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## A Review of the Role of Social Media in Nigerian Youth Participation in Elections

**A. M. IDIALU**

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Bingham University, Karu,  
Nasarawa State  
[gamboakutamichelle@gmail.com](mailto:gamboakutamichelle@gmail.com), +2348061264112

**J. G. AKPOKO**

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, Faculty of Agriculture, Ahmadu Bello University,  
Zaria, Kaduna State  
[josephgamboakpoko@gmail.com](mailto:josephgamboakpoko@gmail.com), +2348033973686

### Abstract

The youth's seeming apathy towards politics has continued to resonate among researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders. However, the emergence of social media has opened up new frontiers for citizens, especially the youths who are known to be the most populous social media natives. The main purpose of this study is to explore how social media serves as a tool for political sensitisation, mobilisation and influence on participation of Nigerian youths in the electoral process. The study relied on desk review of existing secondary data to establish youths' utilization of social media and participation in the electoral process. It presents perspectives on media, social media, youths, youth participation, challenges of social media usage in the electoral processes and recommendations. The study is also hinged on technological determinism theory. Findings of study reveal that, with the right enablement, the Nigerian youth will be actively involved in the political process. It also reveals that lack of professionalism, fake news and hate speeches are some challenges of social media usage for political activities and recommends that laws to punish erring users of social media be considered seriously when promoting the use of social media among the youths.

**Keywords:** Youth, Nigerian, Social Media, Participation and Electoral Process

### Introduction

Media has progressed significantly through the years. Cave paintings, scroll writings, and early performances prove that even before the term media was invented, it had already been practiced around the world in various ways. Now that the world is in a generation filled with new technologies and innovations, receiving, gaining, and giving of information has changed. As the world evolves, it has managed to adapt and grow to suffice the needs of the people (Nwala et al., 2020).

The Internet, invented by computer scientists, Bob Kahn and Vint Cerf, started during the early 60s in the United States of America. However, it only became available in Nigeria in the 1990s (Rice et al., 2022). This invention was initially made for government researchers to share information, but, as the Internet became widely known in the world, adjustments and improvements have been made to fit the necessity of many consumers. The social media were invented in later years and have now become widely known in the world and used for fostering relationships and interactions, particularly among the youths (Aderinto et al., 2018). According to Dollarhide (2023), *Facebook* is the largest social media platform in the world with over 2.9 billion users, though it has similar audiences to other platforms, such as *Twitter* and *Instagram*. As reported by Dollarhide, (2023), *Facebook* has recorded over 2.96 billion users while other social media platforms have the following numbers of users: *YouTube* (2.51 billion users), *WhatsApp* (2 billion users), *Instagram* (2 billion users), *WeChat* (1.31 billion users), *TikTok* (1.05 billion users), *Facebook Messenger* (931 million users), *Douyin* (715 million users), *Telegram* (700 million users) and *Snapchat* (635 million users).

In another report by Ashong (2021), it was established that social media continues to play a prominent role in the overall societal development, especially politics. With its instant messaging and feedback potentials, the social media is doing a far greater job in enlightening the people, based on the sophistication of media tools available to it. For instance, the Internet-based networking sites, especially *Facebook*,



*Twitter, WhatsApp* and *YouTube* have become the major drivers of political conversations, particularly during elections (Wogu et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, the power of social media for mass mobilisation was put to the test with the #EndSARS social movement of the year 2000 which is still fresh in our memories. What started as an innocuous online protest over police brutality snowballed into a social movement that assumed more frightened dimensions (Abdullahi et al., 2020). From the demand to #EndSARS, the youth vigorously used the social media to mobilise themselves to further demand for greater accountability, greater efficiency in government, change in the socio-political and economic structures of the nation which resulted in destructions of lives and properties across several cities (Odoyi et al., 2020; Wogu et al., 2020; Akpan et al., 2022).

Apart from spicing up the media space, the networking sites play dominant roles in influencing crucial decisions in the area of politics, electioneering and popular culture. Social media has become popular in the world now more than ever. It has managed to break down barriers in different aspects of society, and politics is not an exception.

### **Conceptual Exploration**

The media is the communication outlet or tool that is used to receive or give data or information. It is defined as “one of the means or channels of general communication, or entertainment in society, and it comprises print and broadcast channels such as newspapers, radio, or television” (Dollarhide, 2023). Social media on the other hand has been defined by Davis (2016), as the set of interactive internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content. According to Davis (2016), they are an increasingly pervasive aspect of everyday life and one that cannot be viewed as something separate from physical reality, but as an integral part of an interwoven social landscape.

