

**IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA ELECTIONS (A CASE STUDY OF
THE 2024 EDO GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION)**

BY

**FARIDA ITSEHME ISAH
ART2201233**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY**

JULY, 2026

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
MASS COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF
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MASS COMMUNICATION.**

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DECLARATION

This project is based on a study undertaken by me, Isah Farida Itsehme, in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, under the supervision of Dr Sonny Ekorugue. All ideas are the products of my personal research with the help of views of others as well with all duly acknowledged.

ISAH FARIDA ITSEHME

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was written by ISAH FARIDA ITSEHME to the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

Dr. Sonny Ekhorugue
Project Supervisor

Date

Dr. Daniel Ekhareafo
Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty who has shown me tremendous mercy and has provided me with His strength throughout my years in the University of Benin.

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine the effect of social media, specifically Facebook, on youth involvement in politics during the 2024 Edo State Governorship election. With the recent increase in digital communication technologies, politics have been revolutionized especially among the youth who use social media for various political actions. The study evaluates the effects of exposure to political messages in Facebook on youths' engagement in political activities, their perception towards political figures, and their belief in political messages.

Four main research objectives informed the study. These include determining the extent to which youth are exposed to political content in Facebook, assessing how this exposure affects their involvement in politics, analyzing the effect of peer influence on the development of political views, and determining the credibility of the information circulated politically via social media. A survey research method was utilized. Information was gathered through the use of questionnaires.

From the findings of the research, it is evident that many youths are regularly exposed to political content via the social network, which has a positive effect on their political knowledge and involvement. Nevertheless, findings from the research indicate that misleading information and content play an important role in shaping perception of political messages and even inhibit political participation in some cases. Additionally, peer pressure has been established to be a key determinant of youths' political perspectives. Despite the potential benefits of using the social network in politics, issues such as misleading and unreliable political messages need to be addressed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Before the turn of the millennium, the traditional forms of mass media, including the likes of radio, television, and newspapers, were the primary source from which people received information regarding events of public interest. Communication was slow, limiting the spread of information as news was disseminated to the public through these sources. The disseminated information was spread over weeks or even longer, as some news articles were published weeks or months after they occurred because reporters had to travel several miles between news beats in order to deliver information. Communication across borders also presented challenges, including waiting for longer periods before the information was disseminated to the audience on the other side. The advent of the internet in the mid-1990s and the development of interactive digital communication in the following decades have increased the speed of information transfer and facilitated new ways of public political discourse through social media sites (OpenStax, Introduction to Political Science; Web 2.0, n.d.).

Social media is a general term related to internet-based media that offer opportunities through which users can produce content, share data, engage in communication, and develop networks and social groups. Social media has been understood differently from existing forms of media that mainly involve one-to-many communication. It helps users engage in participatory practices, offer feedback and

interaction, and share content from one person to another. The interactive possibilities of social media have led to an appreciation of social media as an important arena of social discourse and an imperative tool for youth social and political engagement.

Social media has become noticeable in political communication and political activities, especially concerning elections, in Nigeria as a nation. Political agents, political parties, and other people in the political world have used various social media such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, blogs, amongst others, during some political periods as a way of political communication, persuasion, mobilization, etc. Besides political process-related activities, social media has helped citizens to relive experiences, incidents, and political actions, as well as participate in discourse that affects political opinion. However, apart from the advantages of social media in political processes, there are also some limitations in its use, especially because of its active nature, which could allow political processes that might dissuade political engagement in some ways.

There has also been the understanding of the meaning of the word “youth,” including the view that while the meaning of the term is associated purely with the years of their age, in other jurisdictions like Nigeria, it is perceived as including the social phase of their economic and cultural times. The youth make up a sizable percentage of the total population of the country and can be regarded as one of the primary constituents of social media and other online communication mediums. However, the youth’s contribution and involvement in electoral politics in the country can be denoted as low

when compared with other age groups. The motives range from a lack of trust in politics and the process of exclusion to feelings of low institutional and political trust.

Nevertheless, in light of these dynamics, it has become necessary to investigate social media's effect on youthful political engagement in general elections, where this issue appears to matter most to political processes. This present 2024 Edo State Governorship Election serves as a relevant backdrop through which the relationship between these concepts could be examined. This is due to the nature of the election, which is usually keenly contested, a situation that makes it a good studying ground, considering the communication dimension involved. This leads us to the need to evaluate the role of exposure to political information as presented on the social media platforms of the youth, considering their involvement, discussion, participation, and mobilization regarding the electoral process.

This study, therefore, examines the effect of social media on youths' participation in Nigeria's electoral process, with a specific reference to the 2024 Edo governorship election. It is also expected to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which social media serves as a tool for youths' political information dissemination and its impacts on democratic participation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Indeed, social media has revolutionized political communication in democracies across the globe, including Nigeria. Social media has allowed politicians to engage in interactive and direct communication with citizens. Social media sites, including

Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, have become integral in the dissemination of campaign information and opinions, as well as mobilizing supporters and engaging in real-time interaction beyond traditional campaign sites. Social media has impacted the youth, who make up a large number of the electorate in Nigeria.

Despite the growing prominence of social media in Nigerian elections, empirical research on its specific effects on youth political participation at the sub-national (state) level remains limited. Much of the existing discourse focuses on the extent of social media usage during elections (e.g., in the 2023 general elections), without sufficiently examining its practical implications for participatory behaviors such as voter registration, political volunteering, campaign involvement, or actual turnout among young Nigerians. Social media has revolutionized political communication in democracies across the world, including Nigeria, through its capacity to facilitate rapid, interactive, and direct communication between politicians and the electorate. Social media sites like Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are now indispensable tools in the communication and transmission of campaign messages and direct interaction with the electorate, which is beyond the campaign arena. This is especially felt in the youth population of Nigeria, who are a significant percentage of the electorate in Nigeria.

