

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE 21st
CENTURY**

BY

DESTINY AISOSA IDAHOSA

ART2100568

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by **DESTINY AISOSA IDAHOSA** in the Department of History and International Studies University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

DR. (MISS.) OGHOGHO ORIAKHI
Project Supervisor

PROF. J. C. NWAKA
Head of Department

DATE

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, whose boundless grace, wisdom, and guidance have carried me through every stage of my academic journey. His strength and presence have been my constant anchor, making this achievement possible. I also dedicate it with love and gratitude to my dear parents, Mr. and Mrs. Idahosa, whose prayers, sacrifices, and unwavering support have been the pillars of my success. Their patience, encouragement, and unconditional love have kept me strong through both challenges and triumphs. This accomplishment is not mine alone—it belongs just as much to them as it does to me.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has marked a pivotal era in the history of human civilization, characterized by unprecedented technological innovations, accelerated globalization, and the widespread proliferation of digital communication tools¹. Among the most profound developments of this digital age is the emergence and integration of social media into the fabric of everyday life. Social media, defined as a range of internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange content in real-time, has revolutionized how individuals, particularly the youth, interact with one another and with the broader world.

In the Nigerian context, the influence of social media has been particularly pronounced among the youth population, who constitute a significant demographic majority². The increasing accessibility of smartphones, coupled with more affordable data services, has facilitated the rapid adoption of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube³. These platforms serve as multifaceted tools for communication, entertainment, education, information dissemination, and sociopolitical mobilization. Consequently, social media has emerged not only as a technological phenomenon but also as a cultural and political force that actively shapes the perceptions, behaviors, and aspirations of Nigerian youth⁴.

While the benefits of social media are evident—ranging from increased connectivity and access to global knowledge networks, to the empowerment of marginalized voices and the facilitation of grassroots movements—there are also growing concerns about its potential negative impacts⁵. These include the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news, the rise in cyberbullying and internet fraud, the erosion of traditional values and cultural norms, and the mental health challenges associated with digital addiction and online validation culture⁶. As such, social media represents a double-edged sword: a powerful instrument for development and self-expression, as well as a space rife with new challenges and complexities⁷.

From a historical perspective, the role of Nigerian youth in shaping the country's sociopolitical landscape has been both visible and profound. From their involvement in anti-colonial nationalist movements to their participation in the post-independence struggle for democracy and human rights, young Nigerians have consistently positioned themselves as agents of change⁸. In the contemporary era, this legacy of activism has taken on a new dimension, with social media serving as the primary platform for civic engagement, political participation, and cultural expression. The 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality stand as a landmark example of this transformation⁹.

In essence, the research explores how Nigerian youth harness social media as a tool for personal and collective expression, sociopolitical mobilization, cultural negotiation, and international engagement. By situating the discussion within broader historical and international frameworks, the study provides a nuanced understanding of

how digital technology, when intersected with youth activism and globalization, continues to redefine the contours of national security, international relations, and cultural identity in Nigeria.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of social media on Nigerian youth within the context of the 21st century, with its implications on national development and global engagement.

Specific objectives include to:

1. Trace historical development of mass communication and its transformation into digital social media.
2. Examine how social media has transformed youth participation in political, economic, and social spheres.
3. Examine the influence of social media on youth engagement in international movements, diplomacy, and global advocacy.
4. Explore how social media-driven movements have impacted Nigeria's international image and foreign relations.
5. Evaluate both the positive and negative consequences of social media usage among Nigerian youth.

Scope of Study

The study focuses on Nigerian youth aged 15–35 and examines their use of social media in both domestic and international contexts. It analyzes the historical progression

from traditional media to digital platforms and considers the impact of this shift on youth engagement in politics, social change, and global communication.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on content analysis of secondary sources. Data will be obtained from academic journals, government publications, policy papers, international reports, and media sources..

A historical-analytical approach will be utilized to critically examine and contextualize key developments and case studies. Particular attention will be given to pivotal events and movements that illustrate the intersection of youth activism, digital communication, and global engagement. These include the #EndSARS protests as a manifestation of digital-driven civic resistance; the “Africa to the World” campaign as a vehicle for cultural globalization; and Nigerian youth involvement in transnational causes such as climate justice and the Black Lives Matter movement. Through this lens, the study aims to uncover patterns, trace historical continuities, and offer nuanced interpretations of the socio-political and cultural dynamics shaping Nigerian youth in the digital age.

Literature Review

Several literary works have been published in the discussion of the The i impacts of social media on Nigerian youth in the 21st century.

Some of these literary works include; “Examining the Relationship Between Social Media Use and Political Participation Among Nigerian Youth” by Adegbola, O. &

Gearhart¹⁰. Adegbola and Gearhart's 2019 study presents a rigorous empirical investigation into how Nigerian youth engage with social media and the effect this engagement has on their political participation. The research draws upon a robust theoretical framework, namely the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Civic Voluntarism Model, to evaluate whether online activities translate into real-world political behavior.

The authors argue that social media provides youth with a platform to express opinions, receive political news, and engage in discussions that would otherwise be inaccessible through traditional media. A survey methodology is employed, sampling university students across various geopolitical zones in Nigeria. It identifies political interest, perceived efficacy, and information consumption as predictors of engagement. Facebook and Twitter were the dominant platforms for political discourse.

This work is extremely relevant as it uncovers the intersection of digital technology and political identity among young Nigerians. In the 21st century, Nigerian youth have become increasingly disillusioned with formal political institutions; however, social media provides them with an alternative space for democratic engagement. The paper highlights that social media enables users to perform civic duties such as signing petitions, tweeting about governance, or participating in online debates. These actions reflect digital citizenship, a concept essential to understanding youth empowerment in modern Nigeria. The study contributes to the conceptualization of political participation as multi-dimensional — encompassing both online (slacktivism, e-petitions, hashtag activism) and offline actions (protests, voting, organizing). This distinction is crucial to

understanding the new patterns of engagement among Nigerian youth, many of whom view social media as a political tool for accountability in a society where democratic norms are often violated.

Another vital work is “Social Media, Youth Culture and Democratic Values in Nigeria” by Salawu, A. & Gambo, D¹¹. Salawu and Gambo’s article explores how Nigerian youth, influenced by social media, develop a distinct digital culture that simultaneously supports and undermines democratic values. The work adopts a cultural studies lens, examining memes, slang, digital protest art, and political discourse to show how democracy is both contested and reimagined by youth in digital spaces.

The article is divided into three core parts:

1. Historical development of youth culture in Nigeria
2. Adoption and domestication of social media
3. The relationship between digital behavior and democratic norms

The authors find that youth are heavily invested in using social media to hold leaders accountable, yet also susceptible to polarization, online bullying, and echo chambers that damage democratic dialogue. WhatsApp and Instagram are identified as platforms where political satire and cultural narratives flourish, while Twitter is seen as the nerve center for rapid mobilization and ideological debate.

This study is invaluable as it provides a cultural dimension to the study of Nigerian youth and social media. It shows how democratic values like free speech, participation, and tolerance are both practiced and contested online. For instance, while

youth often use hashtags to promote change (#NotTooYoungToRun, #EndSARS), the same platforms can facilitate cyberbullying, misinformation, and political tribalism. This duality shows that social media is not just a tool but an ideological battlefield, shaping the political consciousness and ethical frameworks of Nigerian youth. It also points to the need for digital citizenship education to help youth navigate these complex spaces responsibly.

The work by Agbo, J. N. Titled “Youth, Social Media and the Rise of Cyber Activism in Nigeria”, is also very vital¹². Agbo investigates how Nigerian youth are emerging as cyber-activists by leveraging social media platforms to mobilize against injustice and state repression. Drawing on case studies like #BringBackOurGirls and #OccupyNigeria, the article demonstrates how youth circumvent conventional power structures to create alternative avenues of influence. This work explores the transition from passive digital use to proactive digital activism. Youth are no longer mere consumers of content; they are content creators, agenda setters, and digital mobilizers. The article documents the morphology of protest — from viral tweets to digital flyers, podcasts, and online interviews. Importantly, Agbo explores how digital tools provide visibility for marginalized voices, particularly women and minority youth. Social media gives young Nigerians a sense of agency in a socio-political environment where they often feel excluded. This activism is also a response to institutional failures — poor education, unemployment, and police brutality — all of which have mobilized the youth online.

Another notable work is titled “Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria During the 2011 General Elections” by Okoro, N. & Nwafor, K. A¹³. This article provides a comprehensive historical analysis of the role social media played during Nigeria’s 2011 general elections — widely regarded as the first Nigerian election influenced by digital platforms. The study draws on electoral data, media monitoring, and interviews to evaluate the nature and scale of youth participation.

1. Election Monitoring: Youth used Facebook and Twitter to report vote rigging, violence, and irregularities in real time.
2. Political Awareness: Social media increased awareness of party manifestos and debates.
3. Mobilization: Platforms served as organizing tools for rallies, debates, and community meetings.

The study is essential for contextualizing the historical evolution of social media use in Nigeria. It shows that even in the early 2010s, young people were already digital-savvy and eager to participate in nation-building. This work demonstrates how digital tools have become structural components of political behavior, not just communication channels. The article concludes by emphasizing that youth participation in 2011 laid the foundation for subsequent digital movements, showing that the relationship between Nigerian youth and social media is not recent but an ongoing historical development.

The work of Okechukwu, C. E. “Social Media and Identity Politics Among Nigerian Youth¹⁴.” Okechukwu’s article offers an in-depth examination of how social

media platforms have transformed identity formation and political expression among Nigerian youth in the 21st century. The central thesis is that digital technologies — particularly social media — have amplified ethnic, religious, and regional identities, intensifying both solidarity and division within Nigeria’s youth demographic. The author argues that while social media can be a tool of integration, enabling dialogue across ethnic lines, it often becomes a mechanism of polarization, reinforcing historical grievances and deepening ethnic cleavages. This work is particularly important as it links digital behavior with socio-political identity, exploring how young Nigerians use online platforms to reconstruct, perform, and politicize their identities in ways that impact national cohesion and governance.

The article is structured into five key sections:

1. Introduction to Identity Politics in Nigeria

This section provides a historical overview of Nigeria’s complex identity landscape, marked by colonial legacies, ethnic federalism, and post-independence tensions. Okechukwu notes that ethnic and religious identities have long been central to political mobilization in Nigeria. However, the 21st-century digital era has provided a new arena where these identities are expressed and contested in real time.

2. Conceptual Framework: Social Media and Identity Performance

The author draws from constructivist theories of identity and performance theory, emphasizing how social media is not just a communication tool but a space of identity construction. Youth, especially those alienated from mainstream institutions, use

platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to assert belonging, grievances, and aspirations.

3. Case Studies: IPOB, #ArewaYouth, and Religious Digital Communities

Here, Okechukwu presents empirical case studies of youth-driven digital movements:

- The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and their use of Facebook and Twitter to promote Biafran nationalism and critique perceived Igbo marginalization.
- The rise of #ArewaYouth hashtags, where Northern Nigerian youth assert Islamic identity and political opinions shaped by region and religion.
- The proliferation of online Christian and Muslim youth groups, using social media for evangelism, defense of religious values, and sometimes as tools for inter-religious antagonism. These case studies are richly supported with screenshots, tweets, and interviews, making the research both grounded and illustrative.

4. Positive and Negative Implications of Digital Identity Politics

Okechukwu does not adopt a simplistic or one-sided view. While he acknowledges the fragmentary dangers of identity politics online — such as hate speech, ethnocentrism, and incitement — he also highlights positive outcomes. Social media enables marginalized youth to reclaim their voice, document injustice, and build solidarity across diaspora and domestic lines. The dual nature of social media as both liberatory and divisive is a key insight.

5. Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

The article concludes by recommending digital literacy programs, content moderation, and youth civic education as ways to minimize the destructive potential of identity politics online. It advocates for a digital citizenship model where youth are equipped not just to express identity but to engage responsibly and constructively.

This work is indispensable in several ways:

1. **Multidimensional Impact:** It expands the scope of social media's impact beyond political or educational use, bringing in ethnic and cultural dimensions of youth engagement.
2. **Intersection of History and Technology:** Okechukwu's exploration of IPOB and Arewa movements situates digital activism within a historical continuum of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria.
3. **Nation-building vs. Fragmentation:** Okechukwu's paper gives an empirical grounding to explore both sides of that argument. It challenges optimistic narratives of digital empowerment by showing how platforms also enable ethnic enclaves, digital tribalism, and "echo chambers" of identity.
4. **Youth as Agents of Political Culture:** The article foregrounds youth as not just consumers of political culture but as active agents shaping national narratives. Whether calling for secession or demanding inter-ethnic solidarity, young people are using social media to influence what it means to be Nigerian in the 21st century.

