

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON VOTING AND YOUTH
ADVOCACY MOVEMENT IN EDO STATE: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2024
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

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JUNE, 2026

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF
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FOR THE AWARD OF A BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (BSc) DEGREE IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

JUNE, 2026

DECLARATION

I, **Aiworo Dorcas GBEZINA**, hereby declare that this project titled "**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON VOTING AND YOUTH ADVOCACY MOVEMENT IN EDO STATE: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2024 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**" is my original work and has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for any degree or certification at any other institution. All sources of information and references used in this work have been duly acknowledged.

Aiworo Dorcas GBEZINA
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Date: _____

CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, certify that this project was carried out by **Aiword Dorcas GBEZINA**, with the Matriculation Number: **SSC2208545**, in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, in partial fulfillment for the award of a Bachelor of Science Degree in Political Science.

Ms Kemi Ogunbadeniye
(Project Supervisor)

Dr G. O. Igiebor
(Ag. Head of Department)

Date_____

Date_____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to God Almighty.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election. The increasing penetration of digital technologies has transformed political communication, making social media a central platform for political engagement, particularly among youths. The study was guided by four specific objectives: to assess the level of youth engagement on social media during the election, to analyse how social media content influenced voting decisions, to evaluate the role of social media in youth advocacy movements, and to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with its use in political participation. A quantitative research design was adopted using a cross-sectional survey method. Data were collected from 400 respondents, out of which 389 valid responses were analysed. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential tools such as chi-square and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed a high level of social media engagement among youths, with a majority actively following and sharing election-related content. The study further found that social media had a significant influence on voting behaviour, as a substantial proportion of respondents reported that social media content shaped their voting decisions and candidate preferences. In addition, the study established that social media played a meaningful role in youth advocacy, with many respondents participating in online campaigns and voter education activities. However, the study also identified major challenges, including the widespread dissemination of misinformation and difficulty in distinguishing credible information from false content. Hypotheses testing confirmed that social media significantly influenced both youths voting behaviour and advocacy outcomes during the election. The study concludes that social media is a powerful tool for political mobilization and participation among youths in Edo State, though its effectiveness is moderated by issues of misinformation and digital literacy. It recommends that policymakers, electoral bodies, and stakeholders strengthen digital literacy initiatives, regulate misinformation, and leverage social media platforms for effective civic engagement and voter education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Democracy, as a system of government, derives its legitimacy from the active and voluntary participation of citizens in the processes that shape governance. At the heart of democratic theory lies the principle that citizens must not only possess the right to vote but must also engage meaningfully in political discourse, civic mobilization, and advocacy. Scholars such as Dahl (1971) and Held (1987) have long argued that genuine democratic governance requires both procedural mechanisms, such as free and fair elections, and substantive participation by the governed. Political participation, broadly defined, encompasses a range of activities from voting to campaign involvement, protest mobilization, and online civic engagement, all of which contribute to the vibrancy of democratic governance.

The emergence and rapid proliferation of social media platforms in the twenty-first century has fundamentally altered the landscape of political communication. Platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube have created unprecedented opportunities for citizens to access political information, engage in political debate, and mobilize around shared causes (Boulianne, 2015). Unlike traditional mass media, which operated on a one-to-many broadcast model, social media enables multi-directional communication, allowing ordinary citizens to become producers as well as

consumers of political content. This democratisation of information has been widely celebrated as a catalyst for enhanced political participation, though it has also raised significant concerns about misinformation and digital manipulation.

In Nigeria, the growth of internet penetration and smartphone adoption has accelerated dramatically over the past decade. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2023), active internet subscriptions exceeded 157 million by the end of 2023, driven largely by mobile broadband access. This expansion has been particularly consequential among Nigerian youth, who represent the largest demographic cohort in the country. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) estimates that individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 constitute approximately 60% of Nigeria's population, a cohort that has grown up in an era of pervasive digital connectivity and is therefore more predisposed to utilising digital platforms for political communication and civic engagement.

Globally, the role of social media in shaping electoral outcomes has been extensively documented. From the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010–2012 (Howard & Hussain, 2013) to the Brexit campaign of 2016, the U.S. Presidential elections of 2016 and 2020 (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), and various African electoral cycles, social media has emerged as a powerful instrument of political mobilisation, opinion formation, and voter outreach. In Nigeria specifically, social media played significant roles in the 2011, 2015, and 2019 general elections, as well as in the historic 2023 presidential election, where the Obedient movement; a youth-driven social media campaign supporting Labour Party candidate Peter

Obi, demonstrated the potency of digital organising in shaping electoral narratives (Nwankwo, 2023).

The 2024 Edo State governorship election represents a particularly instructive context for examining the intersection of social media, youth advocacy, and electoral behaviour. Edo State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, has a history of competitive and often contentious electoral politics. The 2024 election was contested primarily between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), and was characterised by intense social media campaigns, digital voter education drives, and the mobilisation of youth-led advocacy groups. Against this backdrop, understanding the measurable impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State is not merely an academic exercise but a matter of urgent policy relevance for deepening democratic governance in Nigeria.

The relationship between social media, voting behaviour, and youth advocacy is therefore the central concern of this study. By focusing on the 2024 Edo State governorship election, this research seeks to contribute empirical evidence to a body of scholarship that has, to date, been dominated by studies conducted in Western democratic contexts or at the national level in Nigeria, with relatively limited attention to sub-national, state-level dynamics.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing penetration of social media platforms among Nigerian youth and the

increasing attention paid to digital political communication, several critical questions remain unanswered with respect to the concrete, measurable impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State. The proliferation of social media use does not, in itself, guarantee meaningful political engagement; the relationship between online activity and offline electoral participation is complex, contested, and often poorly understood (Dimitrova et al., 2014).

A central problem confronting scholars and policymakers is the paradox between high levels of social media engagement and uncertain electoral outcomes. Young Nigerians constitute a majority of social media users in the country, yet voter registration and actual turnout among the 18–35 age cohort remain comparatively low (INEC, 2023). This suggests that social media engagement does not automatically translate into active political participation, and the mechanisms through which it might do so; or fail to do so; remain insufficiently studied, particularly at the state level.

Furthermore, the increasing spread of political misinformation, propaganda, and deliberately fabricated content on social media platforms poses a significant threat to the integrity of electoral processes. During the 2024 Edo governorship election, multiple instances of voter manipulation, divisive messaging, and the dissemination of fake news were reported (Channels Television, 2024). The extent to which such misinformation

influenced voter perceptions and behaviour remains empirically uncharted in the existing literature.

