revealed that misinformation often took the form of fabricated stories and doctored media designed to sway public opinion, promote propaganda, and discredit political opponents. Similarly, Ajasa et al. (2023) observed that social media narratives in the Lagos gubernatorial election were shaped by false claims and emotionally charged content, which influenced voters' perceptions and, in many cases, their final voting choices.

The current findings also align with Adu (2024), who asserted that online political discourse in Nigeria is increasingly dominated by information manipulation and digital propaganda, which distort democratic engagement and contribute to the erosion of political trust. Adu emphasized that such misinformation not only misleads the public but also undermines the credibility of electoral institutions and the democratic process. Furthermore, Onuegbu (2024) highlighted that the evolution of social media as a political space has blurred the boundary between fact-based reporting and digital manipulation, allowing misinformation to thrive in emotionally charged online environments. The widespread circulation of fake news and hate messages therefore reflects both the openness of the digital public sphere and its vulnerability to political exploitation.

The implications of these findings are profound for democratic governance and voter education in Nigeria. First, the prevalence of diverse forms of misinformation suggests that electorates are operating within an information ecosystem where truth and falsehood coexist, making it difficult for voters to form rational, evidence-based judgments. This challenges the integrity of democratic participation, as decisions are influenced not by policy debates but by emotional manipulation and sensationalism. Second, the findings underscore the urgent need for electoral management bodies, media regulators, and civil society organizations to promote digital literacy and fact-checking initiatives to help voters identify and resist misleading information. Lastly, these results highlight the importance of political accountability and responsible digital communication by candidates and their supporters. Without coordinated efforts to combat misinformation, the integrity of Nigeria's electoral system and the quality of political engagement risk being further compromised in future elections.

#### 4.3 Trust in the Electoral Process

The respondents were asked to indicate extent of exposure to misinformation on Twitter that affect their trust in the electoral process during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race. A list of items was provided for them to tick as applicable. This is presented in table 4 as follow:

**Table 4: Trust in the Electoral Process**

S/NO.	Trust in the Electoral Process	Frequency	Percentage
1	It made me believe the election was rigged	145	65.9%
2	It reduced my confidence in INEC's neutrality	132	60.0%
3	It made me less likely to vote	145	65.9%
4	It increased my political apathy	143	65.0%
5	It had no effect on my trust in the electoral process	76	34.5%

Source: Primary Data 2025

The findings revealed that a majority of the respondents experienced a decline in trust in the electoral process as a result of exposure to misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. The items with response rates above 50% include: belief that the election was rigged (65.9%), reduced confidence in INEC's neutrality (60.0%), decreased likelihood to vote (65.9%), and increased political apathy (65.0%). These results indicate that misinformation significantly undermined the credibility of the electoral process and weakened the perceived legitimacy of electoral institutions among many voters.

Conversely, only 34.5% of respondents stated that misinformation had no effect on their trust in the electoral process, implying that while a minority of electorates remained confident in the integrity of the election, the overwhelming majority experienced diminished trust and heightened skepticism toward the electoral system and its administration.

The findings revealed that digital misinformation on Twitter substantially eroded electorates' trust in the electoral process during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. This aligns with the study by Eze et al. (2025), who established that the widespread circulation of political misinformation on social media in Nigeria's 2023 elections weakened public confidence in the credibility of electoral institutions and outcomes. Their research emphasized that online platforms often became breeding grounds for false claims about rigging, manipulation, and institutional bias, thereby fostering a general atmosphere of distrust among the electorate. Similarly, Okeibunor and Nwaoboli (2024) found that misinformation and propaganda circulated before and during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria led to growing disillusionment with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as many voters questioned the fairness and transparency of the election process.

The findings also corroborate Attai et al. (2024), who observed through a sentiment analysis of Twitter discourse that negative narratives dominated discussions surrounding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Their analysis showed that trending misinformation—such as allegations of election rigging, doctored results, and fake news about candidates—contributed to the formation of pessimistic attitudes and decreased participation among citizens. In the context of Lagos State, the persistence of such narratives likely intensified voter skepticism, reinforcing apathy and disengagement from the political process.

The implications of these findings are significant for democratic governance and electoral integrity in Nigeria. First, they suggest that misinformation not only distorts political perception but also threatens the legitimacy of elections by undermining public confidence in key institutions such as INEC. This erosion of trust can discourage voter turnout, fuel political polarization, and weaken the foundations of democratic accountability. Second, the results highlight the urgent need for proactive public communication strategies by electoral bodies and media organizations to counter misinformation with verified and transparent information. Developing early-warning systems for detecting false narratives and promoting civic education on digital literacy are critical steps toward mitigating misinformation's impact. Ultimately, building resilience against misinformation is essential to preserving the credibility of Nigeria's electoral processes and strengthening citizens' trust in democratic governance.

