

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH AWARENESS ON CIVIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN ZAMFARA STATE

By

ADAMU, Muhammad

Department of Political Science,
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State

mohdshiwidi@gmail.com,

And

Abubakar, ABDULLAHI

Department of Mass Communication,
Abdu Gusau Polytechnic, Talata-Mafara, Zamfara State.

abubakargumi2@gmail.com

Abstract

The commanding effects of social media has changed the traditional and conservative way in which the Nigerian youths participate and respond to political activities particularly in the areas of governance and public accountability, its specifics and mechanics. It is in recognition of this development, that, the research examined the extents of youths' awareness on civic governance, public accountability and political participation through social media use in Zamfara state. The objective of the study was to identify Zamfara youth knowledge on governance and their preferences on their civic responsibility in the advocacy for good governance and public accountability viz-as-viz analysing how the youths on social media play a central role on advancing their communities to the limelight devoid of e-begging. The paper applied quantitative survey research method using contents observation on Zamfara facebook groups' update and sharing among youths with active facebook account. This work employed purposive sampling method of research; in which five hundred (500) respondents were selected and filled an online questionnaire using Google form developed for data collection; although only 486 respondents were found active on facebook. The paper found that, Zamfara youths are suffering from poverty of thought and are dependent-minded on politicians with little concern for the development of their communities, rather for their politicians. The paper further established that the youths lack courage to demand for good civic governance, and public accountability in the govern space. The paper recommended that few among the enlightened youths and academic elites should use social media channels and mobilize the youths to understand their political rights to demand for good governance and government officials' accountability. The social media youths should also detach themselves from rallying around politicians for e-begging. The paper concluded that Zamfara social media are blindly into political engagement without idea, knowledge and understanding of the political party constitution and its manifestos.

Keywords: Social Media, Youth Awareness, Governance, Public Accountability, Zamfara

Introduction

Zamfara is a rural state with the highest percentage of young people than anywhere in northern Nigeria, with youth making up around 91% of its total population, Garba, U. (2015). The challenge of integrating them in socio-economic terms is crucial for the future development of the state, and indeed the country. Unfortunately, as Borges, A.C.M. (2020) sums it all; that, like in

Pakistan, the youths in the state are portrayed as dependent, immature and incapable of assuming responsibility. They are seen as “the next generation”, whose time and role in society is yet to come, yet to be fulfilled. They are excluded from decision-making processes and not accorded with enough opportunities to take the lead in initiatives which may have a significant impact on their lives and their communities. In lieu of this sad development, the youth remain, as social media promoters, advertising managers, political thugs and vanguards for politicians and as a divided political social group in tents, the most vulnerable to the biggest challenges affecting their communities, from poverty to unemployment, political bandits and crime.

This dragged the youths to another factor that the local governments being the third tier of government and the closest to the people have been unable to engage youths in governance. This is due to the consistent abuse of their power and lack of accountability over time, citizens look to the state government to provide what the local government should constitutionally provide. This research seeks to identify gray areas where the youth are found ignorance of their political rights and responsibilities.

The paper is important because until there is consistent demand for the detachment of youth from social media servitude, and inclusion in governance, and good governance as measured by improved social service delivery and accountability from government officials, elected officials will continue to get away with not serving the people they campaigned and swore an oath to serve. While federal (national) and state level issues affect all citizens.

Drawing from African peninsula, Honwana, A.; De Boeck, F. (2005) argued that, the demographic dynamics in Africa are more than just challenges. Despite their marginalization, young people remain key actors in their communities, often instigating social change and innovation. It is recognized that they are crucial for the future of their domain. In recent years, governments and organisations across Africa have begun to acknowledge the indisputable role youth play as makers or breakers in society and have shown support for their community initiatives. This means that the youths are the fulcrum of any society with largest occupy on social media spaces.

Every social media user has a perceptual bias, content bias, ideological and emotional bias, political bias, social bias and metaphysical bias. This is due to the different thresholds and participation which affect different social preferences, Tan, W. (2020). Awareness of users of social media on civic governance and the demand for public accountability determines the choice and preferences of the users themselves across all geographical facebook zones.