Academically, this work is a strong contribution to political communication, identity studies, and African digital sociology. It provides a framework to study online identity politics without reducing it to either utopia or dystopia. Politically, it calls attention to the need for inclusive dialogue and responsible regulation of digital spaces, especially in fragile multi-ethnic states like Nigeria.

“Social Media, Youth Culture and Consumerism in Nigeria.” By Abubakar, F, is also vital¹⁵. Abubakar explores how social media promotes consumerist values among youth, influencing spending habits, lifestyle aspirations, and even career goals. It Highlights the economic and cultural implications of social media, offering insights into youth identity, status anxiety, and financial behavior.

Another notable work is “Nigerian Youth, Digital Narratives and Political Consciousness” By Ojo, T¹⁶. Ojo’s work is a significant contribution to the study of digital culture, youth political consciousness, and media activism in Nigeria, which investigates how Nigerian youth use digital storytelling tools — particularly memes, short videos, hashtags, and blog posts — to construct alternative political narratives and express dissatisfaction with the state of the nation. Ojo positions digital narratives as both a form of cultural production and a strategy of resistance in the face of corruption, poor governance, and institutional failure. The author specifically situates Nigerian youth as digital griots—modern-day narrators and satirists who blend humor, critique, and vernacular storytelling to educate and mobilize. Unlike formal political discourse, these narratives are accessible, shareable, and emotionally resonant — making them a powerful

tool for social commentary and mass communication. It is directly aligned with *The Impact of Social Media on Nigerian Youth in the 21st Century* for several reasons:

1. **Youth as Creators, Not Just Consumers** – Ojo challenges the view of young people as passive consumers of political content. Instead, they are seen as content creators who use social media to construct counter-narratives that interrogate national issues such as electoral fraud, police brutality, economic inequality, and youth unemployment.
2. **Cultural Archive and Political Resistance** – Ojo positions social media as a digital archive of dissent, preserving youth struggles in visual and textual form. This establishes social media as a living historical record of youth engagement.
3. **Postcolonial and Popular Aesthetics** – The paper makes a compelling case for viewing youth digital narratives as postcolonial critique. Nigerian youth are seen reclaiming agency by blending vernacular culture, pidgin, and local idioms to critique global and local systems of domination.

Ojo's work contributes to multiple academic domains:

- **Media Studies:** It expands media theory by recognizing everyday digital content as politically significant.
- **Political Communication:** It reframes civic participation by focusing on informal, youth-led media.
- **Youth Studies:** It highlights the creativity and political potential of Nigerian youth in the face of institutional failure.

In practical terms, it suggests that policymakers and educators should engage with youth digital cultures as valid and valuable—not as deviant or inconsequential.

The work “Social Media Addiction and Youth Mental Health in Nigeria.” By Yusuf, A¹⁷. In this critical psychological study, Yusuf examines the correlation between excessive social media use and deteriorating mental health among Nigerian youth. The core argument of the article is that social media addiction — characterized by compulsive usage, inability to disconnect, and emotional dependency on digital interactions — poses serious psychological threats, especially to adolescents and young adults. Yusuf argues that while social media platforms offer opportunities for expression, connection, and learning, their unregulated use is increasingly linked to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, academic underperformance, and social isolation. This work adds a vital psychological and public health dimension on The Impact of Social Media on Nigerian Youth in the 21st Century, making it essential for understanding not just the sociopolitical implications of digital platforms but also their effects on youth well-being and development.

“Social Media Addiction and Youth Mental Health in Nigeria.” By Yusuf, Offers critical insights that expand the scope of the research into psychological and health-related dimensions of social media’s impact on Nigerian youth. While other sources may focus on political engagement, identity, or education, Yusuf’s work confronts the hidden emotional toll of persistent digital engagement.

1. **Interdisciplinary Insight:** The inclusion of this source enriches the project by integrating psychology, sociology, and digital media studies.
2. **Policy Relevance:** This work bridges academic research and public policy. By exposing the emerging mental health crisis among Nigerian youth, Yusuf's findings can inform government initiatives, NGO outreach, and educational curricula
3. **Historical Continuity and Change:** In linking youth identity and coping strategies to new digital environments, the study speaks to a generational transformation. Traditional sources of social capital (e.g., religious institutions, peer groups, and extended families) are increasingly replaced by online networks.

The work of Adesina, O. S. Titled "Social Media, Political Mobilization and Youth in Nigeria¹⁸." Adesina's article is a pivotal scholarly contribution to the discourse on digital democracy, youth political engagement, and the transformation of electoral processes in Nigeria. The central thesis argues that social media has redefined the contours of political mobilization in Nigeria, particularly by enhancing the visibility, voice, and agency of Nigerian youth during electoral cycles. Focusing on the 2015 and 2019 general elections, the study analyzes how digital platforms empowered young people to transcend traditional political barriers and become active participants in agenda-setting, civic education, and grassroots mobilization. Adesina contends that this shift is not merely technological but structurally transformative, as it signals a decentralization of political communication and a repositioning of youth from the periphery to the center of Nigeria's democratic process. Social media is presented not just

as a communication tool, but as an arena of political performance, identity formation, and collective resistance.

The study establishes that social media has altered traditional gatekeeping structures in Nigeria's political space. Youth no longer need to depend on political parties or mainstream media to mobilize; they now curate, circulate, and control political discourse independently, often holding political elites accountable. It also emphasizes the emergence of youth-led digital movements, such as #NotTooYoungToRun, which led to constitutional amendments lowering the age for electoral candidacy. This reflects a shift in youth identity from passive observers to digital citizens and reformists.

Another notable work is titled "Social Media and Sexuality Among Nigerian Youth." By Ebong, I. E¹⁹. Ebong's article provides a sociological exploration of how social media has become a transformative space for the negotiation of sexual identity, behavior, and values among Nigerian youth. The author asserts that digital platforms have not only expanded youth access to sexual content but have also redefined traditional norms governing relationships, intimacy, and morality in Nigeria's multi-religious and largely conservative society. This study is grounded in the idea that social media is not a neutral space—it is a cultural and ideological arena where identities are shaped, contested, and expressed. Ebong argues that in the 21st century, Nigerian youth are increasingly exposed to globalized images of sexuality via Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp, which has led to shifts in attitudes toward sex, body politics, gender roles, and courtship practices.

The study recommends:

- Sexuality education programs that are contextually sensitive and use social media as a delivery tool.
- Parental and institutional guidance to help youth navigate these digital spaces responsibly.
- Government partnership with NGOs to launch social media campaigns addressing consent, body autonomy, and safe sexual behavior.

“Digital Literacy and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria.” By Lawal, M. O²⁰. Is another notable work. Lawal assesses the importance of digital literacy programs in maximizing the benefits of social media. The author argues that empowered youth are more likely to use social media responsibly and for developmental purposes.

Another notable work “Online Social Networks and Civic Engagement Among Nigerian Undergraduates.” By Bello, A²¹. Bello’s study presents a compelling argument that online social networks—particularly platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp—have emerged as central tools for political education, civic mobilization, and participatory engagement among Nigerian undergraduates. The article examines how digital interconnectivity stimulates youth involvement in causes that range from campus politics to broader national issues such as anti-corruption, human rights, education reform, and electoral transparency. Bello maintains that the digital public sphere created by social media provides young Nigerians with alternative modes of political and civic participation, enabling them to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as mainstream media,

state institutions, and hierarchical political parties. In a country where the youth demographic has often been marginalized in policy spaces, online platforms offer an outlet for expression, mobilization, and resistance.

The work of Nwankwo, C. Titled “Fake News, Disinformation and the Youth in Nigeria²²” Nwankwo’s article addresses the pervasive challenge of fake news and disinformation within the Nigerian digital space, with a specific focus on youth behavior, vulnerability, and influence. The paper argues that while Nigerian youth are the most digitally active demographic in the country, they are also disproportionately exposed to—and responsible for—the spread of misinformation, due to a combination of limited media literacy, emotional engagement with content, and socio-political polarization. Nwankwo presents a troubling but necessary perspective on how social media, though powerful for civic and democratic engagement, can also function as a tool of manipulation, distortion, and public misinformation, particularly when unchecked by adequate critical reasoning and institutional safeguards. While many studies focus on the empowering and mobilizing potential of social media, Nwankwo presents the darker side—where youth can become misinformed, politically manipulated, and agents of social instability due to unchecked online behavior. By showing that misinformation leads to polarization, hate speech, and public mistrust, the article connects youth online behavior with wider national security and democratic development concerns—bridging the gap between personal media habits and national outcomes. Youth are not only passive recipients but active participants in spreading misinformation. This challenges narratives

of digital innocence and demands a more responsible digital citizenship among young Nigerians. Rather than stopping at critique, Nwankwo provides a policy-oriented pathway to address these issues.

The work of Castells, M. Titled “Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age²³” In *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Castells explores how the rise of the internet and social media has reshaped collective action, protest, and civic engagement in the 21st century. He draws on global case studies—including the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, and the Occupy Wall Street movement—to demonstrate how digital platforms empower ordinary citizens to mobilize against perceived injustices and challenge dominant political and economic structures. Castells introduces the idea of “networked social movements” which emerge organically, driven by online connectivity rather than formal institutions. This directly relates to how Nigerian youth have used platforms like Twitter and Instagram for causes such as #EndSARS. He emphasizes how digital spaces allow individuals, particularly youth, to express personal and collective identities. This is critical in Nigeria where young people use social media to reclaim narratives, showcase culture, and resist marginalization.

While Castells focuses on recent global movements, the ideas offer a framework to historically situate how Nigerian youth have transitioned from traditional modes of activism (e.g., student union protests) to digital mobilization via social media. Manuel Castells’ *Networks of Outrage and Hope* is a cornerstone text for understanding the sociopolitical power of social media in the digital age. It provides both the theoretical

tools and comparative case studies to analyze how Nigerian youth have adopted social media as a platform for activism, identity formation, and resistance

Another vital literary work is “ Social Media and Youth Engagement in Nigeria”, By Ojebuyi, B. R²⁴. explores the growing influence of social media on youth engagement in Nigeria’s political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres. It provides empirical evidence and theoretical insights into how Nigerian youth interact with digital platforms to express themselves, mobilize for collective action, and shape public discourse. The book addresses youth engagement, including participation in democratic processes, activism, entrepreneurship, and civic responsibility, all of which are mediated by social media The book emphasizes that Nigerian youth are not just users of social media—they are shapers of its trends and narratives. They employ these platforms for self-expression, identity formation, and community building. Social media has opened new channels for youth to engage in political discourse, participate in elections, and hold public officials accountable.

“Digital Media and Political Communication in Africa” by Adeiza, A²⁵. examines the intersections between digital media, political participation, and democratic development in African countries. It places particular emphasis on the evolving nature of political communication in the digital age and the role of youth as digital citizens. The book provides a comparative African perspective, situating Nigerian youth within broader continental trends in digital engagement.It explores how digital tools such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook have transformed traditional political communication,

making them more accessible to youth. Adeiza’s analysis highlights how Nigerian youth have used social media to challenge government narratives, organize protests (e.g., #EndSARS), and push for transparency and accountability

The work titled “Mass Communication: A Compendium of Theories, Laws and Principles” by Nwabueze, C²⁶. This text by Chinenye Nwabueze provides a foundational understanding of communication theories, media laws, and principles of mass communication. It is widely used in Nigerian academic institutions to teach the theoretical underpinnings of media practices and media influence. The book offers essential theoretical frameworks, including Uses and Gratifications Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Social Learning Theory, which are relevant to understanding how Nigerian youth use and are influenced by social media. It explains how mass media—especially new media—shapes perceptions, behaviors, and societal values, helping to explain the attitudinal and behavioral shifts among Nigerian youth.

The work of Okafor, J. C. “ #EndSARS and the Power of Social Media in Nigeria²⁷.” African Affairs. This article is a critical and timely scholarly piece that explores how social media served as the primary engine behind the #EndSARS protests—a historic youth-led movement against police brutality in Nigeria. Okafor argues that digital platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook transformed youth activism from marginal, localized resistance into a coordinated national uprising. This article shows how Nigerian youth leverage social media for social justice and political change, highlighting the strategic use of hashtags, influencers, live streaming, and viral

storytelling. It highlights the global reach of local grievances—how #EndSARS drew attention from celebrities, foreign governments, and international media, thereby linking social media to international relations and national image.