Another dimension of the problem is the uncertainty surrounding whether online youth advocacy movements translate into tangible electoral influence. While youth-led digital campaigns have demonstrated an ability to generate attention and viral content, their ability to convert digital momentum into voting action and policy outcomes has been questioned (Obafemi & Dike, 2022). The 2024 Edo election provides a timely opportunity to evaluate whether and how youth advocacy movements, coordinated largely through social media, shaped electoral outcomes.

Finally, the existing literature is characterised by a significant geographical gap. Most empirical studies on social media and elections in Nigeria have focused on national elections or have been conducted in the South-West and North-Central regions, leaving the South-South; and Edo State in particular underrepresented in the scholarly record. This study addresses these gaps by providing a focused, evidence-based assessment of the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the level of youth engagement on social media during the 2024 Edo State governorship election;
- ii. Analyse how social media content influenced the voting decisions of youths in Edo State;
- iii. Evaluate the role of social media in youth advocacy movements during the 2024 governorship election; and
- iv. Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of social media for political participation in Edo State.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the level of youth engagement on social media during the 2024 Edo State governorship election?
- ii. How does social media content influence the voting decisions of youths in Edo State?
- iii. What role does social media play in youth advocacy movements during the 2024 governorship election?
- iv. What challenges and opportunities exist in the use of social media for political participation in Edo State?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Social media has no significant influence on youth voting behaviour in Edo State

during the 2024 governorship election.

H₀₂: Youth advocacy movements mediated through social media have no significant impact on electoral outcomes in Edo State.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study carries significance at multiple levels; theoretical, empirical, and policy-oriented; and contributes to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on digital democracy, youth political engagement, and electoral integrity in Nigeria.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study enriches the existing literature on political communication and democratic participation by providing empirical evidence drawn from an under-studied sub-national context. It advances the application of Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Network Theory to the African democratic experience, demonstrating the utility of these frameworks beyond their original Western contexts.

At the empirical level, the study generates primary data on the social media behaviour, voting patterns, and advocacy activities of youths in Edo State; data that are currently lacking in the scholarly record. By focusing on the 2024 governorship election, the study provides a contemporaneous analysis of one of Nigeria's most politically significant sub-national electoral contests.

For policymakers and electoral bodies, particularly INEC, the study's findings offer actionable insights into the potential of social media as a tool for voter education, mobilisation, and civic engagement. For political parties and campaign strategists, the

study provides evidence-based guidance on the effectiveness of different social media campaign strategies in reaching and persuading young voters. Youth organisations and civil society groups will benefit from the study's identification of best practices and pitfalls in social media advocacy, and the study serves as a foundation for future research on social media and elections in Nigeria.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study is geographically delimited to Edo State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on Benin City, the state capital. The study population comprises youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in Edo State. The temporal scope covers the period of the 2024 Edo State governorship election campaign and its immediate aftermath, specifically between June and November 2024. The thematic focus is restricted to the three intersecting dimensions of social media usage, youth voting behaviour, and digital advocacy movements.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Social Media: As used in this study, social media refers to internet-based digital platforms and applications, including Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, that enable users to create, share, and interact with user-generated content in real time. It is operationalised as any digital platform used by respondents to access political information, engage in political discussion, or participate in campaigns related to the 2024 Edo governorship election.

Voting Behaviour: Voting behaviour refers to the decisions, attitudes, and actions of

eligible voters with respect to whether they participated in the 2024 Edo governorship election and how their vote choice was shaped, encompassing the role of social media exposure in influencing their decision to register, turn out, and cast their ballots.

Youth Advocacy: Youth advocacy refers to organised or informal efforts by individuals aged 18 to 35 to promote, support, or oppose particular political candidates, parties, or policy positions through digital platforms during the 2024 Edo governorship election, including content creation, online campaigns, and peer mobilisation.

Political Participation: Political participation refers to the range of activities through which citizens engage with the political system, operationalised in this study to include voter registration, voting in the 2024 election, sharing or creating political content on social media, attending campaign events, and participating in civic discussions online or offline.

Digital Activism: Digital activism refers to the use of digital technologies; particularly social media platforms; to organise, publicise, and advocate for political causes or electoral objectives, encompassing hashtag campaigns, online petitions, live-streaming, digital fundraising, and coordinated social media action to influence public opinion or mobilise communities.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a systematic review of the existing body of knowledge relevant to the study. It begins with a conceptual review of the key constructs, followed by an empirical review of recent studies on the themes of social media and elections, social media influence on voting behaviour, youth political participation in Nigeria, and social media and political mobilisation. The chapter then presents the theoretical framework drawing on Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Network Theory, before concluding with a summary of identified literature gaps.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Social Media

Social media has emerged as one of the defining technological phenomena of the twenty-first century, fundamentally reshaping the ways in which individuals communicate, access information, and engage with the world around them. Van Dijck (2013) defines social media as platforms built upon the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Boyd and Ellison (2007) offer a seminal definition of social network sites as web-based services that allow

individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles, articulate connections with other users, and traverse those connections within a bounded system.

The political significance of social media derives from its capacity to disintermediate political communication; enabling citizens to access political information and express opinions without relying on traditional gatekeepers such as newspapers, television broadcasters, or political parties. Bruns and Highfield (2015) argue that platforms like Twitter function as important sites of political discussion, enabling real-time commentary and challenges to dominant media narratives. In Nigeria, WhatsApp has emerged as particularly influential due to its group messaging functionality, which enables the rapid dissemination of political content within social networks.

2.1.2 Concept of Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour is a central concept in electoral studies, encompassing the decisions, motivations, and contextual factors that determine how individuals vote in elections. The classical sociological model, advanced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944), posited that voting decisions are primarily shaped by stable social characteristics such as class, religion, and regional identity. The social-psychological model of Campbell et al. (1960) introduced party identification as the primary driver, supplemented by candidate evaluations and issue orientations. The rational choice model of Downs (1957) posits that voters are utility-maximising actors who select the candidate whose platform most closely aligns with their preferences.

In the contemporary digital era, scholars have increasingly recognised the role of social media in shaping voting behaviour. Boulianne (2015), in a meta-analysis of 36 studies, found a positive association between social media use and various forms of political participation, including voting. The mechanisms include information exposure, attitude formation, social norm signalling, and peer mobilisation; all of which are relevant to the Edo State context examined in this study.