In the era of media communication revolution, there is an interesting community culture brought by network of communications. Cyber residents gather together for their common interests and then form their circles recognizing themselves as members of that community operating as group, for instance, on *whatsapp*, *facebook* or *telegram* platforms. As the subject of communication, these individuals choose communication behavior which is suitable for the communication platform, and participate in the public discussion in a way that is accepted by people in public communication. (Tan, W. 2020).

Sumera, B; Zaeem, Y; Batool, AAIMA, (2020), reiterated that, it has become very common to participate in online political activities through liking, mentioning, tagging, uploading, commenting and sharing political content as well as following politicians on facebook and twitter. Similarly, in the words of Jha & Kodila-Tedika, (2019), he submitted that, social media sites not only empower the general citizen but also politicians. Nowadays, social media is providing a new dimension for political leaders to communicate and engage with their citizens.

It is in the context of these, that the study, comes up with an analysis of Zamfara youth presence on social media sites- facebook, whatsapp, telegram, with active accounts in an online groups, and their awareness on civic governance and public accountability to determine the roles they play on new media. This also focuses on the contribution they give for the sustainable development of their immediate communities. This is with a view to challenge their setback and retrogressive participation in policy making process and active involvement in the governance of their own affairs and matters that affect their communities at large.

Literature Review

In the work of Sumera, B; Zaeem, Y; Batool, AAIMA, (2020), titled “*Role of social media in democratization in Pakistan: An analysis of political awareness, efficacy and participation in youth.*” found that, facebook and twitter are providing information regarding voting and electoral procedures to youth and they are actively participating on social media for sharing political content with their friends and social circle. In this analysis, Sumera and et al did not identify the role youths play for promoting and developing their immediate communities through the advocacy on social media in a participatory democracy; which paper determined to uncover.

As Bekafigo & McBride, (2013) noted that, different political candidates engage with electorates through Facebook, likewise government institutions also utilize Twitter as communication tool to circulate political awareness among their followers. Facebook allow users to get awareness about political campaigns, political meetings and political content for sharing with their friend and family.

Social media and its various platforms give an opportunity to their users to effortlessly communicate with each other (Doris, 2014). This is why the young generation uses social media for political awareness and takes part in different political discussion.

In another related research conducted by Auger (2013) critically investigated fostering democracy through social media and evaluated the usage of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube among the nonprofit advocacy organizations. In that study Auger found that social media used by the nonprofit organizations and they were ethically motivated people to their point of view. The study also found that Facebook, Twitter and You Tube were facilitated organizations for different purposes in two- way communication. Unfortunately Auger, accentuate the gap and impact for which the youth on social can make for their communities. Moreover, Abbott (2014) investigated the ICTs impact on social as well as politically generated issues and the role of social media in East Asia. Both researchers were interested to observe the Internet political impact and new digital usage in political discussion. Study findings reveal that the internet itself doesn't support democratization process it does limit the authoritarian regimes, but now technology some extend

empowers the citizens for political mobilization than ever before. This is partially in agreement to the point raised. However the two studies above were inadequate to identify youth awareness, engagement and contribution on civic governance and public accountability through social media.

Accordingly, Sumera, (2020) & et al, quoted Carroll & Hackett (2006) who investigated on *democratic media engagement examine by social movement theory*, he observed the social movement theory in different American democracies. The study also checked the potential of media activism in providing innovative ways in social movements. The results showed that media activism and democratic communication tools can fulfill the social democratic needs of society as well as social movements of society.

In the words of Offe, C. (2009), Wong, L.L. (2008) and Bray, B.L.; Chappel, L.W. (2005): *Liberal democracies need active, informed and responsible citizens who are willing and able to contribute to the political process. Thus, active citizenship requires the engagement with political institutions, Wong, L.L. (2008), which, in the process, “make citizens”, in the sense that they engender in them a perception of duties, opportunities and meanings, Offe, C. (2009). In the absence of this engagement between citizens and institutions, people are left feeling inaudible, invisible and marginal, due to inattention and active exclusion, Bray, B.L.; Chappel, L.W. (2005). Social and political marginalization leads to the materialization of peripheral citizenship, which remains at the margins with regard to equal rights and opportunities, and thus unable to take full effect.*

William Robert Avis (2015) quoted Danida (2007); UNDP (2006); and Walton (2010), submitted that empowering, organizing, capacity-building and partnering with young people can contribute to good governance and improved accountability of governments.