Social media tools are, therefore, social instruments of communication that promotes participation, connectedness, and opportunity to disseminate information across geographical boundaries for fostering relationships and interactions among people (Ruijgrok, 2017). They represent the ideal vehicle and information base to gauge public opinion on policies and political positions as well as to build community support for candidates running for public offices (Rice et al., 2022). The commonly used social media platforms include: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp and YouTube while the others with minimal usage include *WeChat, Facebook Messenger, Douyin, Telegram* and *Snapchat* (Morris, 2022). The social media, a modern trend in information and knowledge dissemination, has taken communication beyond the limitations of the traditional way of reaching the electorate and socialising, making it an essential part in the electoral process (Akpan et al., 2022).

The word “Youth” is one of those words difficult to define because it depends on who is defining it, for what purpose and in what context (occupational, political, educational, social, religious, legal, cultural, etc.). The United Nations (2002), however, defines a youth as an individual between 15-24 years of age. This is based on the fact that children attain puberty from between age 12 to 14, thus by 15 years of age, every individual must have attained puberty and hence no longer a child. The United Nations’ (2002) definition of youths as young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 necessarily excludes many youths in the tradition of Nigerian societies where the youths are any persons a particular society deems as youths.

Therefore, the notion of youth as “a bachelor, still undergoing training or looking for first employment” as defined by Perez-Morales (1996) is unrealistic when applied to Nigeria. For instance, an average Nigerian rural girl of 15 years in some parts of Nigeria is a woman, because she is married and, therefore, cannot technically be classified as a “youth”, going by Perez-Morales’s definition. Also, many children under the ages of 18 years in Nigeria are school leavers in the sense that they are never school beginners. Similarly, many people above the ages of 40 years are still undergoing training or looking for first employment in Nigeria. They are the best hope for a future development of any society.

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) defines the youth to be people between 18 - 30 years of age and that is why a person less than 18 years is not eligible to be a



registered voter because he is still a child and above 30 years is not eligible to participate in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) because he is an adult (Eremie, 2002; Ovwigho et al., 2004). The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, therefore, gives ample opportunities to youth to participate in the democratic processes (Adeoti et al., 2014), as the minimum age for voting is 18 years. In this study, however, youth are those people between 18 and 35 years of age. This is in line with the Not-Too-Young-To-Run bill which has reduced the age qualification for President from 40 to 35; Governor from 35 to 30; Senator from 35 to 30; House of Representatives membership from 30 to 25, State House of Assembly membership from 30 to 25, Chairman from 30 and above, and Councilor from 18 and above. These categories of people are considered to be mature human beings, innovative, high-risk takers, want quick results, are more geographically mobile, and amending easily to change, however, with their time, energies and potentials are unable to find full employment. They are those people with zeal, exuberance, dynamism, and are volatile in nature. They are regarded as the young people who are nonetheless a transient category of human beings, as sooner or later they will leave this category. This age bracket has much time, energy and opportunities to accomplish their goals in life, in consonance with the saying “a fool at 35 is a fool forever”. The main purpose of this study therefore, is to determine how social media serves as a tool for political sensitisation, mobilisation and participation of the youth in Nigeria.

According to ActionAid (2018), youth participation in the electoral process is usually considered to be an important mechanism for achieving development gains, strengthening accountability, and empowering the youth. Participation is defined as the act of taking part in an activity or event leaves room to establish a universal definition of participation. Understanding participation is often assumed; in practice, as development activities, participation is often based on differing perceptions of the level and quality of participation being sought, partly because nothing is implied as to participation in decision-making, party leadership, in elections, as voters, in selection of candidates or as candidates, and in governance.

Youth participation, therefore, may range from “token involvement of the youth”, to “autonomous decision-making at the local and national levels”, “consultations” and “formal political empowerment”. At its most basic, youth participation is “to take part”; this is very simplistic and implies that everyone is participating at some level in every activity. Participation can be top-down or bottom-up, uniform or diverse, simple or complex, static or dynamic, controllable or uncontrollable, predictable or unpredictable (ActionAid, 2018).