2.1.3 Concept of Youth Political Participation

Youth political participation refers to the engagement of young people; typically aged 15 to 35; in the political processes and institutions of their societies. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Youth Policy (2019) defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, with the voting eligibility threshold set at 18. The literature on youth political participation in Nigeria reflects a paradox: while young people constitute the majority of the population and demonstrate high social media political interest, their formal electoral participation has historically been low (Okeke, 2021). The Not Too Young to Run Act of 2018 represented an important institutional reform, and the 2023 Obidient movement demonstrated the potential for social media to catalyse unprecedented levels of youth political engagement.

2.1.4 Concept of Advocacy and Digital Activism

Advocacy refers to organised efforts to influence public policy, political decision-making, or public opinion. In the digital age, advocacy has increasingly migrated to online platforms, giving rise to what Loader and Mercea (2011) term ‘networked democracy.’

Digital activism, a subset of advocacy, refers specifically to the use of digital technologies to advance political causes. Harlow (2012) distinguishes between slacktivism; low-effort digital actions such as liking or sharing content; and genuine digital activism involving sustained and strategic use of digital platforms. The tension between these two forms of digital engagement is a recurring theme in the literature and is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Studies on Social Media and Elections (Nigeria & Global)

Nwankwo and Ugwu (2023) conducted a study titled “Social Media and Electoral Mobilisation in Nigeria: Evidence from the 2023 Presidential Election” at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The study aimed to assess how social media platforms; particularly Twitter and WhatsApp; shaped electoral mobilisation among Nigerian voters aged 18 to 40. A survey methodology was adopted with a sample of 450 respondents across six geopolitical zones. Findings revealed that 78% of respondents reported accessing political information primarily through social media, and social media exposure was significantly associated with increased voting intention. The study concluded that social media constitutes a critical infrastructure of electoral mobilisation, but also highlighted the destabilising influence of misinformation campaigns. The researchers recommended that INEC develop digital literacy programmes to equip voters with skills to identify and resist political misinformation.

Adebowale and Sanni (2022) examined the relationship between social media campaigns and voter behaviour in the 2019 Nigerian general election in “Digital Electioneering and Voter Mobilisation in Nigeria,” conducted at Obafemi Awolowo University using a mixed-methods approach combining survey data from 380 respondents with in-depth interviews of 20 campaign managers. The study found that social media campaigns significantly increased voter awareness of candidates’ policy positions and contributed to higher turnout in urban areas. However, rural voters with lower internet access were largely excluded from the digital campaign ecosystem. The study recommended targeted digital inclusion policies to ensure equitable access to political information.

Bail et al. (2020) conducted an experimental study in the United States examining the effects of social media exposure on political polarisation, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The study recruited 1,652 Twitter users and randomly assigned some to follow a bot retweeting messages from the opposing political side for one month. Contrary to popular assumptions, the study found that exposure to opposing political views on social media increased, rather than decreased, political polarisation among Republican participants. The study recommended platform-level interventions to promote exposure to diverse political perspectives.

2.2.2 Social Media Influence on Voting Behaviour

Abubakar and Mohammed (2024) conducted “Instagram, TikTok and the Youth Vote: Social Media Influence on Voting Decisions in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections” at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, targeting first-time voters aged 18 to 25 with 360 respondents. Findings

indicated that short-form video content on TikTok had a statistically significant effect on candidate preference, with 64% of respondents reporting that social media content changed or reinforced their vote choice. The study recommended that political campaigns prioritise visual and video content to effectively reach young voters.

Okonkwo (2022) examined social media influence on voter decision-making in Anambra State's 2021 governorship election using a survey of 400 voters across three senatorial districts. The study found a positive and statistically significant relationship between social media political content exposure and voting behaviour. Peer influence; operationalised as voting recommendations from social media contacts; was the most powerful predictor of vote choice. The study recommended that political parties cultivate networks of digital opinion leaders to amplify their campaign messages.

Lemi and Clarke (2020) conducted "Social Media and African American Voters: Electoral Mobilisation in the 2018 U.S. Midterm Elections" using a nationally representative survey of 1,200 African American adults. The study found that Instagram and Facebook served as important sources of electoral information and peer mobilisation for this demographic. The study concluded that social media played a catalytic role in the surge of African American voter turnout in 2018, primarily through peer-to-peer sharing of voter registration information and mobilisation messages.

2.2.3 Youth Political Participation in Nigeria

Okeke and Eze (2023) conducted "Not Just Online: Youth Political Participation and the

Limits of Digital Mobilisation in Nigeria” at the University of Lagos, combining survey data from 500 respondents with focus group discussions involving 48 participants. A significant positive association was found between social media political engagement and voter registration, but a weaker relationship between digital engagement and actual voter turnout. The study concluded that structural barriers; including logistical challenges and distrust of the electoral system; limit the ability of digital mobilisation to translate into voting behaviour.

Ogundipe and Bello (2021) examined youth political participation in Ogun State during the 2019 general elections at Olabisi Onabanjo University using a survey of 420 respondents. Findings indicated that 82% of youth respondents were active social media users and that social media was the primary source of political information. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between social media engagement and voter turnout, leading the authors to conclude that social media increases awareness but does not necessarily translate into voting. They recommended a holistic approach combining digital engagement with civics education.

Adeyemi (2024) investigated Nigerian youth participation in the ‘Not Too Young to Run’ movement in Ekiti State’s 2022 governorship election using qualitative interviews with 30 youth activists. The findings revealed that social media served as the primary coordination platform and enabled youth candidates to bypass traditional gatekeeping structures within political parties. The researcher concluded that digital platforms have significantly lowered barriers to political candidacy for young Nigerians.

2.2.4 Social Media and Political Mobilisation/Advocacy

Adamu and Yakubu (2023) conducted “WhatsApp as a Political Mobilisation Tool: Evidence from Northern Nigeria’s 2023 Electoral Campaigns” at Bayero University, Kano, using ethnographic observation of 15 WhatsApp political campaign groups supplemented by interviews with 40 group administrators. WhatsApp was found to function as a critical infrastructure for grassroots mobilisation at low cost and high speed. However, significant levels of political misinformation circulated through WhatsApp groups, leading the researchers to recommend WhatsApp-specific digital literacy interventions.

Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) examined the role of Twitter in the #EndSARS protest movement using content analysis of 10,000 tweets collected over a ten-day period. Twitter served as the primary coordination platform enabling activists to share real-time protest information, coordinate first aid and legal support, and amplify messages to international audiences. The study concluded that Twitter enabled leaderless, decentralised mobilisation that proved highly effective in sustaining a nationwide protest movement.

