

NEW MEDIAS, YOUTHS AND PARTICIPATORY POLITICS: AN EXPLORATION OF UMMARU MUSA YARADUA UNIVERSITY, KATSINA STATE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Before the turn of the millennium, the world majorly relied on the mainstream media for information. Dissemination of news was not instantaneous as it is now because some of the technologies available now were missing then. Correspondents had to travel several miles to and fro news beats in order to relay information making some news stories to be published weeks or months after their occurrence. Gone are the days when you write a letter to your friend living abroad and he receives it in possibly three months and you also have to wait as long as that to get his reply.

However, the revolution in the technological industry that started with the launching of the Internet in the mid-1990s paved way for social media and micro-blogging sites since the 2000s. The social media and by extension the internet, allows for instantaneous dissemination of news.

Sending and receiving information can no longer be limited by space and time, a huge break in the communication barrier that has stood since the beginning of space and time.

According to Ayankoya, Calitz and Cullen, (2015), the social media concept involves the use of internet based applications and services for communication, collaboration, creation and exchange of contents by individuals and groups. The main focus of social media is the communication that takes place, how the communication takes place and the relationships that develop based on these communications. Social media allows individuals and groups to develop, maintain and stay connected to a network of other individuals and people with common interests (Ayankoya et al., 2015).

Statistics show that 2.38 billion people visit Facebook monthly (zephoria.com, 2019). Further studies have shown that Facebook users spend 33% of their online time on

Facebook and that generally individuals spend about 25% of their online time on the different social media platforms that are available. Social media is thus a very important platform for businesses and organizations to utilize in order to reach their target audiences (Ayankoya et al., 2015).

According to Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012, cited in Adedeji, 2015), the 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed a remarkable use of the social media as a tool for political communication. It was used for campaigns via personal websites, blogs, all social media applications, and several other media. Aside from this, the social media was equally used as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of other political parties, especially the People's Democratic Party and All Progressives Party.

In the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general election, the social media became a more potent tool and even a more lethal weapon. There are releases in the form of videos, voice notes, headlines, and broadcasts that made and mar many political parties and individuals. For example, a publication on Senator BurujiKashamu almost marred his political ambition and eventually his swearing in. A hate video was broadcasted on both General

Muhammadu Buhari and Senator Bola Tinubu. Ordinarily, these videos might have ended the political ambitions of these individuals in some other places (Adedeji, 2015).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social media has served as a specialized platform of modern human communication and is now part of the political culture of most democratic nations across the globe, Nigeria inclusive. Usage of social media is one of the most dominant forms of communication between politicians and the electorate, and it is massively and strategically exploited by the politicians across the globe to achieve their targeted goals as regard projecting positive images, retaining offices, and maintaining relationships with their publics. Social media has been useful in aiding exchange of information between the political candidates and electorate; it helps citizens to be informed and influence their political choices, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour towards certain political candidates (Victor, Ikechukwu, Gerald & Chinedum, 2017).

Incidentally, in Nigeria, the everyday use of social media by politicians, and the manner in which the user-citizen interacts with the social network sites/pages of politicians has

received rather less attention. Essentially, politicians expect the communication relationship to be positive and of benefit to them, thus, political gladiators of all shades of opinions, ideologies, intents and goals use the media with the belief that political communication through them might exert pressure or have an influence on people's perception and behaviours. This conception of the effect of social media is akin to the historical and cultural dominance of print and electronic media and the perceived hypodermic needle effect of mass media messages. In view of the perceived impact of the media whether from the 'maximalists' or 'minimalists' perspective, profit driven mentality of competition for political space has given rise to both ethical and unethical political communication using all available platforms of interpersonal and mass communication (Victor et al., 2017)

1.3 Objectives of the Paper

1. To determine the impact of the social media on youths participatory politics in the 2023 Nigeria general elections.
2. To examine whether or not the social media influences the perception of youths on politics and politician image on social media.