Social Media and Political Participation

The term politics is not new and different for this world. Political participation means people get involve in different political happenings of the country as well as the world. In the political domain it is observed as an action to involve in various political activities which is related to the current political and government system, Sumera & et al (2020). Election voting, membership of political parties, following political leaders, information about political campaigns, rallies and processions are all the natures of political participation.

Social media Apps interconnect the citizens with the rest of the world. They can share, like, comment on the political content on Facebook, Twitter and read political blogs through the social media. The advance means of communication not only change the daily conversation but also change the political discussion for the people. Today people from all around the world are using social media to discuss the world politics, political leaders and political ongoing events. Citizens move towards social media networks to get news (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Lee & Ma, 2012; O’Connor, Balasubramanian, Rutledge, & Smith, 2010).

Between Citizens, Social Media and Public Accountability

Mones, H. (2016) quoted Kietzmann et al., (2011) who expounded that youths have a staggering effect on governance and are capable of making public office holders accountable to

citizens across the globe regardless of their class, gender, ethnicity or location through the services of social media platforms. This ability of mobilization had an effect on politics as well as accountability and resulted in various political movements across the globe.

By and large, public officials in the arts of governance are only accountable to their managers and external professional institutions, while politicians are the ones accountable to public. However, some professionals are often questioned by the public, pressured and held accountable for their actions through social media. One example for this is the recent bribery incident with a police officer where a citizen was able to film the officer through his cell phone while receiving the bribe and uploading this video on Social Media (MBC, 2015). The video soon went viral and the public started questioning the values of the police institution and the way they handle their operations. This has led to massive political pressure that resulted in penalising this officer and implementing new policies for fighting corruption (ONA, 2015). Moreover, social media has not only made public able to question the professionalism of government officials but also their personal values and belief system, which often relied on their conscience.

Dialogue is a major channel of public accountability; this dialogue is often conducted through debates of criticism for the government actions. Dialogue is becoming more effective with the spread of media and new technologies that facilitated public debates and created a space where citizens can share their agreement or criticism for government policies and actions, question officials, and request justifications for their actions. In the modern times, officials often have their own twitter and Facebook accounts where they deal directly with the public and answer to their questions. This has surpassed the regular mediatory channels that have always existed between the public and civil servants such as media.

Mones, H. (2016) argued that social media provides a space for dialogue between government and citizens and required higher pace of responsiveness of the government towards public interest and the failure to do so, can result in public outrage.

Public accountability is therefore not often perceived by public across social media platforms in the same way. Politicians can be questioned and held accountable for their actions only when citizens do not fear the consequences of criticizing them on the virtual space. Mones, H. (2016) pointed out that, some activists are often tracked down through these platforms and prosecuted for questioning military leaders or current political leaders.

Facebook and twitter accounts for instance, interact with citizens on daily bases, respond to their concerns and disseminate important information. They share photos and streams of videos that are often used by control organisations to pressure, question politicians or hold them accountable in court.

Governance and Citizens Participation

According to Bello, M.M. (2020) defined Citizens Participation as direct engagement of citizens in policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation. Thus, citizen participation is when local citizens decide on what they want, how they want it, assist in making it reality and give feedback on satisfaction or otherwise.

Bello, M.M further advances six (6) needs to directly engage citizens in the governance of public affairs arise due to:

1. Lack of public trust
2. Failure of representative democracy
3. Emergence of wicked public problems
4. Emergence of citizens as expert by experience
5. Financial constraints
6. The need to improve service quality.

Methodology

The paper applied quantitative survey research method using contents observation on Zamfara facebook groups’ update and sharing among youths with active facebook account. This work employed purposive sampling method of research; in which five hundred (500) respondents were selected and filled an online questionnaire using Google form developed for data collection; although only 486 respondents were found active on facebook from the thirty (30) selected facebook groups bearing Zamfara state.