Ekoh and George (2021) conducted a comparative study of social media and political advocacy across Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and Ethiopia using mixed methods combining content analysis with 60 expert interviews. Social media significantly expanded the reach of political advocacy during the pandemic period, but significant disparities in digital access and digital literacy excluded rural and older populations from digital advocacy spaces. The study recommended that African governments and international development partners prioritise digital inclusion.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory, originally formulated by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their seminal 1972 study of the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, community during the 1968 U.S. presidential election, constitutes one of the foundational frameworks in political communication scholarship. At its core, the theory posits that the mass media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. The media exerts its influence not primarily through direct persuasion of audiences toward particular viewpoints, but through the selective emphasis and prominence accorded to particular issues, events, and actors. By consistently highlighting certain issues and marginalising others, the media shapes the public agenda; the set of issues that citizens regard as most salient and deserving of political attention.

McCombs and Shaw's original formulation established 'first-level' agenda setting, which refers to the transfer of issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. Subsequent developments introduced 'second-level' agenda setting, associated with McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (1997), which addresses not merely which issues the media highlight, but which attributes; qualities, characteristics, and frames; are associated with those issues. More recently, scholars have extended the theory to encompass 'third-level' or 'network agenda setting,' proposed by Guo (2012), which examines how the media links clusters of attributes and issues together, thereby shaping the cognitive networks through which citizens understand the political world.

Critics of Agenda-Setting Theory have raised several important objections. First, the theory has been criticised for overstating the passivity of media audiences and underestimating individual agency in selecting, interpreting, and resisting media messages. Second, the theory has been criticised for neglecting the social and structural factors; such as class, education, and political predisposition; that mediate the relationship between media exposure and issue salience. Third, the applicability of the theory to social media contexts has been questioned, given that social media operates under fundamentally different logics of content curation compared to traditional mass media.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Agenda-Setting Theory retains significant relevance for this study because it provides a compelling framework for understanding how social media content during the 2024 Edo governorship election may have shaped the political priorities and perceptions of youth voters. The capacity of social media platforms to amplify certain political issues; such as security concerns, economic grievances, or candidate integrity; while marginalising others is directly analogous to the agenda-setting function attributed to traditional media. By examining the issues and candidates most prominently featured in social media discourse during the election period, the study can assess the extent to which social media's agenda-setting function shaped youth voting behaviour.

2.3.2 Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory, rooted in the sociological tradition of network analysis pioneered by scholars such as Georg Simmel, Jacob Moreno, and later Mark Granovetter, conceives

of social life as constituted by networks of relationships; ties between individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions; that structure the flow of information, resources, norms, and influence within social systems. Granovetter's (1973) foundational contribution, 'The Strength of Weak Ties,' introduced the distinction between strong ties (close, frequent, emotionally intimate relationships) and weak ties (more distant relationships with acquaintances). Granovetter demonstrated that while strong ties are important for social support, weak ties play a disproportionately important role in information diffusion and bridging disconnected social clusters.

The application of Social Network Theory to political communication has been significantly advanced by Zuckerman (2013), who argues that political preferences and behaviours are heavily shaped by the social networks in which individuals are embedded.

The homophilic tendencies of social networks; the tendency to associate with others who share similar political views; can create echo chambers that reinforce existing political beliefs and limit exposure to opposing perspectives. This dynamic is particularly pronounced on social media platforms, where algorithmic curation tends to maximise engagement by showing users content aligned with their existing preferences.

The basic assumptions of Social Network Theory, as applied to this study, include the following: first, that political information and influence flow through networks of social relationships rather than operating solely at the individual level; second, that the structure of social networks shapes the speed and reach of political information diffusion; and third, that actors who occupy central or bridging positions within social networks; often termed

‘opinion leaders’ or ‘influencers’; exert disproportionate influence on the political attitudes and behaviours of their network contacts.

Critics of Social Network Theory as applied to digital political communication have raised concerns that the theory’s emphasis on structural properties of networks underestimates individual agency, content, and context. Others have pointed to the limitations of online social networks as proxies for meaningful social relationships, noting that weak ties characteristic of large social media networks may be insufficient to generate the trust necessary for effective political mobilisation. Despite these limitations, Social Network Theory offers a powerful lens for understanding how social media influenced youth voting behaviour and advocacy in Edo State; attending to both the relational mechanisms through which political content travelled and the identity of key disseminators.

2.4 Summary of Literature Gap

The review of the existing literature reveals that while considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to social media and political participation in Nigeria, several significant gaps remain. First, the overwhelming majority of empirical studies have focused on national-level elections; particularly 2019 and 2023 presidential elections; with limited attention to sub-national electoral contests such as governorship elections. Second, Edo State as a political and geographic context remains significantly underrepresented in the literature, with most existing studies conducted in South-West, North-Central, or South-East Nigeria. Third, the gap between online political activism and offline voting behaviour constitutes a

theoretically and empirically important problem that has not been adequately addressed in the Nigerian context. This study directly addresses these gaps by providing a focused, evidence-based assessment of social media's impact on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey design, to assess the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election. The quantitative approach enables the systematic collection of standardised data from a large number of respondents, facilitates statistical analysis of relationships between variables, and allows for hypothesis testing through inferential statistics. A cross-sectional design is appropriate because the study aims to capture respondents' perceptions and behaviours following the 2024 governorship election without requiring longitudinal tracking. The positivist epistemological orientation of the study, which assumes that social phenomena can be measured objectively and causal relationships identified through statistical analysis, justifies the primacy of quantitative methods.

3.2 Area of Study

The study is conducted in Edo State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Edo State comprises eighteen local government areas and has an estimated population of over four million people. Benin City, the state capital, is the primary site of study due to its status as the dominant urban centre, the location of the largest concentration

of social media users, and the epicentre of political activity during the 2024 governorship election.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprises youths aged 18 to 35 residing in Edo State who were eligible to vote in the 2024 governorship election. This age cohort corresponds to the Nigerian Youth Policy definition of youth and represents the primary demographic of social media users in Nigeria. According to INEC's 2023 voter registration data, approximately 890,000 voters between the ages of 18 and 35 were registered in Edo State, constituting the accessible population for this study.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size is determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2)),$$

where

$N = 890,000$ and

$e = 0.05$ at the 95% confidence level.

Applying the formula yields a sample size of approximately 400 respondents. A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique is adopted. In the first stage, three local government areas; Oredo, Egor, and Ikpoba-Okha; are selected based on their status as the

most densely populated urban areas with the highest concentrations of registered youth voters. In the second stage, respondents within each selected LGA are identified using systematic random sampling from voter registration lists, with approximately 133 respondents selected from each LGA.