“Social Media Use among Nigerian Youths.” By Ezeah, G. H., Asogwa, C. E., & Obiorah, E. I²⁸ is pivotal in the research. This study offers one of the earliest empirical assessments of social media behavior among Nigerian youth. The authors analyzed youth engagement patterns, preferred platforms, and the motivations behind their usage. It categorizes youth motivations into communication, information-seeking, entertainment, and social networking. The study confirms that youth see social media as a source of identity formation, self-expression, and peer influence.

CHAPTERIZATION

This study is divided into five chapters;

CHAPTER ONE: Background to the study

This chapter gives a general introduction to the study and reviews some relevant literature as it relates to the study. It also comprises of the aims and objectives as well as the scope of work, that deals with the subject matter of the work.

CHAPTER TWO: Evolution of Social Media in Nigeria

This chapter looks at how social media has developed over time. It begins with a look at youth culture in Nigeria, from the pre-independence period to the digital age. It also explains how traditional media like radio, TV, and newspapers changed and moved to digital platforms.

CHAPTER THREE: Social Media and Nigerian youths

This chapter explains the main ideas and terms used in the study, such as social media, youth, digital engagement, and national development.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Impact of Social Media on Nigerian Youth in the 21st Century

This chapter focuses on how social media affects Nigerian youth in different ways. It looks at both the positive and negative sides of social media use, especially in today's digital age.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

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CHAPTER TWO

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

Introduction

To thoroughly understand the evolution and impact of social media in Nigeria, especially on youth and national development, it is essential to provide clear definitions and explanations of key concepts used throughout this study. These concepts form the theoretical and analytical foundation upon which the research is built. The following subsections define and elaborate on the main terms: social media, youth, digital engagement, and national development.

Social Media

Social media refers to a group of internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, access, and share content—such as text, images, videos, and audio—in real-time or asynchronously, across virtual communities and social networks. These platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter (now known as X), Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, and newer emerging platforms. Unlike traditional media, which operates on a one-to-many model (e.g., television or radio broadcasting), social media thrives on interactivity, collaboration, and user-generated content, allowing many-to-many communication.

Social media is characterized by key features such as user profiles, real-time messaging, public and private sharing, content creation tools, hashtags, likes, comments, and algorithm-based feeds. These features have made social media indispensable in

modern society, especially among the youth who are active digital natives. In the Nigerian context, the rise of mobile technology and improved internet access has further accelerated the adoption of social media across urban and rural areas.

Social media goes beyond mere entertainment or communication; it plays vital roles in political awareness, education, civic engagement, business promotion, cultural expression, activism, socialization, and personal branding. It is now a powerful tool through which young Nigerians shape public discourse, participate in democracy, and engage with global trends.

Youth

The term “youth” is a sociological and demographic category that generally refers to individuals in the transitional phase between childhood and full adulthood. In Nigeria, according to the National Youth Policy (2019), youth are officially defined as persons aged 18 to 35 years. This group constitutes a significant proportion of Nigeria’s population—more than 60%—making them a critical demographic in the nation’s political, economic, and social landscape.

Youth are characterized by traits such as energy, creativity, openness to innovation, adaptability to technology, and the desire for self-expression and societal involvement. They are often seen as change agents due to their willingness to question norms and embrace new ideas. In the digital era, Nigerian youths are the most active users of social media. They are frequently early adopters of emerging technologies and are instrumental in shaping online culture, trends, and public opinion.

Moreover, youths in Nigeria face a wide range of socio-economic challenges including unemployment, underemployment, poor access to education, social inequality, and political exclusion. Social media offers an avenue for these youths to overcome some of these limitations by connecting them to information, opportunities, and platforms for advocacy and self-development.

Digital Engagement

Digital engagement refers to the active and meaningful interaction of individuals with digital technologies and online platforms. This includes activities such as browsing websites, posting content on social media, attending webinars, participating in virtual communities, streaming videos, joining online campaigns, and engaging in digital learning. In other words, digital engagement represents how people use the internet and related technologies to connect, express themselves, solve problems, and influence society.

For Nigerian youths, digital engagement is often centered around mobile phones, which serve as their primary device for accessing the internet. Through platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, they engage in discussions on current affairs, share educational content, promote their businesses, create entertainment content, and participate in national debates.

Digital engagement also includes e-participation—using digital tools to take part in governance and decision-making. For example, the use of hashtags like #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls, or #VoteNotFight represents a form of civic digital engagement

where young Nigerians raise awareness, mobilize support, and demand accountability from leaders. It is important to note that digital engagement is not only about consumption but also about creation and contribution. Youths who use social media to teach skills, build audiences, advocate for social justice, or run digital businesses demonstrate a high level of active engagement. However, it also comes with risks such as exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, data privacy issues, and digital addiction—all of which must be managed responsibly.

National Development

National development refers to the holistic and sustained improvement in a country's standard of living, quality of life, governance, economy, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and technological advancement. It encompasses not only economic growth but also social equity, human capital development, security, and environmental sustainability. In Nigeria, national development involves addressing long-standing challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment, insecurity, educational gaps, corruption, and poor infrastructure. Government policies, non-governmental efforts, and citizen participation all play key roles in the development process.

Social media has become a modern driver of national development by offering a low-cost, high-reach platform for information dissemination, innovation, collaboration, and civic engagement. For example:

- Entrepreneurs use social media to promote businesses, generate income, and contribute to the economy.

- Educators and influencers use social platforms to raise awareness on health, education, and social issues.
- Activists and citizens use it to demand transparency, challenge injustice, and participate in democratic processes.

Social media also helps to connect marginalized voices and ensure inclusive development by giving everyone a platform regardless of social status, gender, religion, or location. Youths, in particular, are leveraging digital tools to drive movements, share solutions, and take ownership of national progress in innovative ways. However, social media must be used strategically and ethically to avoid misuse—such as promoting hate speech, misinformation, online fraud, or cybercrime—which can undermine development efforts. Therefore, digital literacy and responsible online behavior are essential components of using social media for sustainable national growth.

Historical Background of Social Media in Nigeria

The evolution of social media in Nigeria is a reflection of global technological advancement, digital innovation, and the growing influence of the internet on communication and human interaction¹. Over the past two decades, social media has transformed from a novel concept into a dominant force that shapes how Nigerian youth interact, express themselves, consume information, and participate in national development². This section traces the historical background of social media in Nigeria, highlighting the key phases of growth and adoption, especially among young people.

Early Adoption Phase (2000–2010)

Social media began to gain traction in Nigeria in the early 2000s, during a period marked by increased computer literacy, mobile phone penetration, and the liberalization of the telecommunications sector. The arrival of GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) services in Nigeria in 2001 was a major turning point, as it provided millions of Nigerians with access to mobile phones and, eventually, mobile internet³.

During this period, cyber cafés became the first digital hubs where many Nigerian youths got introduced to the internet and early social media platforms. Platforms like Yahoo Messenger, Hi5, Friendster, 2go, and MySpace were among the first online spaces where Nigerian youths created profiles, chatted with friends, and built social connections⁴. For many young people, 2go—an instant messaging app created specifically for mobile users—became a household name due to its affordability and accessibility on Java phones.

As internet access expanded, Facebook emerged as a revolutionary platform, attracting a wide audience of Nigerian youths around 2007–2008. Facebook offered a more dynamic and engaging experience with features such as timelines, photo uploads, groups, and fan pages. It was during this era that Nigerian youth began to move beyond passive internet browsing to active digital participation.

Growth and Expansion Phase (2010–2020)

The 2010s marked a period of rapid growth and expansion for social media usage in Nigeria⁵. Several key factors contributed to this transformation:

- Increased smartphone availability due to the importation of low-cost Android devices.
- Improved mobile internet connectivity, especially with the rollout of 3G and later 4G networks.
- Affordable data plans offered by telecom operators like MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile.
- Wider adoption of social platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (now X), YouTube, and Snapchat.

WhatsApp quickly overtook SMS as the dominant messaging tool, enabling real-time communication, group chats, voice notes, and file sharing—all essential tools for social interaction and business activities. Twitter (now X) became a powerful space for public discourse, especially for educated urban youth, while Instagram attracted creative individuals—photographers, fashion enthusiasts, influencers, and entrepreneurs—who used the platform to promote their work and grow their personal brands.

During this time, Nigerian youth increasingly began to use social media for education, entertainment, online business, advocacy, and self-expression⁶. YouTube gained popularity for tutorials, music videos, and comedy skits, while blogs and vlogs became platforms for youth commentary and lifestyle content. The rise of influencers and online content creators became prominent, as some youths began to monetize their presence and build careers through social platforms.

The #BringBackOurGirls campaign in 2014 and the #EndSARS movement in 2020 were significant moments that demonstrated the political power of social media in Nigeria⁷. These youth-led movements showed how platforms like Twitter and Instagram could be used for civic mobilization, advocacy, and international awareness.

The Era of Mass Digital Influence and Monetization (2020–Present)

From 2020 onward, social media in Nigeria entered a new phase, defined by widespread influence, digital entrepreneurship, activism, and monetization. With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing more activities online, social media became even more central to everyday life⁸. The lockdown period saw a boom in content creation, digital marketing, and virtual engagement. Platforms like TikTok, which became globally popular around this time, quickly gained a strong following among Nigerian youth⁹. Its short-form video format enabled users to create and share dance videos, comedy skits, motivational talks, beauty tips, and other viral content. Nigerian TikTok stars such as content creators and comedians became national celebrities with large followings, and in many cases, began earning from brand endorsements and influencer marketing.

Additionally, many young Nigerians now earn full-time incomes from social media as:

- Influencers
- Digital marketers
- Online vendors
- YouTubers and vloggers

- Social media managers
- Affiliate marketers

This shift toward the “digital hustle” culture has made social media not just a tool for leisure, but a platform for economic empowerment and self-reliance, especially in a country where youth unemployment remains a major challenge¹⁰. However, this era also brought new challenges: increased cybercrime (such as internet fraud or “Yahoo Yahoo”), online scams, fake news, digital addiction, and mental health issues caused by comparison culture and online pressure. In response to the growing influence of social media, the Nigerian government has attempted to regulate digital space, most notably seen during the temporary ban on Twitter in 2021, following political tensions and social protests¹¹.

Youth as Key Drivers of Social Media Evolution

Throughout these phases, Nigerian youth have remained the primary drivers of social media evolution. Their creativity, boldness, resilience, and hunger for opportunity have shaped how social media is used in the country. Young people are not only consumers but also creators, innovators, and community leaders on digital platforms¹².

Youth engagement on social media has influenced:

- Language: The blending of English, Pidgin, and local languages in memes, skits, and hashtags.
- Culture: Promotion of Nigerian music (Afrobeats), fashion, and comedy to a global audience.

- Politics: Holding leaders accountable, spreading awareness, and engaging in policy discussions.
- Business: Launching startups, digital products, and e-commerce ventures via social platforms.
- Education: Creating and accessing free online resources, study groups, and tutorials.

Statistical Growth and Digital Penetration

According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and global data platforms like DataReportal, as of 2024¹³:

- Nigeria has over 123 million active internet users.
- Social media users are estimated at over 38 million, with over 90% of them aged 18–35.
- WhatsApp is the most used platform in Nigeria, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.
- Mobile phones account for over 85% of internet access, especially among youth.

This data highlights the significant role that social media now plays in shaping the lives, identities, and aspirations of young Nigerians.

Drivers of Social Media Growth in Nigeria

The rapid growth and widespread use of social media in Nigeria, especially among the youth, did not happen by chance¹⁴. Several important factors have contributed to making social media an everyday part of life for millions of young Nigerians. These

factors both technological and social have created an environment where digital interaction has become the norm. This section explains the major drivers behind the rise of social media in Nigeria.

Increased Smartphone Penetration

One of the biggest reasons for the growth of social media in Nigeria is the increasing use of smartphones¹⁵. Over the past decade, smartphones have become more affordable and accessible, even to low-income earners. Many phone brands, particularly Tecno, Infinix, Itel, Xiaomi, and Samsung, introduced budget-friendly models that allowed Nigerian youths to browse the internet, download social media apps, and stay connected at all times. Before smartphones became common, only those who could afford computers or internet cafés could go online. Today, almost every youth—whether in cities or rural areas—can use their phone to access platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube. Smartphones have made the internet portable and personal, giving youths the power to engage with the world right from their pockets.