3. To recommend measures on improving proper and safe use of new medias in political process in Nigeria

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the impacts of social media on youth political participatory politics in the 2023 Nigeria general elections?
2. Do the social media influence the perception of youths on politicians and political matters in Nigeria.?
3. What are the measures to be adopted in securing usage of social medias in Nigeria.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study will be found in the gap it fills by answering its research questions. It will also be of immense benefit to politicians, political parties, media consultants, electoral umpires and government across all levels as it will help them to know and appreciate the gains and efficacy of using social media tools and how best to handle it for projecting the image of their clients and increasing awareness of the political candidates.

1.6 Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design, specifically utilizing the survey research method. This approach is chosen to collect and analyze data for describing,

evaluating, or comparing current practices, events, and occurrences.

The research method is centered on surveys, aiming to gather data from a large population to establish relevant relationships among variables. The population of interest consists of the undergraduate students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina (UMYUK), a state government-owned university in Katsina, Nigeria. UMYUK comprises 7 faculties, various units, and departments, with a total undergraduate population of 12,257 according to the information obtained from the Registry Unit.

The research will focus on UMYUK undergraduates, considering the 7 faculties within the institution. The sampling approach is stratified random sampling, indicating a systematic method for selecting participants from different strata within the university's undergraduate population.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Social Media

The roots of social media stretch far deeper than we might imagine. Although it seems like a new trend, sites like Facebook are the natural outcome of many centuries of social media development (Drew, 2013).

There are ongoing debates on whether e-mail could be considered a part of social media. The predominant reasons why e-mail is not considered a social medium are because (i) E-mail is a distribution mechanism whereas social media is a collective mechanism and (ii) Mass communication is different from mass collaboration. But e-mail certainly qualifies if we go by the simple definition that “social media is conversations that happen online”. Though the debate goes on, we cannot ignore the fact that the introduction of e-mail marked the beginning to the much more collaborative social media years later. (Sajithra & Patil, 2013).

In the 1990s, the world was evolving rapidly to the connected forefront. Personal computers had evolved in popularity in developed nations, and people started realising the potential that a connected world may have. Hence rose the Internet Relay Chats (IRCs) in 1988 which became popular in 1990. This was a rudimentary form of text messaging and instant communication, and not until 1997 did we see the first full-blown social medium come into being (digit. in, 2019).

2.2 Political Participation

Participation means ‘sharing in’ or ‘wrap oneself with’ every dimension of life, of culture or of economy, our educational system, our political system, our decision-making process. But there is less than a complete agreement among the scholars about the meaning of the concept ‘Political Participation’. Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system (Falade, 2014). The citizens form the crux of any society and it is important they are part of the political process. According to Akamare (2003, as cited in Falade, 2014), political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

2.3 Social Media

Social media is the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation, (Eg, Facebook, X, Instagram). Often the development of media is divided into two different ages, the

broadcast age and the interactive age. In the broadcast age, media were almost exclusively centralized where one entity such as a radio or television station, Newspaper Company, or a movie production studio distributed messages to many people. Feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed, and impersonal. Mediated communication between individuals typically happened on a much smaller level, usually via personal letters, telephone calls, or sometimes on a slightly larger scale through means such as photocopied family newsletters.

With the rise of digital and mobile technologies, interaction on a large scale became easier for individuals than ever before; and as such, a new media age was born where interactivity was placed at the center of new media functions. One individual could now speak to many, and instant feedback was a possibility. Where citizens and consumers used to have limited and somewhat muted voices but now they could share their opinions with many. The low cost and accessibility of new technology also allowed more options for media consumption than ever before – and so instead of only a few news outlets, individuals now have the ability to seek information from several sources and to

dialogue with others via message forums about the information posted. At the core of this ongoing revolution is social media. The characteristics, common forms, and common functions of social media are explored here (Manning, 2014).