3.5 Sources of Data

The study draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are collected directly from respondents through structured questionnaires. Secondary data are derived from existing published sources including academic journals, books, government reports, INEC voter data, news reports, and official social media analytics. Secondary data are used to contextualise primary findings and situate results within the broader scholarly literature.

3.6 Instruments for Data Collection

The primary instrument is a structured, self-administered questionnaire divided into six sections. Section A captures demographic characteristics. Section B assesses social media usage patterns. Section C measures youth engagement with election-related content on social media. Section D examines the influence of social media on voting decisions. Section E evaluates advocacy participation through social media. Section F assesses perceptions of challenges and opportunities of social media for political participation. Sections B through F predominantly use a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

3.7 Validity of Instruments

Face validity is assessed through review by the researcher's academic supervisor and two other political science faculty members who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each item. Content validity is established by ensuring that the questionnaire items comprehensively cover all dimensions of the study's research objectives. A pilot study is conducted with 40 respondents to test clarity and comprehensibility. Following the pilot study, ambiguous or repetitive items are revised or removed. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding a value of $\alpha = 0.82$ for the instrument as a whole; indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming the reliability of the questionnaire (Nunnally, 1978).

3.8 Method of Data Collection

Questionnaires are administered through a combination of physical and online channels. Physical copies are administered by trained research assistants at selected youth centres, tertiary institution campuses, and INEC voter registration centres in the three selected LGAs. An online version developed using Google Forms is distributed through WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages frequented by young voters in Edo State. Research assistants are trained to obtain informed consent from each respondent before administration.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Data are analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics; including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations; are used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and Likert-scale responses, presented in tables and charts. Inferential statistics are used to test the study's hypotheses: the chi-square test of independence assesses the statistical significance of the relationship between social media engagement and voting behaviour, while Pearson's correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of relationships between variables. A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ is adopted. All analyses are conducted using SPSS version 26.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study is conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social science research. Informed consent is obtained from all respondents prior to questionnaire administration, with clear explanation of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any point without consequence. All data are stored securely with access limited to the researcher and the supervisory team. Anonymity of respondents is maintained throughout the study and no identifying information is included in the questionnaire or in the presentation of findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the data gathered through the structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents in the study area. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 389 were returned in a usable condition, representing a response rate of 97.25%. The chapter is organised into five main sections: demographic characteristics (Section 4.2), data presentation by research question (Section 4.3), hypothesis testing (Section 4.4), and discussion of findings (Section 4.5).

4.2 Data Presentation

4.2.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 389)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	211	54.2
Female	178	45.8
Total	389	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents (N = 389)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 21 years	91	23.4
22 – 25 years	150	38.6
26 – 30 years	94	24.2
31 – 35 years	54	13.8
Total	389	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.3: Educational Qualification of Respondents (N = 389)

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary School Certificate	32	8.2
OND / Undergraduate (in progress)	189	48.6
B.Sc. / HND	122	31.3
Postgraduate	46	11.9
Total	389	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.4: Local Government Area of Respondents (N = 389)

Local Government Area	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Oredo	143	36.8
Egor	126	32.4
Ikpoba-Okha	120	30.8
Total	389	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.5: Social Media Platforms Used by Respondents (Multiple Response, N = 389)

Platform	Frequency	Percentage of Respondents (%)
WhatsApp	364	93.6
Facebook	282	72.5
Instagram	240	61.7
Twitter / X	188	48.3
TikTok	165	42.4
YouTube	149	38.3

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.6: Frequency of Daily Social Media Use (N = 389)

Frequency of Use	Frequency	Percentage (%)
More than 5 times per day	239	61.4
2 – 5 times per day	95	24.4
Once per day	37	9.5
Less than once per day	18	4.6
Total	389	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

4.2.2 Presentation of Data for Research Questions

Research Question 1: Level of Youth Social Media Engagement During the Election

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with five statements measuring their level of engagement with social media during the 2024 Edo State governorship election. Results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Respondents' Level of Social Media Engagement During the 2024 Election (N = 389)

S/N	Item	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
1	I actively followed election-related discussions on social media.	2.1	6.7	6.9	47.3	37.0	4.11	0.88
2	I shared election-related content with my social media contacts.	3.3	8.5	17.0	42.4	28.8	3.85	0.97
3	I participated in online debates or discussions about the election.	4.9	12.3	19.8	40.6	22.4	3.63	1.05
4	I created and posted original election-related content online.	8.7	17.5	26.0	33.9	13.9	3.27	1.12

5	I spent significant time consuming political content on social media.	2.8	7.2	14.1	48.3	27.6	3.91	0.93
	Composite Mean Score						3.87	0.73

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 4.7, the composite mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.73) indicates a moderately high level of social media engagement with the 2024 Edo State governorship election. The item “I actively followed election-related discussions on social media” recorded the highest mean (M = 4.11), while “I created and posted original election-related content online” recorded the lowest (M = 3.27), indicating that passive consumption was more prevalent than active content creation. Overall, 84.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they actively followed election-related discussions on social media, confirming the dominant role of social media as a political information channel among youth in the study area.

Research Question 2: Social Media Influence on Voting Decisions

Respondents were asked to rate five statements examining the extent to which social media content influenced their voting decisions during the 2024 election. Results are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Social Media Influence on Youth Voting Decisions (N = 389)

S/N	Item	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
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1	Social media content influenced my decision about whether to vote.	3.3	8.5	19.8	43.7	24.7	3.78	0.96
2	Social media content influenced which candidate I decided to vote for.	4.1	9.2	18.5	44.2	24.0	3.75	0.99
3	Social media changed my initial candidate preference during the campaign.	9.0	19.0	22.4	35.2	14.4	3.27	1.14
4	Recommendations from social media contacts influenced my vote choice.	3.1	7.5	25.2	43.4	20.8	3.71	0.96
5	Video content about candidates on social media shaped my voting decision.	3.6	8.2	18.5	46.8	22.9	3.77	0.96
	Composite Mean Score						3.79	0.81

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 4.8 shows a composite mean influence score of 3.79 (SD = 0.81), indicating a moderately high level of perceived social media influence on voting decisions. An aggregate of 68.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media content influenced their voting decisions. The item regarding changed candidate preference recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.27$), yet 49.6% of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed that their initial preference was changed by social media content; indicating genuine persuasion effects in a significant minority of cases.