Elections on the other hand are a means of participation within any democratic space. Elections are very significant in any democracy as they are means by which youths can express their views about the governance at the national and local levels. Elections facilitate youth participation by determining the kinds of representatives to hold public office (Chikarema, 2013). Youths are the best hope for a future development of any country. When youths are not disenfranchised and marginalised during elections, it makes government to not only become accountable and responsive to local needs but also involve the youths in decision-making. So, elections constitute a platform for youth participation in the choice of candidates who best articulate their felt needs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on the technological determinism theory by Marshal McLuhan (1962). The theory suggests that technology shapes and controls society and human behaviour. The term ‘technological determinism’ was coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) and this theory revolves around the proposition that technology in any given society defines its nature. This theory argues that technology is the driving force behind social and economic change, and that society adapts to the technology that is available to it. One of the main assumptions of the theory is that technology is an autonomous force, meaning that it has a life of its own and is not shaped by social or economic factors. According to this view, technology shapes society and culture, rather than the other way around. Technological determinism is a reductionist theory that aims to provide a causative link between technology and a society’s nature. It tries to explain as to whom or what could have a controlling power in human affairs. The theory questions the degree to which human thought or action is influenced by technological factors and technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course of history.



Technological Determinism theory further argues that the technology of a given society is a fundamental influencer of the various ways in which a society exists, and changes in technology are the primary and most important source that leads to change in the society. Technological determinism, according to the theory, manifests itself at various levels. Initially, it starts with the introduction of newer technologies, introduces various changes and at times these changes can also lead to a loss of existing knowledge as well.

However, critics of the theory argue that it is overly simplistic and fails to take into account the complex ways in which technology and society interact. They argue further that technology is not a neutral force, but rather is shaped by social and economic factors, and that technology can be used in different ways depending on the context in which it is used. Some other critics also argue that technological determinism is a form of technological fatalism, as it suggests that we are powerless to resist the effects of technology on society and culture, and that we must simply accept the changes that technology brings.

This theory is applicable in this study because it explains how technology influences human behaviour. With the advancement in technology and the way humans communicate today through social media, it proves to be a very useful tool for mass mobilisation for any cause of human interest and as Karl Marx rightly opined, technological progress will lead to newer ways of production in a society which will ultimately influence the cultural, political and economic aspects of a society, and thereby inevitably change society itself.

### **Youths and the Use of Social Media for Political Participation**

Nigeria has had seven (7) successfully conducted national elections since its return to democracy; namely the 1999, the 2003, the 2007, the 2011, the 2015, the 2019 and the 2023 general election. The 1993 national election was annulled. On 25th February 2023, Nigerians went to the polls to elect their president and representatives for the National Assembly and on March 18th, 2023 to elect the state governors and members of House of Assemblies. This marks the seventh consecutive elections since the return to civilian rule in 1999 and attests to a growing democratic culture. However, the 2023 general election recorded the highest number of 93,469,008 registered voters (INEC, 2023). Presidential candidates were thus expected to reach out to as many of these registered voters across the country as possible. This must have been a herculean task. While some decades ago, candidates must reach out to these people in persons, the emergence of the social media sites, have brought a paradigm shift in the electioneering process and radical transformation in the process of sensitising and creating political awareness no matter the size.

Accordingly, Odoyi et al. (2020), presents social media as a tool for increased youth participation in the political environment. Various studies in Nigeria have investigated the use of social media for political participation, Shuaibu et al., (2015) for instance, explored the extent of Nigeria's electorate's involvement with social media for the electioneering process and found that political campaigns through the social media had a significant effect on youths' decision-making and participation in the Nigeria's 2011 and 2015 elections respectively.

Similarly, Abdulrauf (2016), appraised the utilisation of social media for political communication in the 2011 Nigerian presidential election to determine whether voters' choice of presidential candidates was influenced by their social media use. The results revealed that majority of the choices of the youths among the presidential candidates were indeed influenced by their use of social media. The youths responded that the two selected presidential candidates were popular because they used social media in their political campaigns. The findings of Abdulrauf (2016), on cognitive engagement and online political participation on *Facebook* and *Twitter* among youths in Nigeria reveal that access to political information on *Facebook* and *Twitter* was one of the factors that influenced online political participation via Facebook and Twitter among the youths. Ahmad et al., (2019), also show that social media played a major role in mobilising, creating awareness, as well as participation of the youths in the electoral process. Apuke et al., (2018) also reported the implications of social media usage in the electoral processes and campaigns in the 2011 and 2015 national elections and how the social media influenced the thoughts of many young people.