#### 4.4 Identifying and Interpreting Misinformation

The respondents were asked to indicate how they identify or interpret misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial race. A list of items was provided for them to tick as applicable. This is presented in table 5 as follow:

**Table 5: Identifying and Interpreting Misinformation**

S/NO.	Identifying and Interpreting Misinformation	Frequency	Percentage
1	By checking multiple news sources	131	59.5%
2	By relying on official INEC statements	167	75.9%
3	By following verified Twitter accounts	100	45.5%
4	By using fact-checking platforms	78	35.5%
5	By discussing with friends/family before believing	124	56.4%
6	I could not identify misinformation easily	159	72.3%

Source: Primary Data 2025

The findings revealed that most respondents demonstrated varying levels of awareness and strategies in identifying misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. Those with response rates above 50% included relying on official INEC statements (75.9%), being unable to easily identify misinformation (72.3%), checking multiple news sources (59.5%), and discussing with friends or family before believing information (56.4%). These results indicate that while a significant number of electorates

attempted to verify information through credible or social means, a large proportion still found it difficult to differentiate between factual and misleading content.

Conversely, responses below 50% included following verified Twitter accounts (45.5%) and using fact-checking platforms (35.5%), suggesting that fewer respondents depended on structured or professional fact-checking tools to verify information. This implies that while many voters relied on informal verification methods, digital literacy gaps still limited their ability to critically assess online political information.

The findings reveal that a significant number of respondents relied on official statements from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and cross-verification with multiple news sources to identify misinformation on Twitter during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial election. This aligns with Eze et al. (2025), who found that citizens tend to place higher trust in formal and institutional communication channels during periods of political uncertainty. Similarly, Okeibunor and Nwaoboli (2024) observed that the credibility of official electoral bodies plays a crucial role in shaping public interpretation of information shared on digital platforms, especially in environments where misinformation is rampant. The reliance on discussions with friends and family further supports the view of Attai et al. (2024), who argued that interpersonal communication remains a critical element in building shared understanding and combating false information in politically charged contexts.

However, the study also found that a considerable number of respondents were unable to easily identify misinformation, which underscores the challenges of digital literacy and information discernment among voters. This difficulty in verification may expose electorates to manipulation and misinformation, as suggested by Eze et al. (2025), who emphasized that limited critical media skills make individuals more susceptible to fake news and propaganda. The relatively low use of fact-checking platforms and verified social media accounts indicates a gap between information exposure and digital competence, reflecting Okeibunor and Nwaoboli's (2024) observation that many citizens in developing democracies lack awareness of online verification tools.

These findings suggest the need for enhanced voter education and digital literacy initiatives to equip citizens with skills for recognizing and verifying information online. Electoral bodies and media organizations should strengthen collaborations to promote public access to credible and verified election-related information. Furthermore, awareness campaigns on the use of fact-checking platforms could reduce the spread and impact of misinformation, fostering greater public trust and informed participation in the electoral process.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the impact of digital misinformation on electoral perception among Lagos electorates during the 2023 gubernatorial race was largely negative. Findings revealed that false information circulating on Twitter distorted voters' understanding of political issues, influenced their opinions about candidates, and weakened their trust in the electoral process. Misinformation fostered confusion, cynicism, and political apathy, thereby undermining democratic participation and the credibility of electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Although social media provided a platform for political engagement and information sharing, its misuse through deliberate spread of falsehoods proved detrimental to informed decision-making. Therefore, the overall impact of digital misinformation on electoral perception was bad, posing serious implications for electoral integrity and democratic governance in Nigeria.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed

1. It is recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant stakeholders develop a comprehensive digital communication strategy to counter misinformation in real time during elections. Collaboration with reputable media outlets, civil society organisations, and social media companies should be strengthened to ensure prompt clarification of misleading information and to promote verified electoral updates to the public.
2. It is recommended that the National Orientation Agency (NOA), in partnership with social media platforms, implement digital media monitoring and regulation frameworks that detect and flag misleading content swiftly. Furthermore, political actors and campaign teams should be subjected to strict penalties for deliberate disinformation, while journalists and influencers should be encouraged to adopt ethical online communication practices to safeguard the integrity of political discourse.
3. It is recommended that INEC intensify transparency initiatives such as open data portals, live-streaming of key electoral activities, and timely dissemination of verified results. In addition, civic education programs should be expanded to rebuild public trust by educating citizens on the electoral process, the role of INEC, and how to differentiate between credible and false election-related information.
4. It is recommended that digital literacy and media education be incorporated into national civic and voter education programmes. Collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, and non-governmental organisations should be established to train citizens especially youths on critical information evaluation skills and effective use of fact-checking tools such as Dubawa, Africa Check, and FactCheckHub to enhance informed participation in democratic processes.

#### SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

1. Future studies should extend the investigation beyond Lagos State to include other geopolitical zones in Nigeria to enable comparative analysis of how regional, cultural, and socio-economic factors influence electorates' susceptibility to digital misinformation during elections.
2. Subsequent research should adopt a mixed-method approach by combining surveys with content analysis of social media posts or interviews with electoral stakeholders to gain deeper insights into the sources, patterns, and psychological effects of digital misinformation on voter behaviour and democratic participation.

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