Results

Demographic Data:

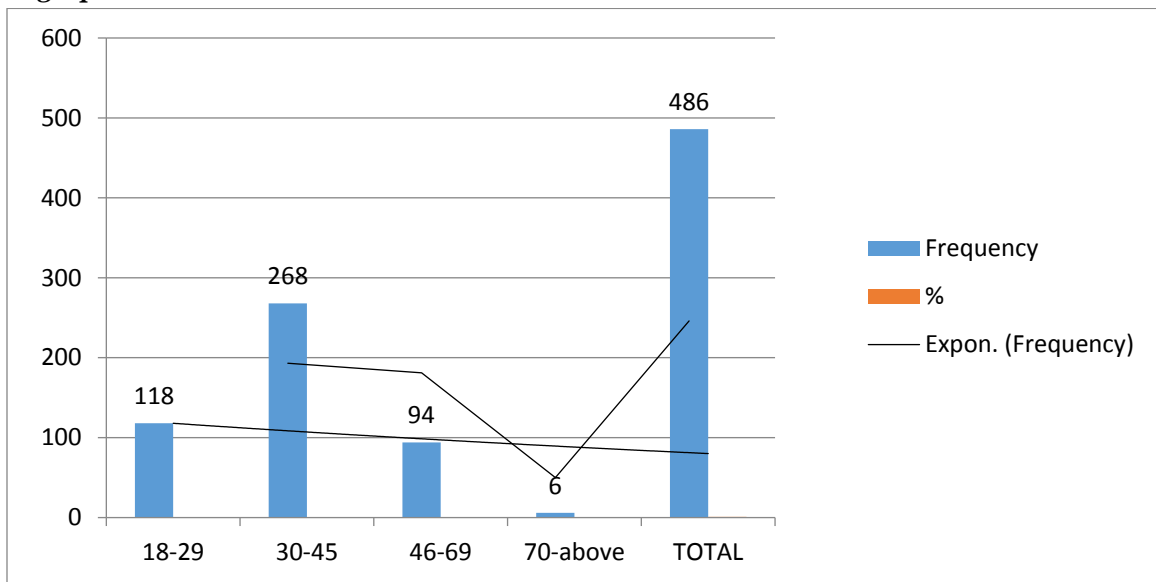


Figure 1: *Source; field survey, (2020).*

Figure 1 above is representing age range and categories of the participants in the research. From the total of 486 respondents, 268 falls within 30-45 years of age bracket, which is the highest number of social media youths involved in the survey. Second to this is the 118 who are between the ages of 18-29 years. Though, the 46-69 categories is 94 persons, except with the least of just 6 under 70 above. This means that the respondents who are social media users are mostly the youths.

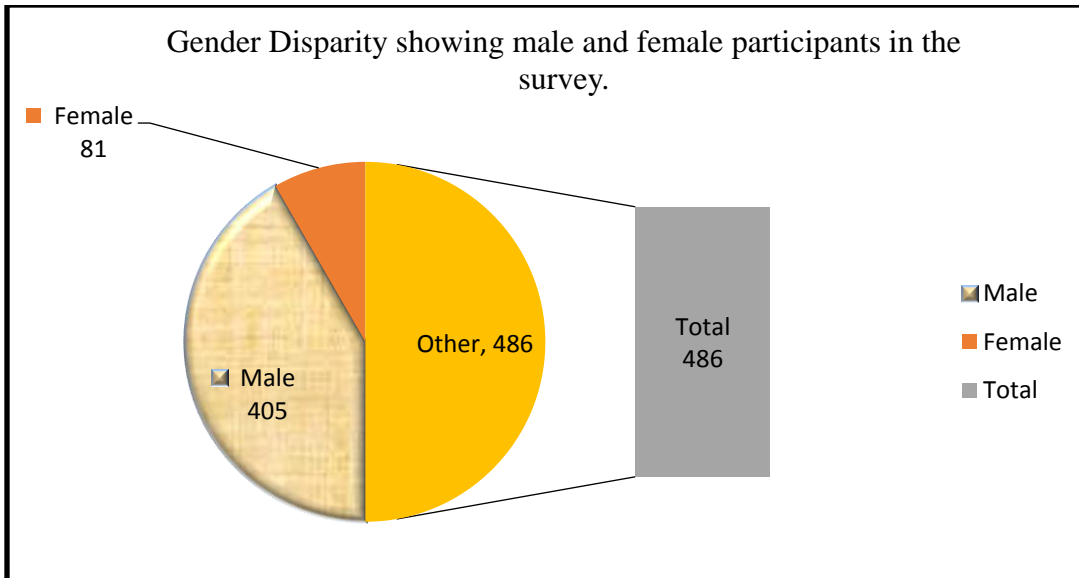


Figure 2. Gender disparity. Source: Field survey, (2020).