4.2.4 Research Question 3: Social Media in Youth Advocacy Movements

Respondents were asked five questions about their participation in social media-based advocacy activities during the 2024 election. Results are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Youth Participation in Social Media Advocacy Activities (N = 389)

S/N	Item	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
1	I shared voter education content on social media during the election.	4.9	12.6	35.7	34.7	12.1	3.37	1.02
2	I participated in online campaigns or hashtag movements.	8.2	16.5	37.0	29.8	8.5	3.14	1.06
3	I directly messaged contacts to encourage them to vote.	6.4	14.1	45.5	26.5	7.5	3.15	1.00
4	I participated in organised digital advocacy activities.	11.3	21.6	46.0	16.7	4.4	2.81	1.02
5	My social media advocacy influenced the voting decisions of others.	5.4	11.3	30.6	39.1	13.6	3.45	1.02
	Composite Mean Score						3.41	0.92

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 4.9, the composite advocacy participation score of 3.41 (SD = 0.92) indicates a moderate level of social media-based advocacy activity. Sharing voter education content was the most prevalent advocacy activity (M = 3.37), while participation in organised digital advocacy activities was least common (M = 2.81). An aggregate of 58.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had participated in at least one social media advocacy activity during the election period.

4.2.5 Research Question Four: Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media for Political Participation

Respondents rated their agreement with eight statements on the opportunities and challenges of social media for political participation. Results are presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Perceived Opportunities and Challenges of Social Media for Political

Participation (N = 389)

Item	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
OPP 1: Social media made it easier to access information about candidates.	1.5	7.2	11.9	49.6	29.8	3.99	0.88
OPP 2: Social media enabled me to express my political opinions more freely.	2.1	8.5	14.4	48.8	26.0	3.88	0.91
OPP 3: Social media helped mobilise youth toward voter participation.	2.8	9.2	17.7	46.8	23.4	3.78	0.95
OPP 4: Social media enabled me to hold politicians accountable.	3.1	10.5	18.2	45.0	23.1	3.75	0.98
CHAL 1: Social media was used to spread false information about the election.	1.3	5.1	11.1	44.5	38.0	4.13	0.85

CHAL 2: It was difficult to distinguish between true and false political information.	2.1	7.5	15.4	47.6	27.5	3.91	0.93
CHAL 3: Social media political content was often manipulative or biased.	2.8	8.5	18.8	46.0	23.9	3.80	0.96
CHAL 4: Online advocacy rarely translates into concrete political change.	5.4	13.4	29.0	36.5	15.7	3.44	1.05

OPP = Opportunity, CHAL = Challenge | SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree | Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.10 shows that respondents perceived both significant opportunities and significant challenges in using social media for political participation. Regarding opportunities, the highest-rated item was enhanced access to candidate information (M = 3.99), followed by freedom of political expression (M = 3.88). Regarding challenges, the most strongly agreed item was the spread of false political information (M = 4.13), with 82.5% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that social media was used to spread false information about the election. The difficulty of distinguishing true from false information also attracted high agreement (M = 3.91), with 75.1% concurrence.

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Social media has no significant influence on youth voting behaviour in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

Table 4.11: Chi-Square Test of Independence; Social Media Engagement and Voting Behaviour

Statistical Measure	Value
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	24.36
Degrees of Freedom (df)	2
Asymptotic Significance (p)	0.000
Pearson's r	0.48
p-value (Pearson's r)	< 0.001
Decision	Reject H_{01}

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 4.11, the chi-square test of independence reveals a statistically significant relationship between social media engagement level and voting behaviour ($\chi^2 = 24.36$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Furthermore, Pearson's correlation analysis between the social media influence score and self-reported voting behaviour yielded a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). On the basis of these results, the null hypothesis H_{01} is rejected. There is sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that social media has a significant influence on youth voting behaviour in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : Youth advocacy movements mediated through social media have no significant impact on electoral outcomes in Edo State.

Table 4.12: Chi-Square Test; Social Media Advocacy Participation and Peer Electoral

Influence

Statistical Measure	Value
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	18.72
Degrees of Freedom (df)	1
Asymptotic Significance (p)	0.000
Pearson's r	0.52
p-value (Pearson's r)	< 0.001
Decision	Reject H ₀₂

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey, 2024

As shown in Table 4.12, the correlation between respondents' social media advocacy participation scores and their reports of influencing the voting decisions of social network contacts is significant and positive ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents who participated in organised social media advocacy activities were significantly more likely to report having influenced the voting decisions of at least one contact ($\chi^2 = 18.72$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). On the basis of these findings, the null hypothesis H₀₂ is rejected. Youth advocacy movements mediated through social media had a statistically significant impact on electoral outcomes in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence for the significant role of social media in shaping both voting behaviour and youth advocacy during the 2024 Edo

State governorship election.

The high level of social media engagement documented in this study; with over 84% of respondents actively following election-related discussions online; is consistent with the findings of Nwankwo and Ugwu (2023), who similarly documented high levels of social media political engagement among Nigerian youth. The dominance of WhatsApp (93.6%) as the most widely used social media platform aligns with Adamu and Yakubu (2023), who identified WhatsApp as the primary platform for grassroots political mobilisation in Nigeria. The high frequency of social media use; over 61% using social media more than five times per day; confirms that social media has become an inescapable feature of the information environment for youth in Edo State.

The finding that 68.4% of respondents perceived social media to have influenced their voting decisions is particularly significant, representing a higher proportion than documented in some earlier Nigerian studies. This aligns with Abubakar and Mohammed (2024), who found a statistically significant effect of social media content on candidate preference among first-time voters, and with Okonkwo (2022), who documented a positive relationship between social media exposure and voting behaviour in Anambra State. The finding that 64.3% of respondents cited peer recommendations and endorsements as influential is consistent with Social Network Theory's emphasis on peer influence in shaping voting decisions, confirming the theoretical relevance of Granovetter's insights.

The finding that 31.6% of respondents reported that social media content had changed their

initial candidate preference demonstrates social media's genuine persuasive capacity. This persuasion effect is significant because it suggests that social media operates not merely as a reinforcement mechanism for pre-existing preferences but also as a genuine agent of political persuasion. This aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory's insights about the capacity of media to shape the cognitive landscape of political decision-making by elevating the salience of certain issues and attributes of candidates.

The moderate level of social media advocacy participation; with 58.6% of respondents participating in at least one advocacy activity; suggests that a significant proportion of youth moved beyond passive consumption to active digital advocacy. The statistically significant correlation between advocacy participation and peer influence on voting decisions ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) provides direct empirical support for Social Network Theory's proposition that individuals embedded in politically active networks are more likely to translate digital engagement into voting behaviour.