Affordable Internet Data

Another major driver is the availability of cheaper internet data plans. Telecom providers in Nigeria such as MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile have continuously reduced their data bundle prices to attract more customers. This competition has benefitted young people, who are often on a limited budget. Social media apps like Facebook and WhatsApp even offer "Lite" versions that use less data, making it easier for users to stay

online longer without spending too much money. Some network providers also offer social bundles, which allow users to access specific apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, or Instagram) for a very low cost. This has encouraged more regular and consistent use of these platforms, especially among Nigerian students and unemployed youth who rely heavily on mobile data rather than Wi-Fi.

Youthful Population

Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations in the world, with over 60% of its citizens below the age of 30¹⁶. This youthful population is naturally drawn to new technology and digital trends. Young people are quick to explore new tools, apps, and platforms. Their curiosity, creativity, and energy make them the most active and influential group on social media. Youths also turn to social media as a way to escape boredom, express themselves, build relationships, and stay updated on trends. Whether through memes, music, skits, or dance challenges, Nigerian youth have used social media to create a culture of their own.

Digital Literacy

Over time, more Nigerian youths have gained basic computer and smartphone skills through ICT education in secondary schools, universities, and training centers¹⁷. The ability to use apps, type messages, send emails, and operate a phone camera has become widespread. As a result, youths feel confident and comfortable using social media to interact with friends, promote their ideas, and participate in global conversations. Social media platforms are also easy to use, with simple interfaces that allow even first-

time users to navigate without much training. Features like “stories,” “status updates,” and “likes” have become second nature to Nigerian youth. The rise of influencers, content creators, and YouTubers has also inspired others to learn how to produce digital content.

Urbanization and Digital Infrastructure

Urban areas in Nigeria such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Enugu, and Benin City have better access to internet infrastructure like mobile networks, Wi-Fi, and fiber-optic broadband¹⁸. As more youths migrate from rural to urban areas for education, jobs, and better living conditions, they are exposed to more reliable and faster internet connections. This urbanization trend has also exposed Nigerian youths to a digital lifestyle where social media is used for everything—from paying bills to attending online church services and participating in job interviews. Even in rural areas, network providers are expanding coverage, allowing more youths to come online and join the digital world.

Role of Social Media in the Lives of Nigerian Youth

Social media is now deeply woven into the everyday lives of young Nigerians. It plays many roles beyond just chatting and posting pictures. For most youths, social media is a tool for connection, education, business, entertainment, and activism¹⁹. It has changed the way they think, act, and interact with society. This section outlines the major roles social media plays in the lives of Nigerian youth in the 21st century.

Communication

Social media has completely transformed how Nigerian youths communicate. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and Telegram allow for instant messaging, video calls, group chats, and voice notes²⁰. Instead of relying on expensive phone calls or text messages, young people now use these apps to keep in touch with friends, classmates, family members, and even strangers across the world. Communication is faster, more expressive (with emojis, GIFs, voice notes, and stickers), and more consistent. Social media also allows for group discussions, creating digital communities such as school group chats, fellowship forums, business networks, or fans of celebrities and influencers.

Education and Learning

Social media has become an informal school for many Nigerian youths. Platforms like YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram now offer educational content in the form of short videos, tutorials, threads, and infographics. Topics range from academics (math, science, history) to practical life skills (makeup, photography, coding, business tips, CV writing, and foreign language learning)²¹. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning became more accepted, with many schools and lecturers adopting platforms like Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp for virtual classes. Today, many students join study groups, attend webinars, or follow educational influencers to boost their knowledge.

Entertainment and Lifestyle

For Nigerian youth, social media is a major source of entertainment, laughter, and relaxation. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram Reels, and Twitter are filled with music, dance videos, memes, comedy skits, movie clips, and live performances. Youths follow celebrities, influencers, comedians, and dancers who entertain and inspire them. Popular Nigerian entertainers like Sabinus, Taaooma, Kiekie, Mr. Macaroni, and many others gained fame through social media. Many youths also participate in viral challenges, post their own videos, and build fan bases. This has given rise to a new wave of “online celebrities” and has helped promote Nigerian culture globally.

Business and Entrepreneurship

Social media is a powerful tool for business and self-employment. Many Nigerian youths now run small businesses online, selling fashion items, hair products, gadgets, cosmetics, and food. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp Business, and TikTok Shop are commonly used to advertise products, showcase customer reviews, and attract new buyers. With little or no capital, a Nigerian youth can start a business from home, promote it online, and make profits through deliveries. Some have also become influencers, affiliate marketers, and social media managers, earning money through brand collaborations and sponsored posts. This has helped reduce unemployment and promote financial independence among youths.

Political Awareness and Civic Engagement

One of the most significant roles of social media in the lives of Nigerian youth is political awareness. Platforms like Twitter (X) have become spaces where youths discuss government policies, share opinions, and criticize bad leadership. The #EndSARS movement in 2020 is a powerful example of how social media enabled young Nigerians to unite against police brutality and demand justice. Through hashtags, live streams, viral videos, and digital protests, youths forced political leaders to respond and drew international attention to the situation in Nigeria. Social media has also encouraged more youths to get their voter's cards, monitor elections, and participate in civic education campaigns. Young Nigerians now feel more involved in the democratic process and use social media to hold leaders accountable, promote good governance, and demand their rights.

Challenges of Social Media in Nigeria

Despite its benefits, social media use in Nigeria is not without its problems.

A) Fake News and Misinformation

The spread of false information on social platforms can cause panic, confusion, or even violence, especially during elections or crises²².

B) Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Many youths experience harassment, trolling, and bullying online, which can affect their mental health²³.

C) Internet Fraud (Yahoo Yahoo)

Some young Nigerians have turned to social media as a means of conducting internet scams, which damages the country's image and creates moral and security concerns²⁴.

D) Government Surveillance and Censorship

The Nigerian government has sometimes tried to regulate or control social media, such as the temporary ban of Twitter in 2021. This raises concerns about freedom of expression and digital rights²⁵.

Social Media and National Development

Social media has proven to be a powerful tool for advancing national development goals:

- **Youth Empowerment:** Platforms like YouTube and TikTok allow young people to earn money, build careers, and gain global visibility.
- **Job Creation:** Many jobs in digital marketing, influencing, and online business have been created due to the rise of social media.
- **Political Participation:** Social media provides an avenue for young people to get involved in national conversations and demand good governance.
- **Health and Awareness Campaigns:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was used to spread awareness and health information to millions of Nigerians.

As technology continues to evolve, the role of social media in Nigeria will also grow. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and virtual

communities will shape the next generation of social media platforms. For Nigeria to benefit fully from these developments, it must:

- Improve digital infrastructure.
- Support digital education in schools.
- Enforce laws to protect users from cybercrime.
- Encourage positive online behavior among youth.

Conclusion

The evolution of social media in Nigeria mirrors a broader global trend toward digital transformation and technological advancement. What started as a simple tool for online chatting and information sharing has grown into a complex, dynamic space where communication, expression, learning, business, and social action converge—especially among young people. For Nigerian youth in particular, social media has evolved into a daily necessity, deeply embedded in their lifestyles, aspirations, and identities. This chapter has provided an in-depth look into the origins and growth of social media in Nigeria, outlining the key concepts involved—such as social media, youth, digital engagement, and national development. It also traced the historical timeline from early internet adoption in cyber cafés to the modern era of smartphones, TikTok trends, digital businesses, and online activism. It became clear that Nigerian youths have been the main drivers and beneficiaries of this evolution, using social media as a tool for empowerment and self-expression.

Several important factors have contributed to the widespread adoption of social media in Nigeria. These include increased smartphone penetration, more affordable data, a large and youthful population, improved digital literacy, and urbanization. Together, these drivers have created an environment where Nigerian youths can explore the digital world, express themselves freely, connect with people globally, and take advantage of online opportunities. The roles that social media now plays in the lives of Nigerian youth are vast and multidimensional. It serves as a communication tool, an informal school, a stage for creativity, a business marketplace, and a platform for political awareness and social justice. From learning new skills on YouTube to protesting for human rights on Twitter, Nigerian youths have shown that they can use digital tools to make meaningful impact in society.

However, as powerful as social media is, it does not come without challenges. Issues such as misinformation, cyberbullying, internet fraud, online addiction, and digital inequality must be addressed. These problems threaten the positive use of social media and may hinder the full potential it holds for national development. Additionally, government efforts to regulate or restrict online spaces must strike a balance between security and freedom of expression. To fully harness the power of social media for national growth, Nigeria must invest in digital infrastructure, promote responsible use, enforce cyber laws, and support the digital economy. Schools, parents, communities, and policymakers all have roles to play in ensuring that social media is used ethically and

productively. More importantly, Nigerian youths must be empowered with the right knowledge, tools, and values to make the most of digital platforms.

In the 21st century, the voice of Nigerian youth—amplified through social media—has become one of the most influential forces in the country. Whether in entertainment, education, entrepreneurship, or civic engagement, their presence online is shaping conversations, challenging norms, and building a new Nigeria. As the nation continues to evolve in the digital age, the youth will remain at the center of that transformation—bold, creative, informed, and connected. Thus, the story of social media in Nigeria is not just about technology; it is about people—especially young people—who are using that technology to write their own stories, build their futures, and change their world.

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CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL MEDIA AND NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Social media has changed the way Nigerian youths think, speak, dress, interact, and even how they define success. It has given them a louder voice, wider visibility, and greater access to opportunities, both within and outside Nigeria. However, this influence comes with its own challenges, including exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, online fraud, and peer pressure.

By the end of this chapter, we will understand how social media has shaped Nigerian youth culture in the 21st century, what factors led to this transformation, and what it means for the future of Nigeria. The youth of today are not just consuming digital content—they are creating it, sharing it, and using it to shape the society they live in.

Understanding Youth Culture in Nigeria

Youth culture refers to the lifestyle, behavior, beliefs, values, interests, language, fashion, and entertainment preferences that are common among young people within a society. In Nigeria, youth culture is not fixed—it changes from one generation to another, depending on the social, political, economic, and technological environment. To properly understand how social media has impacted Nigerian youths today, it is important to first look at how youth culture in Nigeria has evolved over time.

The journey of Nigerian youth culture can be divided into three major historical stages:

- Pre-independence period (before 1960)

- Post-independence period (1960–1999)
- Digital age (2000–present)

Each of these stages reflects the influence of the tools, systems, and ideas available to young people at that time.

Youth Culture in the Pre-Independence Period (Before 1960)

Before Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, youth culture was deeply influenced by traditional customs, communal life, and colonial education¹. Most young people lived in villages and were raised with strong cultural values passed down from their elders. Respect for authority, hard work, obedience, and loyalty to family and community were core values. There were no social media or modern gadgets; young people communicated through face-to-face conversations, folk stories, proverbs, and public gatherings.

In the pre-independence period, youth identity was closely tied to one's ethnic group, religion, and family background. Music, dress, dance, and language varied across regions, and social roles were clearly defined by gender and age. Youths learned traditional skills such as farming, trading, fishing, crafts, and leadership through informal apprenticeships.

Although Western education had started to spread—thanks to missionary schools and colonial policies—only a small percentage of youths had access to formal schooling². For those who did, exposure to books, newspapers, and church groups introduced them to

new ways of thinking. Still, most young people had limited access to mass communication, and cultural change was slow and based mostly on direct human contact.

Youth Culture in the Post-Independence Period (1960–1999)

After Nigeria became independent in 1960, the country began to modernize, and this brought major changes to youth culture³. More young Nigerians gained access to formal education, urban life, and mass media. With the expansion of secondary schools and universities, youth culture became more diverse and exposed to global ideas. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of youth subcultures, such as university student movements, pop music fans, and fashion trends. Nigerian youths began to embrace Afrobeat music, bell-bottom trousers, platform shoes, and other trends influenced by both African and Western styles⁴. Cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, and Kano became centers for youth creativity and lifestyle.

Traditional media—radio, newspapers, and later television—became key tools for shaping youth opinions and tastes⁵. For example:

- Radio dramas and music shows were very popular among young listeners.
- Newspapers and magazines kept them informed about politics and global affairs.
- Television introduced youth to sports, news, and cultural events from around the world.