2.4 Social Media and Politics

With every advance in technology comes impact on everyday life. This holds true especially for advances in media technology. While the media is a pervasive aspect of life on a day to day basis, a time when it really becomes important is in regards to government and political information (Baker, 2009). The use of social media in recent elections, worldwide, has significantly intensified, especially among young adults. Of interest for this particular age group is the rise of social media use for political information, creating user-generated content and expressing political views. As answer to the growing political use of social media, researchers have investigated these media's effects on political behaviour such as political participation (Muntean, 2015).

The popularity of getting political news from social media platforms is greatly increasing. A 2014 study showed that 62% of web users turn to Facebook to find

political news. This social phenomenon allows for political information, true or not, spreading quickly and easily among peer networks. Furthermore, social media sites are now encouraging political involvement by uniting like-minded people, reminding users to vote in elections, and analyzing users' political affiliation data to find cultural similarities and differences (Udoka, 2015). Recent years have seen a decline in non-profit community participation such as political party membership. Also, there are several challenges when it comes to engaging people in party politics. Contrary to popular expectations, the rise of the Internet did not result in increased levels of public participation. On top of that, manpolitical parties are afraid to lose control over their message when they delegate power and authority to the public (Effing, Hill ergersberg&Huibers, 2011)

2.9 Nigeria General Elections and Youth Participation

The 2023 Nigeria general election was the seventh general election to be conducted in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It featured elections for the position of President and governorship elections in 29 of the 36 states of the Federation. Also, elections were held

to determine members of the federal and state legislatures.

Total number of registered voters for the elections was 84,004,084 (premiumtimesng.com, 2019) while the number of registered voters whose ages were between 18 and 35 was 42,938,458 or 51% (allafrica.com, 2023). However, only 28,614,190 or 34.75% of total number of registered voters came out to vote during the presidential election (pulse.ng, 2019). This represents the lowest turnout of voters in Nigeria's election history (saharareporters.com, 2023).

Prior to the elections, electoral observers described Nigerian youths as being key to the success of any political candidate at the elections as they represented 51% of the total number of registered voters, but on election day, there was a reported high rate of voter apathy evident in the turnout of registered voters.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The beginning of **Agenda-Setting Theory** can be traced as far as 1922, when Walter Lippmann expressed his concern on the vital role that mass media can do in influencing the setting of certain image on the public's mind. In portraying the influence of mass

media, Lippmann gives an example of individuals who supposed to be enemies while their countries are at war. Instead of becoming enemies, without having access to information about the war through media, those individuals are able to live harmoniously in a secluded island. Lippmann indicates on how mass media can set a particular agenda which can influence the opinions of the public. However, he never used the term 'agenda setting theory' in his book. Nevertheless, he did generate the foundation for the agenda setting theory (Nor, 2014).

3.1 Sampling Procedure

When random sampling is used, each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected (simple random sampling) or a known probability of being selected (stratified random sampling). The sample is referred to as *representative* because the characteristics of a properly drawn sample represent the parent population in all ways.

This procedure known as stratified random sampling is also a form of probability sampling. To stratify means to classify or to separate people into groups according to some characteristics, such as position, rank, income, education, sex, or ethnic

background. These separate groupings are referred to as subsets or subgroups. For a stratified random sample, the population is divided into groups or strata. A random sample is selected from each stratum based upon the percentage that each subgroup represents in the population. Stratified random samples are generally more accurate in representing the population than are simple random samples. They also require more effort, and there is a practical limit to the number of strata used.

Copies of the questionnaires will be randomly distributed to registered undergraduates in the 7 faculties of the institution.

Table 1: Table showing the distribution of questionnaires based on sample size

Faculty	Population	No. Of questionnaire shared
Agriculture	157	5
Education	4730	30
Humanities	1212	10
Law	218	12
Medical Sciences	102	5
Natural and Applied Sciences	3662	23
Social and Management Sci.	2176	15

Total Population **12257** **100**

3.2 Data Collection Process

The data collection process involved administering questionnaires at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University in Katsina during February 2023. Students from various faculties provided the required information through the distributed questionnaires. The researcher ensured proper distribution, clarification, and collection of the questionnaires, with respondents returning filled copies either immediately or at their convenience.