The challenges identified by respondents; particularly the high levels of agreement that social media was used to spread misinformation (82.5%) and that it was difficult to distinguish true from false political information (75.1%); reflect a significant threat to the integrity of social media as a democratic communication platform. These findings align with the global evidence documented by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) that misinformation spreads faster and more widely than accurate information on social media.

Taken together, the findings support a nuanced understanding of the relationship between

social media, voting behaviour, and youth advocacy in Edo State. Social media plays a significant and multifaceted role; serving as the primary source of electoral information, a platform for peer political communication, an arena for advocacy and mobilisation, and a potentially decisive factor in the voting decisions of a significant proportion of young voters. At the same time, the challenges of misinformation and the gap between online activism and offline political outcomes caution against an uncritical celebration of social media as a democratic panacea.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study assessed the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election. The following key findings emerged:

With respect to the first research objective, the study found a high level of youth social media engagement during the 2024 election, with a composite engagement mean of 3.87 out of 5.00. Over 84% of respondents actively followed election-related discussions, and over 71% shared election-related content.

With respect to the second research objective, social media content was found to exert a significant influence on the voting decisions of youth, with 68.4% of respondents reporting social media influence on their vote. A composite influence mean of 3.79 was recorded, and 31.6% reported that social media had changed their initial candidate preference.

With respect to the third research objective, the study found that social media played an active and significant role in youth advocacy movements, with 58.6% of respondents having participated in at least one social media advocacy activity. Advocacy participation was significantly correlated with peer influence on voting decisions ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$).

With respect to the fourth research objective, the study identified both significant opportunities; enhanced access to political information, freedom of political expression,

and youth mobilisation; and significant challenges; including the prevalence of misinformation ($M = 4.13$) and difficulty distinguishing true from false information ($M = 3.91$). Both research hypotheses were rejected, confirming that social media has a statistically significant influence on youth voting behaviour and that social media-mediated youth advocacy has a significant impact on electoral outcomes in Edo State.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that social media constitutes a significant and multifaceted force in shaping the political behaviour of youth in Edo State, with measurable effects on both voting behaviour and advocacy activities during the 2024 governorship election. The evidence supports the position that social media is not merely a peripheral channel of political communication but a central arena of political engagement through which youth access information, form opinions, influence peers, and participate in civic life. The findings affirm the relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory in explaining how social media shapes the political priorities of youth voters, and of Social Network Theory in explaining the social mechanisms through which digital political content and advocacy mobilisation travel through youth social networks. The challenges of misinformation and the gap between online activism and offline political outcomes nonetheless caution that the full democratic potential of social media can only be realised through concerted efforts to address these challenges.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- 1 **Government and Policymakers:** The federal and state governments should develop and implement a comprehensive national digital literacy curriculum equipping young Nigerians with skills to critically evaluate political information, identify misinformation, and engage responsibly in online political discourse. This curriculum should be integrated into secondary school and tertiary institution academic programmes, and investments in digital infrastructure development should be prioritised to reduce the digital divide between urban and rural youth.
- 2 **INEC and Electoral Bodies:** INEC should develop a robust digital outreach strategy leveraging WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to disseminate voter education content, facilitate voter registration, and provide real-time election information. INEC should also establish a dedicated digital misinformation monitoring unit to identify and publicly counter false electoral information circulating on social media in real time during election periods, and should pursue partnerships with social media companies to flag and remove demonstrably false electoral content.
- 3 **Political Parties:** Political parties seeking to engage youth voters should prioritise the development of authentic, policy-focused digital content on the social media platforms most frequented by youth; particularly video content, which was identified as among the most influential types of social media political content. Campaign teams should

cultivate networks of trusted youth opinion leaders and community influencers who can serve as credible voices for their campaign messages within digital social networks.

- 4 **Youth Organisations:** Youth organisations and civil society groups should adopt a hybrid advocacy model combining digital mobilisation with physical voter assistance programmes; including transportation to polling units, voter card collection drives, and legal support for voters who encounter electoral malpractice. Youth organisations should also invest in building the digital communication capacities of their members through training in content creation, social media strategy, and digital counter-messaging.
- 5 **Social Media Regulators:** The Nigerian government should engage social media platforms; through NITDA and the NCC; to develop and enforce transparent policies on political content, electoral misinformation, and platform transparency during election periods. These regulatory engagements should prioritise the development of Nigeria-specific content moderation guidelines that reflect the linguistic diversity of Nigerian political discourse and the specific forms of misinformation prevalent in Nigerian electoral contexts.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a distinct contribution to the existing body of knowledge on social media and elections in Nigeria by providing the first systematic empirical assessment of social media's impact on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State; a context that has been significantly underrepresented in the literature. The study's application of Agenda-

Setting Theory and Social Network Theory to a South-South Nigerian electoral context extends these theoretical frameworks' relevance beyond their original Western contexts. The study also contributes an integrated analytical framework that addresses both the content dimensions (agenda-setting) and the relational dimensions (social networks) of social media's political effects.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research should consider longitudinal studies tracking social media behaviour and voting patterns of youth in Edo State across multiple election cycles to enable a more dynamic understanding of how the relationship between social media and political participation evolves over time. Qualitative studies employing ethnographic observation of social media political communities and in-depth interviews with digital opinion leaders would provide richer insights into the mechanisms of social media political engagement. Comparative studies examining social media's electoral impact across multiple states in the South-South geopolitical zone would enable broader regional generalisations and identify context-specific factors shaping the nature and intensity of social media's democratic effects.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY, EDO STATE

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON VOTING AND YOUTH ADVOCACY IN EDO STATE: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2024 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for an academic research project on the impact of social media on voting behaviour and youth advocacy in Edo State during the 2024 governorship election. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all responses will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. Do not write your name on this questionnaire.

Thanks Very much and Yours Faithfully,

Dorcas Gbezina

Researcher

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick [✓] the appropriate option for each item.