In figure 2, 405 participants are male and 81 female from the 486 respondents. This explains that the male are of higher number with social media accounts using facebook site as illustrated in figure 2 above.

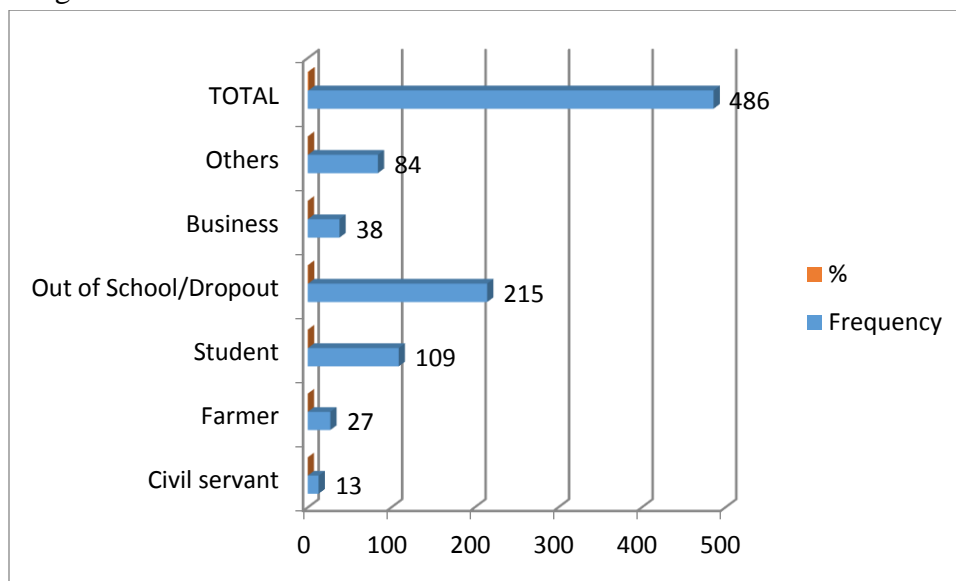


Figure 3: Occupation of social media youths.

In terms of occupational spread of the respondents in the study, figure 3 above indicated that there is 215 social media youths who are active users of facebook out of school while some signified that they are dropout. Students placed at 109, others 84, those with business career stands at 38; but farmers 27, and civil servants 13, all out of the total 486 respondents. What this means is that significant number of social media users are either out of school (i.e graduated from school) or dropout from the school who are mostly engage on social media. They are more vulnerable to social unrest, cybercrime, and etcetera.

Table 4: Education Background among social media youths

<i>Social media youth level of education</i>	Frequency	%
FSCL	8	1.6%
SSCE	355	73.0%
Diploma/NCE	104	21.4%
HND/Degree	5	1.0%
M. Sc.	3	0.6%
Others	11	2.3%
TOTAL	486	100%

In this table 4, the data from the 486 respondents show the qualifications and positions of the level of education of the social media youths in Zamfara. For instance, 355 hold SSCE, 104 possessed Diploma/NCE, but only 8 (representing 1.6%) are holders of First School Leaving Certificate. Similarly, Degree/HND holders are said to be 5 with 1.0% out of 486 Zamfara social media youths. Although others fall within the category of not having any records of attending education school, yet M.Sc. holders only tuned to be 3.

This portrays that, the highest number of youths on facebook at the time of the survey are those with ordinary level of education. This signifies that the facebook updates shown from their timeline are associated more with adolescence thought than adulthood.

Social Media Youth Engagement in Civic Governance:

Table 5: Social media youths' participation in the meeting with the local government chairman

<i>Social media users' participation in meeting with LG Chairman</i>	Frequency	%
Yes	446	91.7%
No	27	5.6%
Indifferent	13	2.7%
TOTAL	486	100%

Source, field survey, (2020).

On the social media youth engagement in the meeting with the local government chairman, the above table 5, indicated that the social media users among the youths have shown that as much as 446 representing 91.7% have expressed that they had an opportunity to meet with their local government council chairman. While the 27 (5.6%) of the youth have never attended any meeting with the chairman. This means that the youth with the highest percentage of attendance should have better chance to know about public accountability from officials that govern them.