The platforms also afford youths a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance, thus, advancing the tenets of participatory democracy that sees



the media as debate avenues which aid tremendously the actualisation of involvement in politics (Funmilola et al., 2020). Social media also offer a range of potentials for innovative governance and finding new ways of governing, by creating an opportunity of listening to youths' opinion pool online, thereby setting ideas about the needs of the youth including their reactions towards the manifestos of political parties, programmes and decision-making processes. The social media can equally provide politicians with the opportunity to be free to discuss with the youths in an informal setting, to assess the political atmosphere even before venturing into any campaign. Okafor et al., (2020), also reported that over the years, social media have become important sources of political participation for young people, who are normally not attracted to politics and the platforms have become one of the best tools to assess the popularity of a political candidate among youths.

The social media also helps politicians to appeal to the youths, understand their humour as well as their accessibility, thereby bringing them closer and in constant contact with the youths (Akpan et al., 2022). Recognising these benefits, Nigerian politicians also embraced and exploited the media for political campaigns during the 2011 presidential elections. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria was in fact, the first test of the use of social media by political parties, political candidates and civil society organisations in Nigeria. The election was historic in the sense that it was the first time that social media facilitated political communication and participation. Since then, social media have been deployed in the electoral processes in Nigeria, as a study by Dagona et al., (2013), found a significant relationship between social media usage and political participation and mobilisation among Nigerian youth.

Similarly, Akpan et al., (2022), found that Nigerian youths who spent more time on social media participated in campaigns during elections. These studies have been able to reveal increasing use of social media for political participation among Nigerian youths. Furthermore, a study by Abdullahi et al., (2020), have shown that with the emergence of social media, the participation of Nigerian youths in politics has increased because the social media as veritable platforms for political socialisation have been able to attract young people to the electoral process.

In the United States for instance, former President Barack Obama's election in 2008 is an example of how social media was utilised for mobilisation of the electorates, as his popularity with youth voters was one of the key elements of his campaign, giving him a large margin over competitors in a number of strategic States. Barack Obama's election in 2008 used social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *Snapchat* as some of the means of communication on the political process, and these increased his popularity amongst youth voters given him a large margin over the oppositions in a number of strategic States. In another example, use of the social media as veritable platforms was credited with the decisive votes in the 2012 election of Barack Obama for a second term as President; when he won 67% of the national youth votes, proving more popular in crucial States such as Florida, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, over his opponent Mitt Romney (Bataineh et al., 2015). Similarly, Donald Trump's usage of *Twitter* in his 2016 Presidential campaign had a huge impact on his electoral victory (Morris, 2019). Furthermore, the President of Kenya Dr. William Samoei Ruto, has a transformative social media platform which provides the youth to directly reach him. Unlike previous Kenya leaders, President Ruto embraced this opportunity for unfiltered interaction with the youth, a stark contrast to former Presidents who shied away from the social media due to relentless criticisms.

Globally, a majority of the youths adopt social networking media for communication with friends, family members and the general public. Abubakar (2012), reported that as far back as 2010, about 72 per cent of American youths (age 18-29 years) used social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *MySpace*. Similarly, Joseph (2014) reported that *Facebook* and *Twitter* were two social media systems that were popular among university students in Cape Town, South Africa.

Furthermore, Aharony (2012) as well as Adaja et al., (2013), have described youth as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) natives and prolific users of social media. This assertion has been corroborated by Chatora (2012) who reports that the social media has spread to all nooks and crannies of Nigeria and its usage has become so common among the youths. Chinedu-Okeke et al., (2016) summed it up by describing the Internet as the chief host of social media sites, while the youths are the most predominant clients.