Table A.1: Demographic Questions

Q	Question	Options
1	Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
2	Age Group	☐ 18–21 ☐ 22–25 ☐ 26–30 ☐ 31–35
3	Highest Educational Qualification	☐ Secondary School ☐ OND/Undergraduate ☐ B.Sc./HND ☐ Postgraduate
4	Local Government Area of Residence	☐ Oredo ☐ Egor ☐ Ikpoba-Okha ☐ Other (specify): _____
5	Did you vote in the 2024 Edo State Governorship Election?	☐ Yes ☐ No

Source: Researcher's Design, 2026

SECTION B: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS

Table A.2: Social Media Usage Questions

Q	Question	Options
6	Which social media platforms do you use? (Tick all that apply)	☐ WhatsApp ☐ Facebook ☐ Instagram ☐ Twitter/X ☐ TikTok ☐ YouTube ☐ Other: _____
7	How often do you use social media on a daily basis?	☐ More than 5 times a day ☐ 2–5 times a day ☐ Once a day ☐ Less than once a day
8	Did you use social media to follow the 2024 Edo governorship election?	☐ Yes ☐ No

Source: Researcher's Design, 2026

SECTION C: LEVEL OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT DURING THE ELECTION

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each statement below. Use the scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
9	I actively followed election-related discussions on social media.					
10	I shared election-related content with my social media contacts.					
11	I participated in online debates or discussions about the election.					
12	I created and posted original election-related content (opinions, memes, analysis) online.					
13	I spent significant time consuming political content on social media during the election period.					

SECTION D: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON VOTING DECISIONS

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
14	Social media content influenced my decision about whether to vote.					
15	Social media content influenced which candidate I decided to vote for.					
16	Social media changed my initial candidate preference at some point during the campaign.					
17	Recommendations or endorsements from my social media contacts influenced my vote choice.					
18	Video content about candidates shared on social media shaped my final voting decision.					

SECTION E: SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY PARTICIPATION

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
19	I shared voter education content on social media during the election period.					
20	I participated in online campaigns or hashtag movements related to the election.					
21	I directly messaged contacts on social media to encourage them to vote.					
22	I participated in organised digital advocacy activities coordinated by a youth group.					
23	My social media advocacy activities influenced the voting decisions of at least one person.					

SECTION F: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
24	Social media made it easier to access information about candidates and the election.					
25	Social media was used to spread false information about the election.					
26	It was difficult to distinguish between true and false political information on social media.					
27	Social media political content was often manipulative or biased.					
28	Social media helped mobilise youth toward voter registration and participation.					
29	Online political advocacy rarely translates into concrete political change.					
30	Social media enabled me to express my political opinions more freely.					
31	Social media enabled me to hold politicians and parties accountable.					

Thank you sincerely for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX B: DATA ANALYSIS SUMMARY TABLES

B.1 Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Data

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	211	54.2
	Female	178	45.8
Age Group	18 – 21 years	91	23.4
	22 – 25 years	150	38.6
	26 – 30 years	94	24.2
	31 – 35 years	54	13.8
Education	Secondary School	32	8.2
	OND / Undergraduate	189	48.6
	B.Sc. / HND	122	31.3
	Postgraduate	46	11.9
LGA	Oredo	143	36.8
	Egor	126	32.4
	Ikpoba-Okha	120	30.8

Source: Field Survey, 2026

B.2 Descriptive Statistics: Scale Variables

Variable / Scale	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Social Media Engagement (Composite)	389	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.73
Social Media Influence on Voting (Composite)	389	1.00	5.00	3.79	0.81
Youth Advocacy Participation (Composite)	389	1.00	5.00	3.41	0.92
Opportunities of Social Media (Composite)	389	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.90
Challenges of Social Media (Composite)	389	1.00	5.00	3.82	0.93

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

B.3 Item-Level Means: Social Media Engagement (Section C)

Table B.3: Item-Level Descriptive Statistics: Social Media Engagement (N = 389)

Item No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Q9	Actively followed election discussions on social media	4.11	0.88
Q10	Shared election-related content with contacts	3.85	0.97
Q11	Participated in online election debates/discussions	3.63	1.05
Q12	Created and posted original election content	3.27	1.12
Q13	Spent significant time on political content on social media	3.91	0.93
	Composite Mean	3.87	0.73

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

B.4 Item-Level Means: Voting Decision Influence (Section D)

Item No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Q14	Social media influenced decision about whether to vote	3.78	0.96
Q15	Social media influenced candidate choice	3.75	0.99
Q16	Social media changed initial candidate preference	3.27	1.14
Q17	Peer recommendations on social media influenced vote choice	3.71	0.96
Q18	Video content on social media shaped voting decision	3.77	0.96
	Composite Mean	3.79	0.81

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

B.5 Item-Level Means: Advocacy Participation (Section E)

Item No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Q19	Shared voter education content on social media	3.37	1.02
Q20	Participated in online campaigns or hashtag movements	3.14	1.06
Q21	Directly messaged contacts to encourage them to vote	3.15	1.00
Q22	Participated in organised digital advocacy activities	2.81	1.02
Q23	Advocacy influenced the voting decisions of others	3.45	1.02
	Composite Mean	3.41	0.92

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

B.6 Opportunities and Challenges: Item-Level Means (Section F)

Item No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Type	Mean	Std. Dev.
Q24	Social media improved access to candidate information	Opportunity	3.99	0.88
Q25	Social media enabled free expression of political opinions	Opportunity	3.88	0.91
Q26	Social media helped mobilise youth toward voter participation	Opportunity	3.78	0.95
Q27	Social media enabled holding politicians accountable	Opportunity	3.75	0.98
Q28	Social media was used to spread false election information	Challenge	4.13	0.85
Q29	Difficult to distinguish true from false political info	Challenge	3.91	0.93
Q30	Social media political content was manipulative or biased	Challenge	3.80	0.96
Q31	Online advocacy rarely translates into concrete change	Challenge	3.44	1.05

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

B.7 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Test Used	Statistic	df	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁ : Social media has no significant influence on youth voting behaviour	Chi-Square Pearson's r	+ $\chi^2 = 24.36$ r = 0.48	2	p = 0.000 p < 0.001	Rejected
H ₀₂ : Social media advocacy has no significant impact on electoral outcomes	Chi-Square Pearson's r	+ $\chi^2 = 18.72$ r = 0.52	1	p = 0.000 p < 0.001	Rejected

Significance level: $p < 0.05$ | Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey, 2026

Table B.8: Pearson's Correlation Matrix: Key Variables (N = 389)

Variable	1. SM Engagement	2. Voting Influence	3. Advocacy Participation	4. Peer Influence
1. SM Engagement	1.00	;	;	;
2. Voting Influence	0.48**	1.00	;	;
3. Advocacy Participation	0.43**	0.51**	1.00	;
4. Peer Influence	0.39**	0.46**	0.52**	1.00

** Correlation significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed) | SM = Social Media | Source: SPSS

Output, 2026

Note: All statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ was applied throughout. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the overall instrument was $\alpha = 0.82$, indicating high internal consistency.