Table 6: Frequency of meetings held with social media youths and the Local Government Chairman in the last 12 months

<i>Social media users' meeting held with LG Chairman</i>	Frequency	%
None	40	8.2%
1-2 times	237	48.7%
3-4 times	89	18.3%
5-6 time	67	13.7%
7 above	53	10.9%
TOTAL	486	100%

Source: field survey, (2020).

Table 6 above shows frequency number of time the youth held meetings the Local Government Chairman in the last 12 months; which to this effect, the data indicated that as less as 40 people were not able to hold any meeting with the chairman even once, let alone of demanding for accountability or good governance in their local communities. However, as much as 48.7% of the youths which stands at 237 of them have access to attend meeting with their local government chairman for about two (2). This presents to them the opportunity to know about their local governance and demand for proper public accountability in the area; Likewise, 89 (18.3%), 67 (13.7%), and 53 (10.9%) respectively.

Table 7: Medium of engagement with the local government chairman and the social media users

Medium category	Frequency	%
Community town hall meeting	83	17.0
Radio	37	7.6%
Social media	194	39.9%
Television	9	1.8%
Face-to-face engagement	163	33.5%
TOTAL	486	100%

This table 7 depicts that the citizens mostly the youths indicated their interest to meet with their chairman for engagement at various avenues they feel desired to meet with the chairman. Here, social media outlet takes 194 users as their alternative medium to meet for meeting for their contribution. Face-to-face engagement 163 representing (33/5%), 83 (17.0) opted for community town hall meeting, while for radio medium 37 (7.6%), and television received 9 (1.8%) in quest for meeting with their chairman for the demand of good governance.

Social Media Youth Awareness on Accountability in Civic Governance:

Table 8: Social media youth awareness on the monthly cash allocation received by the Local Government Chairman from Federal government (above N1 billion naira) from January to November, 2020.

<i>Youth awareness on monthly cash received by LG Chairman from FAAC</i>	Frequency	%
Not at all aware	219	45.6%
Slightly aware	137	28.1%
Moderately aware	105	21.6%
Very aware	15	3.0%
Extremely aware	10	2.0%
TOTAL	486	100%

Source: field survey, (2020).

The table 8 above presents data that explain social media youths' level of awareness on the monthly cash allocation to government officials through local government chairmen from the federation account allocation commission (FAAC). The responses “*Not at all aware*” and “*slightly aware*” connote that the citizen youths are not aware of the fact and the figures local government officials received as stipends.

Table 9: Social media youth awareness on any ongoing/recently completed project executed by Local Government Chairman:

<i>Social media youth awareness on LG project</i>	Frequency	%
Not at all aware	310	63.7%
Slightly aware	112	23.0%
Moderately aware	33	6.7%
Very aware	17	3.4%
Extremely aware	14	2.8%
TOTAL	486	100%

Source: field survey, (2020).