During the military rule years (1970s–1990s), youth culture also developed a political side. University students and youth groups were often at the front of protests,

human rights movements, and social activism. Student unionism and campus journalism helped shape critical thinking and civic responsibility.

However, even in this period, youth expression was limited to physical interactions, printed materials, and government-controlled media. Only a few youths had access to computers or the early internet. Communication was still largely one-way, with little room for personal content creation or instant global interaction.

Youth Culture in the Digital Age (2000–Present)

The 21st century marked a major turning point in Nigerian youth culture due to the arrival of mobile phones, internet access, and social media platforms⁶. This is the digital age, and Nigerian youths have embraced it fully. Young people are now deeply connected to global culture through smartphones, laptops, and online platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Telegram.

This digital environment has allowed youth culture to become:

- More expressive: Young people now express themselves freely online through videos, memes, tweets, blogs, photos, and voice notes.
- More creative: Many youths now create and share music, skits, dance videos, artwork, and business promotions from their phones.
- More connected: Nigerian youths interact with people across the world, join online communities, and take part in global conversations.

- More independent: Many young people now work online as content creators, influencers, freelancers, and digital marketers.

Trends move quickly in this era, and social media has become the biggest influence on youth fashion, music, slang, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, viral dance challenges, hashtag movements, fashion influencers, and meme culture now shape how young Nigerians think and behave. While traditional values like respect for elders and religion still exist, many youths today are forming individual identities based on personal interests, online exposure, and global trends. This has created a culture that is both local and global—where traditional Nigerian values meet the fast-paced influence of the internet. At the same time, digital youth culture also faces some challenges. Many young people struggle with online peer pressure, cyberbullying, unrealistic lifestyle comparisons, and the spread of fake news. Some youths are addicted to social media and find it hard to separate online life from real life⁷.

From Traditional Media to Digital Platforms

Before the rise of social media, Nigerian youths relied heavily on traditional media—such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television—for information, entertainment, and social awareness⁸. These older forms of media played a major role in shaping youth knowledge and public opinion. However, as technology advanced and the internet became widely accessible, there was a major shift toward digital platforms, particularly social media. This section explains how this transition occurred and how it

has influenced the ways in which Nigerian youths access, create, and share information in the 21st century.

What is Traditional Media?

Traditional media refers to old forms of mass communication that existed before the internet. These include:

- Newspapers and magazines – printed publications that provided news, opinions, and entertainment.
- Radio – used widely across Nigeria, especially in local languages, to broadcast music, talk shows, news, and public announcements.
- Television – brought visual content to Nigerian homes, including dramas, music videos, news, and educational programs.
- Posters and flyers – physical materials used to pass information in communities.

These media forms were one-way channels: the producers of content (government, journalists, media houses) controlled the message, and the public—including the youth—were just consumers. There was little or no opportunity for direct feedback, and content creation was limited to a few professionals or elites. In the 1980s and 1990s, many Nigerian youths grew up watching local TV stations like NTA, listening to radio programs, and reading popular newspapers like *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Guardian*. These platforms helped shape youth opinions about politics, education, culture, and lifestyle.

However, there were limitations:

- Access to information was slow and limited.
- Many youths in rural areas had little access to newspapers or electricity for television.
- Information was controlled by government or big companies, leaving little room for youth expression or participation.

The Rise of Digital Platforms

The early 2000s saw the beginning of Nigeria's digital transformation⁹. The introduction of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in 2001 and the spread of internet-enabled phones created a new era of communication. As more young Nigerians began to access the internet through their phones and cyber cafés, new digital platforms became available.

Digital platforms include:

- Websites and blogs
- Online newspapers and e-magazines
- Video-sharing platforms like YouTube
- Streaming apps like Spotify and Boomplay
- Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok

Unlike traditional media, these digital platforms are interactive, fast, and user-centered.

Youths can now:

- Create and share their own content (videos, posts, podcasts, photos).

- Engage in conversations through likes, comments, and shares.
- Access global information in real time, 24/7.
- Participate in trending topics and movements, such as #EndSARS or global challenges.

Why Nigerian Youths Prefer Digital Platforms

Nigerian youths have embraced digital media for many reasons¹⁰:

- **Speed and Convenience:** News and updates are shared instantly through phones, without needing to wait for tomorrow's newspaper or a 7 pm news broadcast.
- **Freedom of Expression:** Unlike traditional media, social media gives every youth a voice. They can speak their mind, challenge authorities, promote their beliefs, or defend their rights.
- **Creativity and Recognition:** Social media platforms allow young people to showcase talents, promote businesses, and build personal brands—even from home.
- **Connection and Community:** Digital platforms help youths find like-minded individuals, both locally and globally, making it easier to build support systems and social groups.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** With cheap data bundles and free apps, many young people can access the internet more affordably than buying newspapers or magazines daily.

As more young people moved to digital platforms, traditional media organizations were forced to adapt to new technology to stay relevant. Today, almost every major newspaper, TV station, and radio station in Nigeria has an online presence.

Examples include:

- Punch and Vanguard now publish news on their websites and social media pages.
- Channels TV and Arise News stream live broadcasts on YouTube and Facebook.
- Radio stations like Cool FM and Wazobia have mobile apps and run live shows on Instagram.

This shift has created a hybrid media space, where traditional and digital tools are combined to reach wider and younger audiences. Many media houses also employ youth social media managers, bloggers, and online reporters to engage the digital generation more effectively.

How Social Media Reshaped Nigerian Youth Identity

One of the most powerful effects of social media is how it has influenced the identity, values, and mindset of Nigerian youth¹¹. In the digital age, identity is no longer shaped only by family, school, and religion—but also by the online world.

Youth today:

- Build personal brands on Instagram and TikTok.
- Form online communities around shared interests (e.g., fashion, tech, sports).
- Discover global trends and adapt them locally (e.g., K-pop, tech startups, activism).

- Express their views on politics, relationships, culture, and religion through memes, tweets, and vlogs.

Social media has created a space where being young and Nigerian can mean different things to different people. It has also increased exposure to global cultures while still allowing youths to celebrate local identity¹². Movements like Afrobeats, #EndSARS, and Made-in-Nigeria fashion show how social media connects local pride with global reach.

Digital Freedom and Responsibility

The digital age has given Nigerian youths unprecedented freedom through social media platforms¹³. With just a smartphone and internet access, young people can now express themselves freely, engage in national conversations, and reach audiences across the globe. This kind of digital freedom has transformed how youths interact with one another and with society at large.

Unlike the traditional media era, where content was filtered and censored by media houses or government agencies, social media allows users to post content instantly and without approval. Young people can now:

- Speak their minds without fear of censorship.
- Criticize public officials or challenge bad governance.
- Call attention to injustice, discrimination, or abuse.
- Create and distribute music, videos, fashion, art, or opinions—without needing media gatekeepers or expensive platforms.

This freedom has allowed many Nigerian youths to become their own bosses, brand managers, and influencers. It has given voice to the voiceless and created a new space for civic engagement, innovation, and community building. Social media also provides emotional support systems, safe spaces for vulnerable groups, and platforms for marginalized voices to be heard. However, this digital freedom comes with serious responsibilities and risks. Without guidance, some young people misuse this freedom in ways that harm themselves, others, or society.

Common Misuses of Digital Freedom

Some Nigerian youths have found themselves in trouble due to the way they use social media¹⁴. Common digital misconduct includes:

- Spreading fake news and misinformation: Many users share news, rumors, or conspiracy theories without verifying facts. This can cause panic, confusion, or even social conflict. During elections, crises, or protests, false information spreads quickly and dangerously.
- Cyberbullying and online harassment: Some youths engage in verbal attacks, name-calling, body shaming, and emotional abuse on platforms like Twitter, TikTok, or Facebook. This can damage mental health, lead to public shaming, or ruin reputations.
- Posting illegal, violent, or harmful content: Without understanding the legal or ethical consequences, some users post sexually explicit material, threats, hate

speech, or violent acts online—leading to arrests, suspension of accounts, or damage to future job opportunities.

- Internet fraud and scams: Some young Nigerians have been both victims and perpetrators of online scams (also known as “Yahoo Yahoo”). These activities not only break the law but also give Nigeria a negative image globally.
- Addiction and mental health issues: Constant use of social media can lead to addiction, sleep problems, anxiety, and low self-esteem—especially when youths compare their lives to others online.

The Need for Digital Literacy and Ethical Use

Given the growing impact of social media, there is an urgent need to promote digital literacy among Nigerian youths¹⁵. Digital literacy means having the skills to:

- Use technology responsibly and safely.
- Think critically about the content consumed or shared.
- Understand the consequences of online actions.
- Protect one’s privacy and avoid scams.
- Respect others and obey community rules on social platforms.

Digital literacy also involves understanding the laws and ethics of online behavior¹⁶. For example, many young people do not realize that posting defamatory content or personal data without consent can lead to legal punishment. Therefore, both formal and informal education systems should include digital awareness programs.

To create a safe and productive digital space for young people, various groups in society must play active roles:

- **Government:** Should create and enforce cyber laws that protect users from abuse while still respecting freedom of speech. Public campaigns on digital safety, cybersecurity, and data privacy should also be launched.
- **Schools and Universities:** Must include digital citizenship and online ethics in their curriculum. Teachers should help students understand how to use the internet for learning, collaboration, and innovation.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Can organize workshops, training programs, and awareness campaigns on responsible social media use, especially for youths in rural areas.
- **Parents and Guardians:** Should guide their children on safe internet habits, monitor their online activities when necessary, and encourage open conversations about their digital experiences.
- **Tech Companies and Influencers:** Social media platforms themselves should promote safety features, report buttons, and educational content. Influencers and content creators should also set a good example by promoting truthful, respectful, and empowering content.

While social media has opened up exciting opportunities for Nigerian youths to express themselves, grow their businesses, and drive social change, it has also introduced

new challenges. With great freedom comes great responsibility¹⁷. The internet does not forget, and one wrong post can have long-term consequences.

To truly benefit from the digital world, Nigerian youths must learn to balance freedom with responsibility, creativity with caution, and expression with respect. Digital platforms are powerful tools—but only when used wisely. If the youth are empowered with the right knowledge and values, they can lead Nigeria into a brighter, more innovative, and more inclusive future¹⁸.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex and evolving relationship between social media and Nigerian youths, showing how digital platforms have become a powerful force in shaping youth culture, communication, identity, and opportunities in the 21st century. From the early stages of youth culture in traditional societies—where values were passed down orally and information was shared face-to-face—to the modern digital age where news, trends, and ideas are exchanged instantly online, Nigerian youths have undergone a significant transformation. We have seen how the journey from traditional media to digital platforms has changed not just how young people receive information, but also how they interact with the world around them. Social media has given Nigerian youths the tools to speak out, create content, learn new skills, build businesses, and engage in civic action. They are no longer just consumers of information; they are now creators, influencers, activists, and entrepreneurs. However, with these opportunities also come new responsibilities. The freedom offered by social media must be used wisely. Youths

must be guided on how to navigate the digital space safely, ethically, and purposefully. Issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, online fraud, and mental health challenges are real and must be addressed through proper digital education and awareness.

The influence of social media on Nigerian youth is both powerful and permanent. It has redefined identity, reshaped culture, and expanded the space for innovation, expression, and activism. As Nigeria continues to grow in the digital age, the role of youth—empowered by social media will remain central in shaping the nation's future. For this reason, investing in digital literacy, responsible online behavior, and inclusive access to technology is not just important—it is essential for national development.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In today's world, social media plays a very important role in the lives of young people. It has changed the way they talk to each other, learn, do business, and even take part in politics. In Nigeria, social media has become a major part of daily life for many youths. Almost every young person uses platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter (now called "X"), and others. This chapter will explain how social media affects Nigerian youths. It will look at both the good sides and the bad sides. It will show how social media helps young people to grow, connect, and learn. At the same time, it will also show the problems that come from using social media too much or in the wrong way. This chapter is divided into different parts. First, it will explain how youths in Nigeria use social media. Then, it will look at the positive effects. After that, it will talk about the negative effects. It will also give real-life examples. Finally, it will discuss ways to reduce the bad effects and improve the good ones.

Social Media Usage Among Nigerian Youth

Social media use has become very common among Nigerian youth. Young people between the ages of 15 and 35 use it every day. Many of them have smartphones, and they use these phones to go online¹.