In terms of data presentation, the raw data collected underwent processing for application. Data analysis, employing descriptive statistical methods such as percentages, frequency count, pie-charts, and tables, played a vital role in interpreting the data and addressing the research question. The gathered information was coded and organized into the IBM SPSS 21 App data processing template for comprehensive analysis, contributing to informed decision-making across academic, commercial, industrial, and professional contexts.

4.0 Analysis of Data

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina undergraduates. Of these, 97 were returned fully completed, indicating a commendable response rate of 97%. However, 3 questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete or invalid information.

The demographic profile of respondents includes 65 males (63.05%) and 32 females (31.04%). The majority of respondents fell within the age group of 20-24 (44.6%), followed by the age group of 15-19 (44.4%), and the age group of 25-29 (11%).

Examining faculties, the Faculty of Education had the highest representation with 29 respondents (28.13%), while the Faculty of Medical Sciences and Agriculture

had the lowest with 5 respondents each (4.85%). Other faculties include Social and Management Sciences (13.58% - 14 respondents), Humanities (8.73% - 9 respondents), Law (11.64% - 12 respondents), and Natural and Applied Sciences (22.31% - 23 respondents).

Considering study levels, 400-level students constituted the highest portion with 50.4% (52 respondents), while 100-level students had the least representation at 5.8% (6 respondents). This comprehensive study provides valuable insights into the demographic distribution of respondents at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina.

4.1 Analysis of Research Questions

RQ1: Impact of Social Media on Respondents' Political Participation in 2023 Elections

Table 2: Table showing results garnered from the first research question

Social Media Use (N= 381)	Level of Agreement (%)				Mean	S.D	Overall %
	1	2	3	4			
I followed political news on social media during the electioneering period.	23.1	49.1	14.7	13.1	2.19	.956	54.75
I became aware of political news through the social media.	22.6	56.7	12.6	8.1	2.11	.895	52.75

I share political news on social media.	13.9	36.2	26.0	23.9	2.62	1.018	65.5
Social media helped me to become more politically active during the elections.	27.8	33.6	17.3	21.3	2.28	1.05	57
I commented and participated in political discourses on social media.	13.1	34.9	23.9	28.1	2.63	.988	65.75
Total					2.37	0.98	

***Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree. 2 = Agree. 3 = Disagree. 4 = Strongly Disagree**

In Table 2, the data reveals that 27.8% of respondents strongly agreed that social media impacts their political participation (Mean = 2.37, S.D. = 0.982). Specifically, respondents acknowledged following political news on social media during election periods (Mean = 2.19, S.D. = 0.956) and being aware of political developments through these platforms (Mean = 2.11, S.D. = 0.895). Moreover, respondents agreed that social media played

a role in increasing their political activity (Mean = 2.28, S.D. = 1.053). This indicates a significant perception among respondents regarding the influence of social media on their political engagement.

RQ2: What are the perceptions of youths about Nigerian politician’s image on social media?

Table 3: Table showing results garnered from the second research question

Social Media Use (N= 381)	Level of Agreement (%)				Mean	S.D	Overall %
	1	2	3	4			
Social media influenced my choice of political candidate.	21.8	34.4	26.5	17.3	2.49	1.104	54.75
Social media influenced my choice of political party.	17.8	33.1	28.9	20.2	2.60	1.085	65

Social media was an avenue for politicians to boost their image to the public.	31.8	49.1	5.5	13.6	1.93	.819	48.2
I believe political candidates who were not active on social media to be unserious about their ambition.	21.0	34.1	19.4	25.5	2.43	1.028	60.75
I would vote for a politician who is on social media instead of one who is not.	17.1	23.6	32.8	26.5	2.75	1.090	68.75