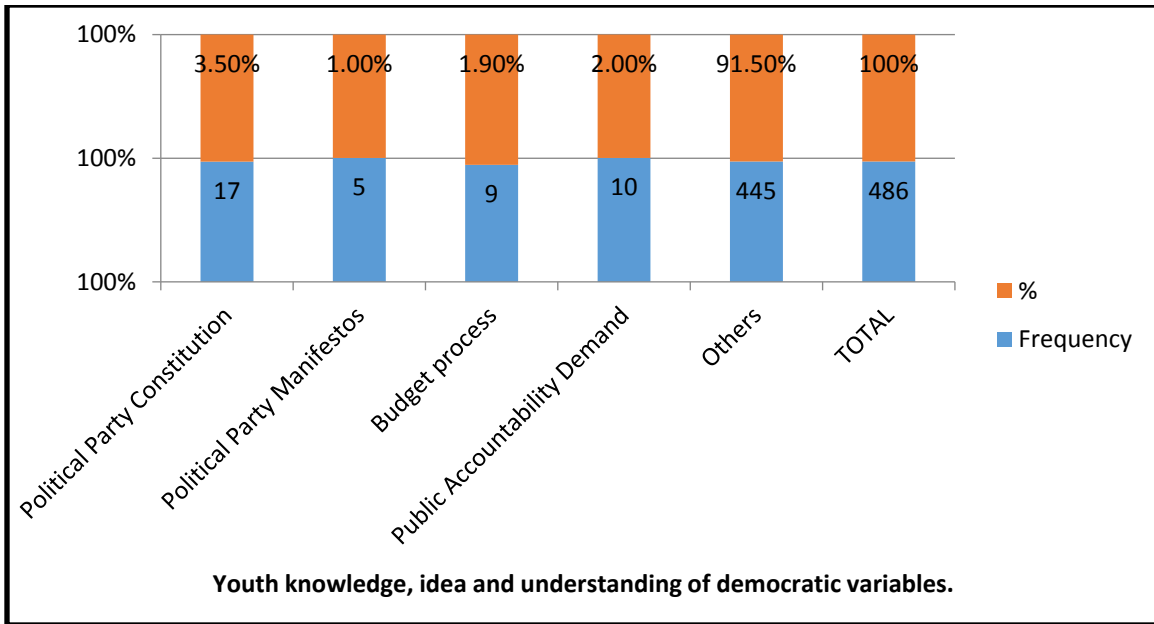


Figure 10, showing social media youth extent of information acquired on democratic governance.

Figure 10 expounded that Zamfara youths do not have knowledge of the political parties' constitution and their manifestos. This is shown as represented with 17 (3.50%) and 5 (1.0%) respectively. The youths lack idea about budget process and poor understanding of presenting and initiating demand for public accountability from political office holders in civic governance. This means that the youths portray themselves as instrument of politicians on facebook.

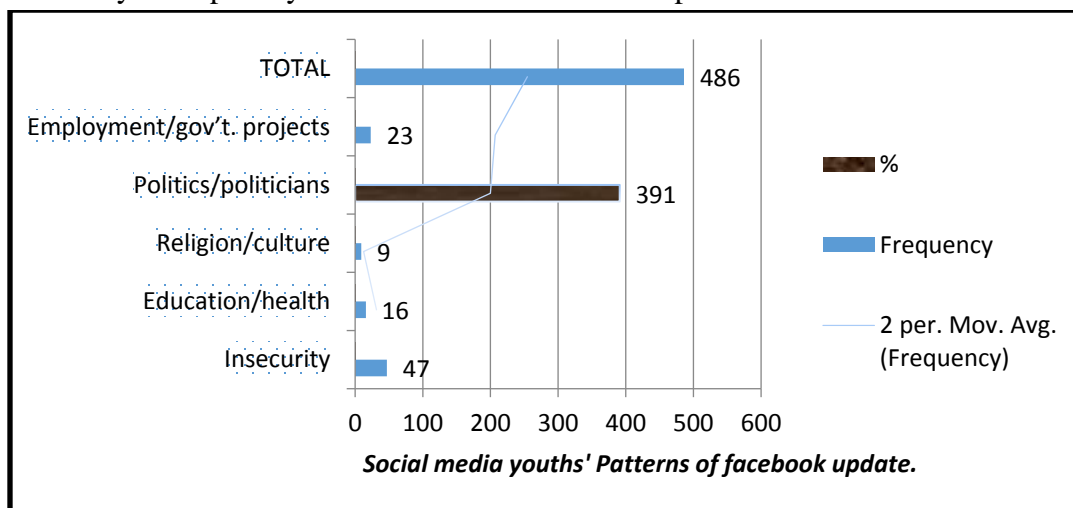


Figure 11: Issues social media youths post on facebook most.

Figure 11 shows that Zamfara social media youth are more committed on posting politically related contents with prominence on promoting and supporting their political parties aspirants that they do for religion/culture, education/health, employment/projects and insecurity; this is as depicted in 391, 9, 16, 23, and 47 respectively.