Popular Social Media Platforms

Some of the most popular platforms used by Nigerian youths include:

- **WhatsApp:** This is the most used app. Youths use it to chat, send pictures, make video calls, and create groups for school or work.
- **Instagram:** Many young people post pictures and videos here. It is also used by business owners to sell clothes, shoes, hair, and other items.
- **Facebook:** Youths use Facebook to share ideas, join groups, and stay updated on news.
- **TikTok:** This app is used for fun videos, dance challenges, and short comedy skits. It is very popular among teenagers and young adults.
- **Twitter/X:** This platform is used to speak out on issues like politics, human rights, and social change.

How Youths Access Social Media

Most Nigerian youths use mobile phones to access the internet². Some also use laptops or go to cyber cafés. In cities, internet access is faster and easier. But in villages, some young people struggle with poor network and expensive data. Many youths buy cheap data plans that last for one day or one week. Others use public Wi-Fi or connect to hotspots. Because of the cost of data, some youths spend only a few hours online, while others spend more than 5 hours daily.

Positive Effects of Social Media on Nigerian Youth

Even though social media has its problems, it also helps young people in many good ways.

1. Education and Learning

Many Nigerian youths use social media to learn new things. They watch YouTube videos to understand topics better. They join WhatsApp or Facebook groups to study together. Some also attend free online classes or webinars. This has made learning easier, especially for those who cannot afford expensive education. Many Nigerian youths use social media as a tool to improve their knowledge and support their academic journey³. Platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and even Instagram have become alternative learning spaces where students can study at their own pace and connect with others.

YouTube, for example, is widely used by secondary school and university students. They search for videos that explain difficult subjects like mathematics, biology, chemistry, government, and literature. These videos are usually explained by teachers in very simple ways, sometimes using visuals and animations to make the topic easier to understand. Many students say they understand better through video lessons than what they learn in class. WhatsApp and Facebook groups are also very common among students. They use these platforms to ask questions, share assignments, solve past questions, and prepare for exams together. Some schools and lecturers even create class WhatsApp groups where they send notes, updates, and voice notes to help students. These online study groups encourage teamwork and make it easier to learn from one another.

In addition, social media helps youths attend free online classes and webinars. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), education experts, and digital coaches use Instagram Live, Facebook Live, and Zoom to teach subjects like coding, writing, public speaking, and business skills⁴. These free or low-cost lessons are especially helpful for youths who cannot afford to pay for physical classes or attend expensive schools. Some youths also follow educational pages and accounts that post daily lessons, facts, quotes, career advice, and study tips. There are even pages dedicated to helping students pass WAEC, NECO, JAMB, and university courses. By following these pages, young people stay motivated and focused.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many schools were closed, social media played a very big role in helping students continue learning from home⁵. Teachers created YouTube channels and Instagram pages to teach their students. This showed that social media can be very useful when there is no access to physical classrooms. Furthermore, many youths have learned important life skills from social media—like how to sew, bake, make wigs, edit videos, and use digital tools. These skills help them earn money and become self-reliant, even if they didn't go to university.

2. Business and Entrepreneurship

Social media gives young people a chance to start small businesses. Many sell clothes, wigs, phones, bags, and other items online. They advertise their goods on Instagram and WhatsApp and deliver to customers. This has helped many youths to earn money and become self-reliant.

Social media has opened up many opportunities for Nigerian youths to start and grow small businesses, even with little money or support⁶. Before the rise of social media, many young people needed to rent a shop, print flyers, or rely on word of mouth to get customers. But now, with just a smartphone and internet connection, they can reach hundreds or even thousands of people online every day. Many youths now sell a wide range of products and services on platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. Some of the popular items sold include clothes, shoes, human hair wigs, phones, bags, makeup kits, skincare products, perfumes, food, and even digital products like ebooks and online courses. Others provide services like makeup, photography, hairdressing, graphics design, online tutoring, and fashion styling.

Young business owners post pictures and videos of their products, give prices, and explain how to order. Customers can easily send a message, place their order, and receive the product through delivery services like GIG, Jumia Logistics, or local dispatch riders. This direct and fast form of marketing is very attractive to today's busy youth and working-class customers. Many youths have also learned digital marketing skills by watching videos on YouTube or attending free webinars online. They learn how to create engaging posts, use hashtags, write catchy captions, and run paid ads on Instagram or Facebook to reach more people. These skills have helped them increase sales and grow their businesses much faster than traditional methods.

Some Nigerian youths have become influencers or brand ambassadors, promoting other people's products in exchange for money or free gifts. Others use affiliate

marketing, where they post links to products and earn a commission for each sale. These online business models allow young people to make money even without owning any physical goods. In addition to selling, some youths also teach others how to make money online. They hold training sessions, sell e-books, or create online classes about mini-importation, dropshipping, trading, and other business ideas. They use WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram for teaching and advertising their knowledge.

Social media has also helped to reduce unemployment in Nigeria. Instead of waiting for white-collar jobs, many youths now create their own jobs online⁷. Some even employ others to help with deliveries, packaging, or content creation. This not only helps them earn money but also contributes to the economy. Lastly, many youths use social media to build their brand identity. They create logos, slogans, and unique styles that help customers recognize them easily. With time and consistency, some grow into full business owners with proper registration and official websites.

3. Communication and Connection

Social media helps youths stay connected with friends and family. Even when they live far away, they can chat or make video calls. It also helps them make new friends from different parts of Nigeria and even other countries. One of the biggest advantages of social media for Nigerian youth is the way it makes communication faster and easier⁸. In the past, it could take days or even weeks to send letters or hear from someone who lives far away. But now, with platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram,

Snapchat, and Twitter (X), young people can stay connected with friends and family in just a few seconds.

Social media allows Nigerian youths to chat in real-time, send pictures, share videos, and even make voice and video calls. For example, a university student in Lagos can easily talk to their parents in Benin or their friend in London by just opening an app. This kind of instant connection helps reduce loneliness and keeps relationships strong—even when people live in different cities, states, or countries. For many young people, social media is also a way to make new friends. They follow people with similar interests, comment on posts, and join online communities. There are thousands of groups and pages on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram for students, business owners, gamers, book lovers, musicians, and more. These groups allow youths to meet others, share ideas, and feel a sense of belonging.

Young Nigerians also use social media to maintain relationships. For example, students who have finished secondary school or NYSC use WhatsApp or Facebook to stay in touch with their old classmates. These platforms help them reconnect, share memories, and plan reunions or events. Social media keeps friendships alive, even after many years apart. In short, social media has made it easier than ever for young people in Nigeria to stay connected with others. It builds stronger relationships, supports friendships, reduces isolation, and opens the door to meeting people from all walks of life. As long as it is used wisely, it can be a powerful tool for connection, growth, and positive influence.

4. Talent and Creativity

Many Nigerian youths use social media to show their talent. They post videos of themselves singing, dancing, drawing, or acting. Some have become famous and now earn money through brand deals and sponsorships.

5. Political Awareness and Activism

Social media gives youths a voice. They use it to speak about important issues like bad roads, police harassment, electricity problems, and more. A good example is the #EndSARS protest in 2020. Social media helped youths across Nigeria to organize and speak against police brutality⁹. Social media has become a powerful tool for political awareness and activism among Nigerian youths. In the past, many young people were not involved in politics because they felt their voices did not matter. They also lacked access to information about government activities, elections, and their rights. But now, with the help of social media, more youths are learning about politics and speaking out on issues that affect their lives.

On platforms like Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, Nigerian youths express their opinions, ask questions, and demand accountability from leaders. They talk about problems such as police brutality, bad roads, poor education, lack of jobs, electricity failure, insecurity, and corruption. These platforms allow them to share their thoughts freely and find others who feel the same way. A clear example of social media activism is the #EndSARS protest that took place in October 2020. SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) was a police unit in Nigeria that was accused of harassing,

beating, and even killing innocent young people. For many years, victims had no place to report these issues. But in 2020, Nigerian youths used social media to speak up. They posted stories, shared videos of abuse, and used hashtags like #EndSARS, #PoliceBrutality, and #EndBadGovernance to create a movement. The protest began online and quickly spread across the country. Within days, thousands of young people came out to protest in Lagos, Abuja, Benin, Port Harcourt, and other major cities. The entire world saw what was happening because of live videos, viral posts, and trending hashtags. Celebrities, both in Nigeria and abroad, joined the campaign and called on the government to take action. Without social media, the #EndSARS movement would not have grown so quickly. Youths used Twitter to organize protest locations, Instagram to share posters and flyers, and WhatsApp to update each other. They also used crowdfunding tools online to raise money for food, water, medical care, and legal help for arrested protesters. This showed how smart and united Nigerian youths can be when using digital tools.

Apart from protests, social media has helped many young people become more interested in elections and voting. Youths now follow political news, join discussions, and ask questions about candidates and their plans¹⁰. During the 2023 general elections, many young Nigerians used platforms like Twitter and Instagram to encourage each other to get their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), go out and vote, and monitor the election process. For the first time in years, thousands of young people lined up at polling stations to vote for candidates they believed in. Some youths even use social media to educate

others about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They post videos explaining how to register to vote, how laws work, and how to hold leaders accountable. These online efforts help reduce ignorance and make Nigerian youths more politically active.

Social media has also given rise to youth-led civic groups and movements¹¹. These groups organize online campaigns, start petitions, write open letters, and push for new laws or reforms. They talk about important topics like gender equality, climate change, student rights, and freedom of speech. This shows that social media is not just for fun or entertainment—it is a serious tool for change. In some cases, the government has tried to control or limit social media use, especially when young people use it to criticize the authorities. For example, the Nigerian government banned Twitter for several months in 2021. However, this only made youths more determined to speak up. They continued to find creative ways to share their message and stay informed.

Social media has helped Nigerian youths become more aware of what is happening in their country. It gives them the power to ask questions, demand change, and take part in national conversations. Through hashtags, online protests, and political discussions, Nigerian youths have shown that their voices matter and that they are ready to shape the future of their country. With responsible use, social media can continue to be a strong force for justice, development, and democratic growth in Nigeria.

Negative Effects of Social Media on Nigerian Youth

While social media has many benefits, it also has serious negative effects on Nigerian youth.

1. Addiction and Time Wasting

Many young people spend too much time on social media¹². They check their phones every minute, even in class or at work. This reduces their focus and makes them less productive. Some even find it hard to sleep because they are always online. While social media has many benefits, one of the biggest problems facing Nigerian youths today is addiction. Many young people find it difficult to stay away from their phones, even for a few minutes. They constantly scroll through Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (X), even when they should be doing more important things like studying, working, or sleeping.

Some youths wake up in the morning and the first thing they do is check social media. Throughout the day, they keep checking their phones for new posts, messages, likes, and comments. Even in school, during lectures, or at the office, some cannot concentrate because they are always distracted by social media notifications. This habit reduces their attention span, meaning they find it hard to focus on one thing for a long time. This kind of behavior is called social media addiction. Just like other types of addiction, it can be harmful. It makes young people waste valuable time that could have been used to learn new skills, do school assignments, rest, or build real-life relationships. Instead of spending time on things that help them grow, they spend hours looking at pictures,

watching skits, or gossiping in group chats. Social media addiction also affects academic performance. Many students find it hard to study or prepare for exams because they are constantly distracted by their phones. Some even carry their phones to the library or reading room and end up wasting time online instead of reading. As a result, their grades drop, and they may struggle to meet deadlines.

Another effect of this addiction is poor sleep habits. Many youths stay online late at night, watching TikTok videos, replying to chats, or just scrolling without purpose. This habit, often called "doom scrolling," makes them sleep very late and wake up feeling tired. Lack of sleep affects their health, energy levels, and ability to think clearly the next day. Excessive use of social media can also reduce real-life interactions. Young people may spend so much time chatting online that they forget to bond with family members, talk to friends in person, or enjoy nature. This can lead to loneliness, anxiety, and depression, especially when they start comparing their lives with what they see on social media. Some youths also develop the fear of missing out (FOMO)¹³. This is a feeling of worry that something exciting is happening online and they are not part of it. Because of this, they feel the need to stay online all the time, even when they are tired, busy, or stressed.

Another danger is that addiction to social media can lead to procrastination. Youths often say, "I'll start reading in 10 minutes," but then spend hours online and forget what they planned to do. This behavior makes it hard for them to meet goals or manage their time properly. Also, when young people spend too much time online, they

sometimes fall into unhealthy habits like watching inappropriate content, joining gossip groups, or engaging in online fights. These things do not add value and can lead to negative behavior or bad influence.