United Nations Development Programme-UNDP (2024) reported that with the emergence of social media, the participation of youths in politics has increased because social media are veritable platforms of political socialisation that are used to attract young citizens to the processes. Moving into the most recent presidential election in Nigeria, the youths demonstrated the tremendous power of social media when they created the “Obidient Movement” and used the social media to support Mr. Peter Obi, a former Governor and Nigeria’s Labour Party (LP) Presidential candidate, a third political force which emerged, making the February 25, 2023 presidential election a three-horse race for the first time in Nigerian political history. It must be stressed, however, that the “Obidient Movement” was not created by Mr. Peter Obi, but was a fallout of the social media overblown #EndSARS killings, which the collective anger by Nigerian youths led to its formation and Mr. Obi became a beneficiary in the 2023 Presidential election. That singular case, especially the effective coordination of the youths in using the social media lends credence to the power and influence of social media in the Country’s politics. Indeed, UNDP (2024), commenting on this have said that, in the 2023 general election, majority of the youths in Nigeria used the social media, to participate in political advocacy, lobbying, blogging about political issues, political campaigns, communicating directly with politicians, monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices. These studies, therefore, all establish the fact that the active participation of the youth in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 Nigerian national elections were largely influenced by social media usage.

### **Challenges of Social Media Usage by Nigerian Youths for Political Awareness**

Even though the advent of social media in the political arena has drastically impacted the politicians and voters alike; the use of social media for political participation has its challenges. Some of these challenges include: prohibitive cost of acquiring a smartphone; social media network capacity and use in the rural areas remain poor and epileptic; fake news on social media; unverified, unclear, faceless, and unproven information; cyber-bullying; hacking; social media addiction; security issues; ruining of credible candidates’ reputation; cheating; health hazards; glamorisation of drugs and alcohol, hate speeches and incitements which disintegrate the Party members and the electorate alike etc (Alquraan et al., 2017; BBC, 2018; Morris, 2019; Adullahi et al., 2020; Wogu et al., 2020; Akpan et al., 2022, and Muzammil, 2023). these challenges have been summarized as follows:

1. *Prohibitive cost of acquiring a smartphone and high rate of poverty:* One of the major challenges is the prohibitive cost of acquiring a smartphone amidst the high rate of poverty and lack of jobs. Poverty and lack of jobs are hitting young people, this means that many young people, who would have loved to offer their services by seeking public offices, cannot do so because they don’t even have the money for rent and feeding let alone hitting the campaign road. Therefore, it can be said, that the issues of funding, poverty and biased electoral process are contributing hindrances of Nigeria youths’ full participation in the electoral process in Nigeria. Indeed, due to the current economic hardship in Nigeria, it would be a herculean task for the youths to be able to market a political party that would give them space to vie for positions in the electoral processes. In addition, Social media network capacity and use in the rural areas remain poor and epileptic, as some locations are yet to be fully covered by telecommunication services that can enable the effective utilisation of social media by residents of such areas, which affects the full participation of several youths in the electoral process, when using the social media for mobilisation and political participation. In rural areas in particular, where not everyone has access to the internet, the few who have are usually accorded a lot of respect. Many people in the locality rely on them for news updates. These social media users in such areas are more of opinion leaders, hence they exert certain informal influence on others and this can pave way to fake news updates.
2. *Fake news on social media:* The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) defines fake news as “completely false information, photos or videos, purposefully created and spread to confuse, deceive or misinform the public. These include old photographs shared as new and satires that mean no harm,



but can fool people” (BBC, 2018). Fake news is deliberate falsehood designed not merely to mislead but to poison the minds of the people and force them to act in a manner detrimental to the collective interests of the society. It is also obvious that fake news published on volatile issues such as religion or tribal politics can lead to hate speech. Hate speech, in turn can lead to violence or discrimination or hostility. The social media has brought positive changes to the way we live and communicate, however, it is a double-edged sword, it can cut for us or cut against us. Unarguably, fake news abounds in social media. In Nigeria, for instance, there have been many cases of fraudulent news items. The recent one being the declaration of election winners even when voting was still on-going in the constituencies, which were awash in the social media platforms. Although it is often difficult to trace the origin of these news, they are believed to be first fabricated by Twitter users, from where they spread to other social media outlets such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Instructively, cases of fake news in Nigerian social media are on the increase, and, unless measures are put in place to checkmate the ugly trend, it will continue to cause havoc in the country. The social media, therefore, has the potentials to contribute to transforming politics just as it can be used to undermine it. In Nigeria, as in the rest of the world, we have seen elements of both in action.