Total **2.43** **1.006**

***Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree. 2 = Agree. 3 = Disagree. 4 = Strongly Disagree**

In Table 3, respondents' perceptions regarding the image of politicians on social media are highlighted. A substantial 31.8% Strongly Agreed that social media influences their perception of politicians (Mean = 2.43, S.D. = 1.006). They specifically concurred that social media plays a role in shaping their choice of political candidates during elections (Mean = 2.49, S.D. = 1.104) and influencing their selection of political parties (Mean = 2.60, S.D. = 1.085). Furthermore, respondents acknowledged social media as a platform for politicians to enhance their public image (Mean = 1.93, S.D. = 0.819). Additionally, respondents believed that political candidates not active on social media might be perceived as unserious about their

ambitions (Mean = 2.43, S.D. = 1.028). This collective insight provides a comprehensive view of how social media influences the perceptions of youths regarding politicians and electoral choices.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study revealed some interesting facts based data gathered through the research instrument. Discussion of the study's findings will be done in line with the objectives of the study and more specifically the research questions.

This study is centered on exploring the impact of social media on the level of political participation of undergraduates of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin. Resting heavily on the agenda-setting theoretical

paradigm, the study presents findings that are in tandem with what other scholars have found in related studies.

Respondents agreed that social media had an effect on their level of political participation, especially in the 2019 general. 23.1% of the respondents 'Strongly Agreed' that they followed political news on social media and 49.1% 'Agreed' to it. 22.6% of respondents 'Strongly Agreed' that they became aware of political news through the social media and 56.7% 'Agreed' to it and 27.8% of respondents 'Strongly Agreed' that social media helped them to become more politically active in the 2019 elections while 33.6% 'Agreed' to it. This findings is in tandem with the findings of Akinlade (2016) who found that social media influenced Nigerian youths respondents in South-East Nigeria during the 2015 Nigeria general election. These statistics prove that the social media did have an impact on youths' political participation in the 2019 Nigeria general elections.

To answer the second research question, questions 15, 16, 17 and 18 from Section D of the questionnaire were analysed. 21.8% of respondents 'Strongly Agreed' that social media influenced their choice of political candidates in the elections while 34.4% of

respondents 'Agreed' to it. 17.8% of respondents reported that social media influenced their choice of political party while 33.1% of 'Agreed' to it. 31.8% of respondents 'Strongly Agreed' that the social media was an avenue for politician's to boost their image in the eyes of the public while 49.1% 'Agreed' to it. 21% of respondents 'Strongly Agreed' believed that politicians who were not active on social media were unserious about their political ambition and 34.1% 'Agreed' to it. These statistics show that the social media projects a positive perception of politicians to youths.

5.0 Conclusion

Social media did have a positive influence on youths participation in the political and electoral process, especially the 2019 Nigeria general elections. Social media influenced youths' choice of political candidate and party but, quite amazingly, did not actually guarantee that youths voted for any political candidate just because he or she has a social media account. Youths also regard social media as a credible medium for political discourses and majority also testified to the social media has making them become more politically active. This does not come as a surprise if one considers

how often and how much time youths spend on social media daily.

5.1 Recommendations

The Federal Government of Nigeria should strengthen its efforts in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in every sector of the country. More and more Nigerian youths are gaining access to the internet every day and ensuring the information flow on the internet is uninterrupted is key to the information flow of the country.

The National Information and Technology Development Agency government should monitor what goes onto the social media as many people will believe what they read/see on it and the consequences wrong or misleading information can only better imagined.

Political parties, politicians, governmental agencies and ministries should create a robust and effective social media presence to inform and educate youths, especially on social media platforms which has a high concentration of Nigerian youths who believe political news on social media and regards them as credible. This will help reduce the low turnout of voters on election days and reduce the spread of fake news.

In future elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), should adopt the electronic voting system in order to allow youths who may not go out to vote physically do so online. 97.4% of respondents in this study claim to have an accessible device with 50.5% spending between 1-6 hours on social media daily while 35.4% spend above six hours daily.

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