To reduce addiction, some youths are now setting screen time limits on their phones or deleting certain apps during exam periods. Others are using social media only at specific times of the day. Schools, parents, and teachers are also beginning to teach students how to manage their time wisely and not allow social media to take over their lives, while social media can be fun and helpful, using it too much is dangerous. Addiction reduces focus, affects learning, wastes time, and harms the mental health of young people. Nigerian youths must learn to use social media in a controlled and balanced way, so they can enjoy its benefits without falling into the trap of addiction.

2. Mental Health Issues

Seeing perfect pictures and lifestyles online makes some youths feel sad or not good enough. They begin to compare themselves to others. This can lead to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Social media can sometimes affect the mental health of young people in a negative way¹⁴. While it is fun to see pictures, videos, and updates from friends and celebrities, it can also cause emotional stress, especially when young people begin to compare their lives with what they see online. Many Nigerian youths spend hours on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Snapchat looking at photos and videos of people who seem to have a perfect life. These people are often shown wearing expensive clothes, traveling to beautiful places, living in fine houses, and driving big cars.

Even though some of these posts are edited or fake, they still make many youths feel like their own lives are not good enough. This constant comparison can lead to low self-esteem. Young people may begin to feel that they are not beautiful enough, not rich enough, or not successful enough. They start to feel insecure about how they look, where they live, what they own, and what they have achieved in life. This kind of thinking can make them feel sad, hopeless, or even ashamed of themselves.

Over time, this can lead to depression, which is a serious mental health condition. A depressed person may feel tired all the time, lose interest in things they used to enjoy, have trouble sleeping, or even think about harming themselves. Sadly, many young people do not talk about how they feel because they are afraid of being judged or misunderstood. Social media can also cause anxiety, especially when youths feel pressure to look or act a certain way. They may feel nervous when they don't get enough likes or comments on their pictures. Some even delete their posts when people do not engage with them. This makes them feel unimportant or unloved, even when it's not true.

Another problem is cyberbullying—when people use social media to insult, mock, or threaten others. Some young people post mean comments, spread false information, or create fake accounts to shame others. Victims of cyberbullying often suffer in silence, and it can lead to emotional pain, stress, or even suicidal thoughts in extreme cases. Also, some youths try too hard to please others online. They may post fake lifestyles or try dangerous trends just to get attention. This need for online approval can lead to mental exhaustion and feelings of worthlessness when they don't get the response they want.

Staying online all the time can also make young people feel lonely, even though they are constantly connected. This happens because online relationships are not the same as real-life connections. Spending too much time on social media takes away from face-to-face conversations, family time, or quiet personal time to rest and reflect.

Fortunately, more people are now talking about mental health, and some youths are using social media to share their stories and support others. Mental health pages, blogs, and influencers now talk openly about issues like depression, anxiety, and self-worth. There are also helplines, online support groups, and counselors who offer help through platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. To protect their mental health, young people are encouraged to take social media breaks, follow only positive and uplifting pages, talk to someone when they feel overwhelmed, and avoid comparing themselves to others. Parents, teachers, and society should also teach youths how to use social media wisely and remind them that what they see online is not always real.

3. Cyberbullying and Harassment

Some youths are bullied online. People insult them, post rude comments, or share their private pictures without permission. This can cause emotional pain, fear, and shame. Cyberbullying is one of the major problems that Nigerian youths face on social media today¹⁵. It happens when someone is bullied, insulted, or harassed through the internet, especially on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Snapchat. Unlike traditional bullying that happens face-to-face, cyberbullying takes place online—sometimes in secret—and can reach many people very quickly. Many young

people have experienced online insults, mockery, or abuse. Some are called names, laughed at, or criticized for the way they look, talk, dress, or live. Others are judged because of their religion, tribe, or opinions. Sometimes, people even use fake accounts to attack or threaten others without showing their real identity. A common form of cyberbullying is when someone's private pictures or videos are shared online without their permission. Some youths, especially girls, have had their personal photos leaked or posted by angry friends, ex-partners, or strangers. This kind of harassment can lead to serious emotional pain, embarrassment, and loss of confidence. In some cases, the victims become afraid to go out, attend school, or use social media again.

There are also cases where people are blackmailed online. For example, someone may threaten to post a person's secret or photo if they do not pay money or do something in return. This kind of online harassment is dangerous and can lead to fear, stress, or even depression. Cyberbullying is especially harmful because it does not stop easily. A rude or embarrassing post can be shared and reposted by thousands of people within minutes. Once it spreads, it becomes hard to delete, and the victim may suffer for a long time. The internet "does not forget," so the pain can continue for months or even years. Some young people have also faced body shaming, where others laugh at their weight, height, skin color, or facial features. This can damage their self-esteem and make them feel like they are not good enough. Others are bullied for having an accent, being poor, or simply being different.

Sadly, not all youths know how to respond to cyberbullying. Some keep it to themselves because they are ashamed or scared. Others delete their accounts, isolate themselves, or suffer in silence. In serious cases, cyberbullying can lead to mental health problems like anxiety, sadness, anger, or even thoughts of suicide. However, some youths are now speaking up and fighting back against online bullying¹⁶. Campaigns like #SayNoToBullying, #StopCyberBullying, and other awareness movements on social media help to educate people about the dangers of harassment. Some influencers and NGOs now talk openly about cyberbullying and encourage victims to speak out and get help.

To reduce cyberbullying, youths are advised to:

- Avoid posting or sharing personal information or photos that could be used against them
- Report or block people who insult, threaten, or harass them online
- Tell a trusted adult, teacher, or friend if they are being bullied
- Use privacy settings to control who can view their posts and messages
- Be kind and respectful to others online

Parents and teachers also have a role to play. They should talk to their children and students about how to behave online, how to recognize bullying, and how to protect themselves.

4. Fake News and Misinformation

Social media spreads false information quickly¹⁷. Many people share news without checking if it is true. This has caused fear and confusion, especially during elections or health crises. Fake news and misinformation are some of the biggest problems caused by social media today. These are false or misleading stories that are shared online and believed by many people, especially when they spread quickly. Social media makes it very easy for such information to go viral within minutes. In Nigeria, many young people get their news and updates from platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram. Unlike traditional newspapers or radio stations that usually confirm facts before reporting, anyone can post anything on social media—whether it is true or not. Sadly, most people do not take time to check the source or confirm the facts before sharing with others. During important times like elections, fake news becomes a serious problem. People create and share stories that can damage the image of political candidates or cause tribal and religious tension. A simple false headline like “Candidate A has dropped out of the race” or “People from a certain tribe attacked voters” can create fear and confusion among the public. Some people may even be discouraged from voting because of lies they saw online.

Another example is during health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸. Many fake stories and videos were shared on WhatsApp and Facebook, such as “drinking hot water cures COVID” or “vaccines are dangerous and kill people.” These types of messages made people afraid and stopped them from following real medical advice.

Some Nigerians believed these lies and refused to take the vaccine or even denied that the virus was real. Fake news is also common in areas like security, celebrity gossip, religion, and education. Sometimes people spread lies that certain schools are under attack, or that a popular person has died when they are still alive. These stories often cause panic, anger, and unnecessary fear.

Young people are especially vulnerable to fake news because they spend a lot of time online. Some of them repost or forward messages just because they seem interesting or dramatic, without knowing the harm they are causing. A false post can destroy someone's reputation, start fights, or even cause violence in a community. Some creators of fake news do it for fun, while others do it on purpose to deceive people or gain followers, likes, and views. There are also “clickbait” posts—these are stories with misleading headlines just to make people click on them.

To fight fake news and misinformation, youths need to become more careful and responsible online. They should:

- Always check the source of any news before sharing it
- Confirm the information with trusted news websites or government pages
- Avoid forwarding messages from unknown people or unverified pages
- Think about the effect a post could have before reposting it
- Learn to spot signs of fake news (e.g., spelling errors, no author, dramatic language)

Some social media platforms have started labeling false information and providing fact-checking tools. For example, Twitter and Facebook now warn users if a post contains false claims. However, not all lies are caught quickly, so everyone must play a role in stopping the spread.

5. Internet Fraud and Scams

Some young people fall into scams online. Others are even involved in fraud, also known as “Yahoo Yahoo.” These acts are illegal and damage Nigeria’s image. Some youths are also tricked into sending money to fake accounts. One of the major negative effects of social media on Nigerian youths is the rise of internet fraud and scams¹⁹. Many young people today have either been victims of scams or have become involved in fraudulent activities themselves. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and WhatsApp have made it easier for scammers to connect with people and carry out their tricks. Some Nigerian youths fall into online scams without realizing it. They are promised quick money, job offers, scholarships, free giveaways, or romantic relationships by strangers who message them on social media. These scammers often pretend to be rich foreigners, business owners, or celebrities. They use fake names, photos, and accounts to deceive people. Once they gain the victim’s trust, they ask for money—saying it is for processing fees, transportation, or emergencies. Sadly, many young people lose their savings this way and get nothing in return.

Another common scam is when fake online vendors advertise goods like phones, shoes, wigs, or laptops at cheap prices. They use attractive photos and sweet words to

convince people to send money for the item. But once payment is made, the seller disappears—blocking the victim and deleting the account. Some even go as far as using stolen pictures from real businesses to appear genuine. This kind of fraud has made people scared of buying online, and it affects real sellers who are trying to do honest business. On the other side, some youths themselves engage in fraud. This is popularly called “Yahoo Yahoo” in Nigeria. It involves using lies, tricks, and fake identities to scam people—usually foreigners—out of their money. Some Yahoo boys claim to be in love with their victims, while others pretend to offer business deals or job opportunities. They use photos of models or soldiers, fake documents, and emotional stories to gain sympathy and trust.

Unfortunately, many youths are attracted to Yahoo Yahoo because they see it as a fast way to get rich. Some do it to escape poverty, while others do it to follow the lifestyle they see on social media—such as owning cars, flashy clothes, and expensive gadgets. In some places, these fraudsters are even praised by friends and seen as “smart” or “sharp.” Some Nigerian music videos and songs also seem to promote this lifestyle, making it look acceptable or even cool. However, what many youths forget is that fraud is a crime. It is punishable under Nigerian and international laws. Those caught can be arrested by EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission), sent to prison, and lose their freedom²⁰. It also damages Nigeria’s image across the world, as many people now see Nigerians as dishonest or untrustworthy because of the actions of a few. This makes it harder for innocent Nigerians to get jobs, visas, or business deals in other countries.

Apart from being illegal, fraud also has spiritual, emotional, and moral consequences. Some young scammers live in constant fear of being caught or exposed. Others lose their peace of mind or get involved in dangerous rituals (“Yahoo Plus”) just to succeed. There are reports of some Yahoo boys consulting native doctors or doing blood sacrifices to make money, which leads them down a dark and dangerous path.

To protect themselves, young people must learn to:

- Avoid sharing personal details with strangers online
- Never send money to people they don’t know or trust
- Always research before buying from online vendors
- Report any suspicious account or scam attempt to the platform or to authorities
- Focus on honest ways of making money through skills, education, or legal business

Parents, schools, religious leaders, and the government also have a role to play. They must teach youths about internet safety, discourage fraud, and create better job and training opportunities so that young people don’t turn to crime out of desperation.

6. Exposure to Bad Content

There is a lot of bad content on social media, including pornography, violence, and drugs. When young people watch such content often, it can affect their behavior and mindset. Social media has a lot of useful and educational content, but it also contains a large amount of bad and harmful content that can negatively affect Nigerian youths. Bad content includes things like pornography, violence, drug use, sexual content, scam tricks,

fraud training, and hate speech²¹. These types of posts, pictures, or videos are easy to find online, especially on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter (X), YouTube, and Facebook. Many social media platforms do not fully control what is posted. Although they try to remove bad content, some of it still slips through. Some users even intentionally post or share harmful videos just to gain likes, followers, or attention. As a result, young people are regularly exposed to things that are not appropriate for their age or mental development.

One of the most common forms of bad content is pornography. Many Nigerian youths, especially teenagers, come across nude photos or sex videos online—sometimes even by accident. Some of them begin to watch this kind of content regularly, and over time, it changes the way they think about sex and relationships. It may lead to addiction, unhealthy curiosity, or even cause them to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or pressuring others. Also, violent content is becoming very common online. Some videos show fighting, killings, police brutality, or even war scenes. Seeing such disturbing videos all the time can make a young person emotionally numb, aggressive, or anxious. It may also increase fear and stress, especially when they feel that their environment is not safe.