3. *Citizen Journalism*: Most of the reports on politics on social media are based on unverifiable, unclear, faceless, and unproven information. Often times the information, most especially on political allegations are totally irresponsible and unethical, and the intention seriously questionable, intimidating and detrimental to peaceful electoral processes. Most of the social media managers are not properly schooled and groomed to exhibit a high level of professionalism by checking, verifying, report accurately and responsibly in line with the media codes of conduct. Fake stories have many implications and are highly dangerous to the society if not properly checked. They can undermine free, fair and credible elections, and the unity and peace of a country. In addition, faceless unregistered supporters may use hate speech to incite the general public to cause violence during the electoral process.
4. *Cyber-bullying*: According to a report published by PewCenter.org most of the politicians have become victims of the cyber-bullying over the past decade. Since anyone can create a fake account and do anything without being traced, it has become quite easy for anyone to bully on the Internet. Threats, intimidating messages and rumors can be sent to the masses to create discomfort and political chaos in the society. The unfortunate use of unguarded and inflammatory social media messages, speeches and incitements can disintegrate the Party members as well as the electorate, instead of building their unity.
5. *Hacking, Fraud and Scams*: Personal data and privacy can easily be hacked and shared on the Internet, which can lead to financial losses and sometimes, even loss to personal life. Similarly, identity theft is another issue that can give financial losses to anyone, by hacking their personal accounts. Several personal Twitter and Facebook accounts have been hacked in the past and the hackers had posted materials that affected the individuals’ personal lives. This is one of the dangerous disadvantages of social media and every user is advised to keep their personal data and accounts safe to avoid such accidents. Furthermore, security issues involving security agencies are becoming common as they can have access to people’s personal accounts, which makes their privacy almost compromised. You never know when you are visited by any investigation officer regarding any issue that you knowingly or unknowingly discussed over the internet. In addition, several examples are available where individuals have scammed and committed fraud through the social media. For example, this list contains some of the social media scams that are done all the time. In addition, during political activities, many youths tend to use social media platforms to cheat politicians. After pretending to be their staunch supporters, on election day, they turn to vote other candidates. Similarly, candidates may pretend to be good on social media platforms by providing fake feelings and incorrect information. Social media can also easily ruin someone’s reputation just by creating a false story and spreading across the social media. Similarly, businesses can also suffer losses due to bad reputation being conveyed over the social media.



6. *Addiction:* The addictive part of the social media on youths is very bad and can disturb personal lives as well. The teenagers are the most affected by the addiction of the social media. They get involved very extensively and are eventually cut off from the society. It can also waste individual time that could have been utilised for productive tasks and activities. Addiction has also raised health concerns, as excessive usage of social media can have a negative impact on the health of users and this may bring disorder in the youth's routine life. Research has proved how bad health can be negatively affected by the excessive use of the social media.
7. *Glamorization of Drugs and Alcohol:* One other challenge of the social media for youth is that a youth may start to follow others who are wealthy or drug addicted and share their views and videos on the web, which eventually inspires him/her to follow the same and get addicted to the drugs and alcohol. This bad vice can cut the youth off from reality and in times of political transitions, the youth may be unaware of the power they wield to make positive changes in governance through active participation in the electoral process and as such efforts for mobilisation and political participation through social media, may fail.

It is also worthy to note that, the topic of bots affecting the outcome of elections has recently become a mainstream topic during elections. Bots are used to leak fake news stories, spread dissension and create fake profiles on social media platforms that sow divide between people and political parties. Usage of social media for political participation also exacerbates the problem of echo chambers, with everyone feeling the need to be on one side or the other. People only see contents and viewpoints they agree with when they scroll down their news feed, which makes it unlikely that voters will ever have to sincerely defend their political stance unless they actively seek people and media outlets with opposing political views. In addition, the use of social media for political participation allows for foreign interference in elections (BBC, 2018).

Most social media sites have a severe lack of online authenticity. People use *Snapchat*, for instance, to share their exciting adventures, post about how much they love their significant other on *Facebook*, and load up their *Instagram* pages with heavily staged photos. But in reality, you have no way of knowing whether this is all a farce. While it looks great on the surface, that person could be in massive debt, on bad terms with their significant others, or desperate for *Instagram* as a form of validation (Morris, 2019).

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to strengthen youth participation in the electoral process in Nigeria through the utilisation of social media.