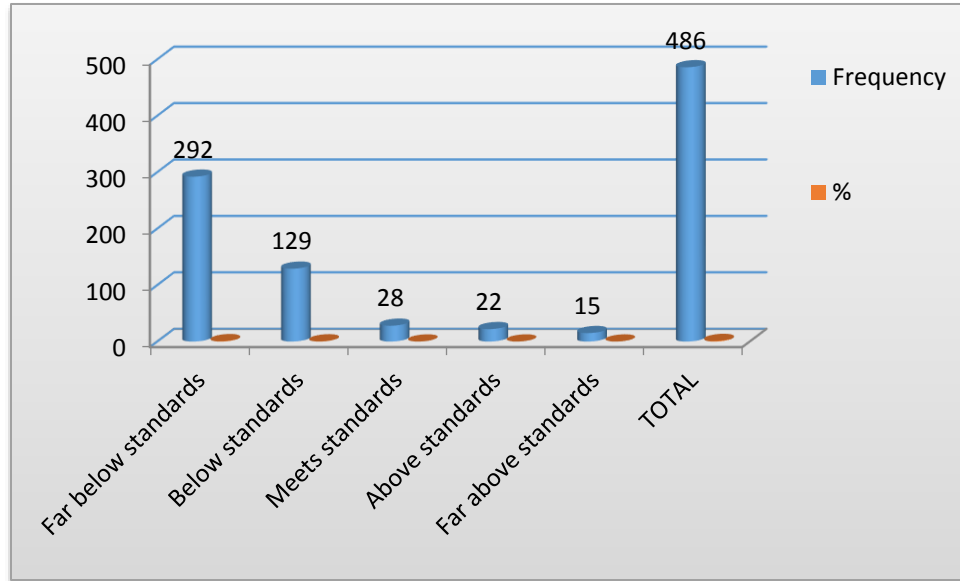


Figure 12: Social media youth rating the LG Chairman performance on improving quality markets.

Social Media Youths’ Needs Assessment:

Table 13: Rating social media youth opinion on what government should focus on in their LGA:

	<i>Repairs of existing rural roads</i>		<i>Maintenance of schools</i>		<i>Providing Employment opportunities</i>			
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Not at all important	6	1.2%	Not at all important	13	2.7%	Not at all important	7	1.4%
Slightly important	13	2.7%	Slightly important	11	2.3%	Slightly important	11	2.2%
Moderately important	81	16.7%	Moderately important	26	5.3%	Moderately important	33	6.8%
Very important	88	18.1%	Very important	70	14.4%	Very important	41	8.4%
Extremely important	298	61.3%	Extremely important	366	75.3%	Extremely important	394	81.0%
TOTAL:	486	100%		486	100%		486	100%

Discussion of Findings

At this junction, the findings relating to the topic “Social media and youth awareness on civic governance and public accountability in Zamfara state” are hereby discussed. But at first, it should be noted that Zamfara social media users concentrate more on the promotion and advertisement of political office and parties’ aspirants than doing same for promoting democratic

good ideals for civic governance and public accountability. The youths on social media hardly report, update and share issues related to their communities' development agenda.

For instance, a facebook named "*Hon. Umar Faruku Musa Social Media Forum*" is solely tuned for political contents update for politicians, rather than posting for developmental issues, views, news and ideas. The youths create, monitor political groups, forums and platforms on social media sites exclusive for their political principals and party prefects. They spend their energy, time and space at the expense of community development agenda. Example facebook groups such as:

- ✓ *Zamfara Facebookers Enlightenment Forum*
- ✓ *Zamfar State PDP New Medias Forum*
- ✓ *Gummi Emirate Development Association*
- ✓ *Zamfara Young Movement*. And many more.

The incidence of bias is evident in their affinity for their political candidates. Another sterling evidence of Zamfara social media youths appendages to political characters at the detriment of social development agenda for the state, is their roles as unconditional advertising managers for their kinsmen, in lieu of issue-based awareness.

As indicated above, most of the youth on social media particularly, facebook, are secondary school leavers, out of school, or drop out students. This is depicted in figure 3 and table 4 respectively who are heavily male. These categories lack ideals, self-control and intellectual skills to demand for good civic governance and public accountability.

Similarly, the qualified once with post-secondary qualification lack required exposure, composure and confidence to do the needful.

According to these findings, the paper attested that leading majority of youths on social media is "not at all aware" of the monthly monetary allocation the local government councils received from the federation. This is captured in table 8, by "*Not at all aware*" category by 219 respondents as represented 45.6%.

Accordingly, about 137 (28.1%) which if put together, can be deduced that the youths are not in the know to address the challenges of demanding for public accountability or civic governance. Instead, the fact that the youths are made to remain backward and therefore put behind to participate in the governance. This therefore comes in terms with the assertion of Borges A.C.M. (2020) "the youths in the state are portrayed as dependent, immature and incapable of assuming responsibility. They are seen as "the next generation", whose time and role in society is yet to come, yet to be fulfilled. They are excluded from decision-making processes and not accorded with enough opportunities to take the lead in initiatives which may have a significant impact on their lives and their communities".

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