Another serious issue is drug content. Some videos on TikTok, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts show people smoking, drinking alcohol, or using hard drugs like tramadol, codeine, or cannabis. These videos often make it look cool or fun. When young people see others "enjoying" drugs online, they may become curious or even try it out.

This can lead to addiction, mental illness, school failure, and even death. In addition, some pages and influencers promote a lifestyle of fraud, materialism, and greed. For example, young men who engage in internet fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) sometimes post their flashy cars, cash, or jewelry on Instagram or Snapchat. They rarely talk about how they got the money illegally, but instead, they act like role models. Many youths watching them become tempted to follow the same wrong path just to feel important or accepted.

Hate speech and tribal or religious insults are also part of the bad content online. Some people make posts insulting others based on their ethnic group, religion, or language. This creates division and can lead to violence and tribal conflicts, especially during elections or crises. Many young people are easily influenced by what they see online because they are still growing and learning. Their minds are not fully developed to separate good from bad or real from fake. So when they consume bad content over time, it can change their behavior, mindset, and attitude. For example, a respectful child may become rude, addicted to sex videos, or start dressing and behaving in a way that does not reflect their culture or values.

Parents, teachers, and religious leaders often complain that social media is destroying the morals of Nigerian youth, and in many cases, this is true. Some youths now find it hard to listen to advice because they are copying what they see online instead of following good examples from home or school.

To reduce the effect of bad content, Nigerian youths should:

- Be selective about what they watch, read, and share online
- Use parental controls or restricted modes when possible
- Unfollow pages or people who post harmful or dirty content
- Spend more time on educational and positive platforms
- Listen to guidance from trusted adults, mentors, or counselors

Social media offers a lot of good opportunities, it also exposes Nigerian youths to a lot of harmful content. If not properly controlled, this can affect their thinking, actions, and future. It is important for youths to be wise, disciplined, and careful when using the internet, so they do not fall into the trap of bad influence.

Examples of Social Media Impact

EndSARS Protest

In 2020, thousands of Nigerian youths used Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to protest against police brutality. The protest was called #EndSARS. Youths used hashtags, videos, and live streams to organize and share their experiences. This movement showed the power of social media in bringing change.

Online Business Success

Many Nigerian youths have built businesses through Instagram and WhatsApp. For example, a young lady who sells hair started posting videos and pictures of her wigs. Soon, she began to get orders from different cities in Nigeria. Today, she earns more money than she would have with a regular office job.

TikTok Creators

Some youths in Nigeria have become popular on TikTok. They post funny videos and skits. Some of them now work with brands, travel abroad, and make money through content creation. This has inspired other youths to also use their talent wisely.

Factors That Affect How Social Media Influences Youth

Not all young people are affected the same way by social media. Some of the things that can change how a youth is influenced include:

- **Education Level:** Those who are educated are more likely to use social media wisely.
- **Location:** Youths in cities have more access to fast internet and better devices.
- **Family Background:** Youths with supportive families may use social media for good.
- **Peer Pressure:** Some youths follow what their friends do online, whether good or bad.
- **Digital Skills:** Those who know how to check facts and stay safe online are better protected.

Ways to Reduce the Negative Effects of Social Media

Even though social media has problems, there are things that can be done to reduce the bad effects and make the good ones stronger.

Teach Digital Skills

Schools and communities should teach young people how to use social media safely. They should learn how to spot fake news, avoid scams, and manage their time online.

Encourage Positive Content

Young people should be encouraged to post helpful and inspiring content. They should use social media to share their knowledge, promote their businesses, and support good causes.

Parental Guidance

Parents should talk to their children about the dangers of social media. They should also monitor what their children are doing online, without being too strict.

Government Support

The government can support youths by providing digital training programs and job opportunities. They should also create laws that protect users from cyberbullying and fraud.

Youth-Led Campaigns

Young people can form online groups to fight against fake news, bullying, and other issues. They can also support each other and share ideas for success.

Conclusion

Social media has changed the lives of Nigerian youths in many ways. It has made it easier to learn, connect, do business, and speak out. It has also brought problems like addiction, fraud, and mental health issues. Whether social media helps or harms a young person depends on how it is used. If used wisely, social media can be a powerful tool for growth and success. But if used carelessly, it can lead to problems and regret. In today's world, social media has become a big part of the lives of Nigerian youths. It has changed the way they learn, talk to others, do business, get information, and express their opinions. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter (now X), and YouTube have opened new doors for education, communication, entrepreneurship, and political involvement. Many young people now use their phones and the internet to attend online classes, sell goods, share their talents, learn new skills, and connect with others from around the world.

However, social media is not perfect. While it brings many benefits, it also comes with serious problems. These include addiction, where youths spend too much time online instead of studying or working; mental health issues, such as depression and low self-esteem caused by comparing themselves to others; cyberbullying, where people are insulted, harassed, or exposed online; and internet fraud, where some youths either get scammed or become involved in scams themselves. Other problems include exposure to pornography, violence, fake news, and bad role models. These can affect a young person's behavior, mindset, and future.

The truth is, social media can either help or harm Nigerian youths—it all depends on how it is used. If used wisely, it can be a tool for success, creativity, knowledge, and financial freedom. But if used wrongly, it can lead to regret, trouble with the law, poor mental health, bad behavior, and wasted time. This is why it is very important for young people to learn how to use social media in a responsible and positive way.

To make sure social media brings more good than harm, everyone has a role to play:

- Youths should be smart and careful with how they use the internet. They should avoid harmful content, spend their time wisely, and use social media for learning, business, and positive things.
- Parents and guardians should monitor and guide their children's online activities. They need to talk to their children, teach them good values, and protect them from online dangers.
- Schools should include digital education in their teaching. Students should be taught how to use social media safely and how to recognize fake news, cyberbullying, and online fraud.
- Religious and community leaders can also help by preaching against immoral online behavior and encouraging positive use of technology.
- The government has a big role to play. It should create laws that protect young people online, punish internet criminals, and provide more training and job opportunities so that youths are not tempted by fraud or illegal activities.

Social media is a powerful tool that can shape the future of Nigerian youths in either a good or bad way. The goal should not be to stop its use, but to guide its use. When used the right way, social media can help build a better, brighter, and more successful future for Nigerian youths in the 21st century.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study by reviewing its main objectives and findings on how social media shapes Nigerian youths' lives, behaviors, and opportunities. It highlights both the benefits and risks of digital platforms, reflects on their impact on individuals and society, gives recommendations for stakeholders, and suggests areas for future research.

Overview of the Study

This study explored how social media influences Nigerian youths. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok have become key for communication, learning, business, and self-expression¹. While they create opportunities for education, networking, and activism, they also bring risks such as addiction, cybercrime, harmful content, poor academic focus, and mental health issues². The study aimed to show how social media shapes the behavior, values, and future aspirations of young Nigerians.

Key Findings

From the data collected through careful review of existing literature, several major findings emerged regarding how social media is impacting Nigerian youths. These findings highlight the significant ways digital platforms are shaping behavior, values, productivity, and opportunities among young people across the country.

1. Widespread Use of Social Media

Most Nigerian youths actively use platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook daily for communication, identity, and self-expression³.

2. Digital Entrepreneurship

Social media is now a major tool for youth businesses, personal branding, and income generation through online shops, services, and influencer marketing⁴.

3. Academic Support and Distraction

While platforms provide tutorials and group learning, they also cause distractions through entertainment and trends, affecting study time⁵.

4. Mental and Emotional Effects

Excessive use often leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and social pressure due to comparisons and unrealistic online standards⁶.

5. Cultural Influence and Lifestyle Changes

Social media is reshaping language, fashion, values, and relationships, with many youths adopting foreign trends at the expense of traditional norms⁷.

6. Exposure to Cyber Risks

Youths face online fraud, scams, cyberbullying, misinformation, and risky viral challenges, showing the need for stronger digital safety measures⁸.

Youth and the Digital Age

The study shows that Nigerian youths are now active participants in the digital age, using platforms like TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube to create content, build businesses, learn skills, and engage in global conversations⁹. Smartphones have

become essential tools for education, work, self-expression, and identity, shaping how young people live and think. However, social media also brings risks such as cyberbullying, scams, addiction, misinformation, body image issues, shallow connections, and pressure from unrealistic online lifestyles. It has influenced values and behaviors, sometimes replacing cultural traditions with global trends and weakening real-life relationships. Despite these challenges, the digital age presents huge opportunities—youths can access education, jobs, funding, and global networks, allowing them to innovate, advocate, and achieve success.

However, no youth should have to navigate the digital world alone. The responsibility of supporting them belongs to multiple stakeholders:

- Parents and guardians need to be more engaged in their children’s digital lives. This does not mean spying, but building trust and guiding them with love, open communication, and wisdom.
- Teachers and schools must play a key role in teaching digital skills, online ethics, fact-checking, and cyber safety. Media literacy should become a compulsory part of the school curriculum.
- The government must ensure that policies are in place to protect young users from online exploitation, cybercrime, and harmful content. They must also invest in digital infrastructure and youth-focused innovation programs.

- Technology companies and social media platforms have a moral obligation to create safer online environments by regulating harmful content, protecting user data, and promoting educational resources.
- Religious institutions, NGOs, and community leaders can also provide moral guidance, mental health support, and practical tools to help youths thrive in this digital age.

This reflection emphasizes that the digital age is not just about technology—it is about people, purpose, and possibilities. Nigerian youths must not be left to figure it out on their own. They must be equipped, supported, and empowered to use social media as a force for good. With proper digital education, emotional awareness, and social support, Nigerian youths can transform social media from a source of confusion into a tool for creativity, confidence, and national development.

Recommendations

The study concludes that while social media offers Nigerian youths opportunities, it also presents risks that require proper management. To address this, several recommendations are proposed. Schools should promote digital education and media literacy, teaching students safe and responsible online use. Parents need to provide guidance at home through open communication and balanced monitoring. The government should strengthen regulations, run awareness campaigns, and ensure digital safety policies are enforced. Youths should be encouraged to use social media

purposefully, balancing online and offline life while promoting positive content. Expanding access to mental health support is crucial to help youths cope with pressures like addiction, low self-esteem, and cyberbullying. Finally, digital skills and entrepreneurship programs should be supported by government, private organizations, and global tech platforms to empower young Nigerians and reduce unemployment.

Social media is no longer a passing trend or mere entertainment tool — it is now one of the most powerful forces influencing the lives of Nigerian youths in the 21st century. It has completely transformed how young people interact, learn, express themselves, build careers, do business, form opinions, and even shape their identities. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), YouTube, and Facebook, Nigerian youths now have access to a global stage — one where they can tell their stories, showcase their talents, engage with the world, and drive change.

This study has shown that the impact of social media is both vast and complex. On one hand, it provides life-changing opportunities: from digital entrepreneurship and skill-building to online education, civic engagement, and access to vital information. Many young Nigerians are using social media as a stepping stone toward success, visibility, and independence. It gives them a voice and the chance to belong to something bigger than their immediate environment — breaking traditional barriers and offering global exposure.

On the other hand, the study also exposes the darker side of social media. The same platforms that offer growth can also become spaces of harm. Prolonged and

unregulated use of social media has led to issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, addiction, online fraud, cyberbullying, and the erosion of cultural values. The constant pressure to perform, compete, and compare online can silently destroy mental health and distract many youths from real-life goals and responsibilities. If not properly guided, social media use can lead to confusion, identity crisis, and reduced productivity.

The key lesson from this research is that social media, like any tool, depends on how it is used. It can build or break, heal or harm, educate or mislead. It is not inherently good or bad — its impact depends entirely on the intentions, discipline, awareness, and support system of the user. In the case of Nigerian youths, the goal should not be to fear or reject social media, but to understand it, manage it, and master it for personal development and national progress.

In conclusion, this research strongly emphasizes that a digitally literate, emotionally aware, and socially responsible generation of Nigerian youths is essential for the nation's success in this global digital age. Social media is here to stay — the challenge is not to escape it, but to prepare and empower young people to use it wisely. With the right mindset and support, Nigerian youths can rise to become global leaders, innovators, and changemakers — not in spite of social media, but because of how they choose to use it.

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