- i. Government should as a matter of urgency, work towards improving the economy of Nigeria through implementation of workable policies that will help reduce recurring cases of inflation. This will in turn lead to a reduction in cost of affording smartphones, because when the economy is booming, there will be more job creations and employment opportunities for the teeming youth population, which will thereby afford them the resources needed acquire the required tools to facilitate healthy engagements on social media. In addition, erratic telecommunication services in rural areas should be improved, to give youths in such localities an equal opportunity to have a voice on social media particularly as it relates to politics and political processes in Nigeria.
- ii. Increased attention should be paid to the utilisation of social media to encourage youth participation in the electoral process, to ensure inclusive elections and accountable governance. Nigerian youths should be encouraged to actively use the social media to campaign against being used as "errand boys" by the older generation of politicians. Nigeria will get better, only when young people believe in themselves and stop collecting handouts from the Nigerian elites that do not mean well for their political growth. This could help curb the cases of fake news being pedalled by desperate politicians during the electioneering process. The kind of synergy and mobilisation towards the signing of "The Not-Too-Young-To-Run bill" is a further testimony that young people of this country can mobilise themselves using the social media to stop the "Ghana-Must-Go" politicians, irrespective of the current struggling economy, as they did in the past and contributed in stopping the military and enthroned democracy in the country.



- iii. Encourage social media Networks to support issues of credibility and acceptability over the social media through quality journalism. There is need for professional and continuous training for conventional and citizen journalists on verifying fake news. There is also the need for increased social media literacy for the public, particularly the youths, on how to access, verify and respond to authentic social media messages. The social media managers should endeavour to exhibit a high level of professionalism at all times by checking, verifying, report accurately and responsibly in line with the media code of conduct. This can help to reduce the spread of fake news as fake stories have many implications and are highly dangerous to the society if not properly checked. They can undermine free, fair and credible elections, and the unity and peace of a country. In addition, regulatory bodies such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) deserve additional support and autonomy to carry out their duties. There is also the need for an increased involvement of professional bodies such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUT), the Radio and Television and the Theatre Arts Workers Union (RATTAWU) in calling peddlers of fake news and non-authentic social media messages to order. Also, the Nigerian National Assembly should enact a stringent law that will punish fake news peddlers.
- iv. The issue of cyber-bullying is a global issue. However, the Nigerian National Assemble can enact laws with stringent punishments for perpetrators of cyber-bullying; this can help curb the menace because where there are penalties for wrong actions, perpetrators will thread with caution. There is also the need to encourage partnership and networking among credible social media organisations within and outside the country to help track cases of cyber-bullying.
- v. Another recommendation that can increase youth participation in politics is the reduction of nomination fees for the youths. Investigations show that Nigerian political parties are yet to reduce nomination fees for the youths unlike for women who merely pay for the expression of interest forms to enable them to contest for elective positions. Such gesture is not enshrined in any of the constitutions of the parties currently. Such gestures should also be extended to the youths. If that is done, the number of the youth with political ambitions may increase. Furthermore, the political class must open up the political space for Nigerian youths who are being excluded in the scheme of things. All those in government and politics must commit to opening the political space to allow for greater participation by our nation's youths. Political leaders must act now and consistently to dismantle those practices and systems that exclude young people from political participation or limit them to operating on the fringes as foot soldiers in the battle for spoils.
- vi. Finally, the youths are generally cautioned against taking the current social media commentary too seriously due to the challenges of fake news and incited hate speeches. The need to fact-check information before believing is paramount. The youths are encouraged to pay increased attention to social media usage an accountability mechanism towards ensuring increased youth participation in the electoral process.

### **Conclusion**

Given the growing popularity and use of social media and the way they influence peoples' private and public lives, this study adds to the understanding of how and why social media use influences youth participation in political activities. The study has also been able to expand the current literature by explicating that youths in Nigeria use social media to participate in political processes. The study also concludes that inclusivity, the high cost of acquiring a smartphone as well as party forms, poor network services, lack of professionalism, regulation to guide the use of social media for political participation etc, are some of the challenges of using social media for political mobilisation. Therefore, bearing in mind some of the challenges of using social media for political mobilisation and participation, the youths should also be wary of fake news and hate speeches that can derail the system. The recommendations of the study should be considered seriously when promoting the use of social media among youths, and should be taken more seriously by social media developers and stakeholders, as safety measures need to be put into consideration when designing social media platforms that would be accepted and used by intended users.



It is easier now more than ever to be an educated voter. Everything is at our finger tips. The Internet is an online climate where young people can form a clear picture of candidates and their platforms through all types of social media applications.

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