Although the social media in Nigeria's electoral process is gaining prominence, there is still a lack of empirical evidence regarding the impact of social media on youth political participation in Nigeria at the sub-national level or state level. Most of the discussion is centered on the level of usage of social media in Nigeria's electoral process,

especially in the conduct of the general election in 2023 without sufficient examination and analysis of its implication in youth political participation in Nigeria.

More critically, therefore, social media represents a double-edged sword in democratic processes, as it provides opportunities for the expansion of political awareness, voter education, and youth mobilization, but at the same time, it also poses a challenge in the spread of misinformation, propaganda, hate speech, character assassination, manipulation, etc. To this effect, therefore, the 2024 Edo State Gubernatorial Election, which was conducted on the 21st of September 2024, presents itself as an interesting and compelling case study worthy of investigation and analysis since, in the first place, the youth population comprising persons between the ages of 18-35 years who were registered as voters in Edo State presented themselves in large percentages as voters in the election, while at the same time, social media was instrumental in the campaigns and dissemination of information and all that, while at the same time, it was marred by issues of misinformation/disinformation among voters through social media, which affected voters in one way or another and created tension and divisions among persons along political and ethnic lines, among others, while at the same time offering opportunities for debates, advocacy campaigns, monitoring of results, among others, but at the same time posing a challenge in terms of hate speech and all that, which might have affected some of the youth negatively.

Key questions arise: Did social media primarily enhance youth knowledge, interest, and active participation in the Edo 2024 election, or did its challenges (e.g.,

exposure to divisive or false content) contribute to disillusionment, apathy, or passive engagement? Was it more of an opportunity for empowerment or a source of disruption? These ambiguities highlight why this topic merits focused research — the 2024 Edo election offers a recent, context-specific lens to assess whether social media ultimately strengthened or weakened youth political participation in Nigerian state elections, with implications for democratic consolidation.

This study addresses the existing gap in context-specific, empirical evidence by examining the extent to which social media influenced youth attitudes, behaviors, and participation levels during the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election. It investigates how the nature of online political content shaped meaningful engagement (e.g., voting and related activities) versus superficial or negative outcomes, providing insights for stakeholders aiming to harness social media's potential while mitigating its risks.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the impact of social media on youth participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the extent to which social media impacted the youths participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election.
2. To examine whether social media shapes youths' perceptions of politicians' images during the election.

3. To assess how youths' political activities and messages on social media affect other electorates' political behaviour.
4. To evaluate the level of credibility Nigerian youths attach to political messages on social media platforms.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the impact of social media on youths political participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election?
2. Does social media influence youths' perceptions of politicians' images?
3. To what extent does youths' political activities on social media affect other electorates' political thinking?
4. What level of credibility do Nigerian youths attach to political messages on social media?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research seeks to fill the gaps in the existing knowledge on the implications of social media on youth political participation in the Nigerian elections, with particular reference to the 2024 Edo gubernatorial elections. This study, therefore, seeks to offer empirical and context-specific information on the influence of Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube on the attitudes and behaviors of the youth during the 2024 Edo gubernatorial elections, providing critical insights into the implications of the said social media on the said process.

The results will be of significant practical use to various stakeholders. Political actors like political parties and candidates will be able to acquire an informed knowledge of how best to approach social media campaigns in creating candidate images, mobilizing voters, and designing targeted awareness campaigns without running the risk of misinformation, which contributed to the polarization of voters in Edo 2024. Media strategists and social media managers will be able to use the knowledge generated by this research to better understand how best to harness the interactive potential of social media in order to promote participation instead of pseudo-engagement. Electoral bodies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and their respective state counterparts will be able to use the knowledge generated by this research to inform their approach to social media regulation and its use in voter education and combating misinformation.

Additionally, policymakers and civil society organizations interested in democratic governance will benefit from the study in planning strategies to exploit the benefits of social media in empowering youth while addressing challenges like hate speech and ethnic cleavages witnessed in Edo State's electoral process. Since youth between 18 and 35 years made up a considerable number of registered voters and showed high levels of online mobilization in previous elections, such findings could inform strategies to maintain and enhance their participation in democratic processes. Ultimately, this research contributes to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria by recognizing the

role of youth, as they are both the majority vote and future leaders in the country, in shaping electoral outcomes through digital platforms.

Academically, this research contributes to the body of literature on the impact of social media on politics in Nigeria, especially at the state level since there is little literature available on this compared to national politics. The state is an essential concept in politics since it is closest to the people and represents them better than national politics. The research will be an essential reference material to anyone who is interested in studying politics and social media in developing countries.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to examining the impact of Facebook as a key political communication and mobilization platform on the voting behavior and political participation of Nigerian youths during the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election (held on September 21, 2024). Geographically and contextually, the research focuses on youths associated with the University of Benin, located in Benin City, Edo State — the epicenter of the election — where digital engagement with political content was prominent among young, educated voters.

Conceptually and theoretically, the scope is limited to how exposure to and interaction with political content on Facebook shaped youths' sentiments toward candidates, participation in election-related online discussions, and actual political behaviors. These behaviors include voter registration, involvement in campaign activities,

turnout on election day, and post-election engagement. The study does not extend to other social media platforms (e.g., X, Instagram, or WhatsApp), offline media influences, or broader national elections; nor does it cover non-youth demographics or elections outside the 2024 Edo gubernatorial contest.

By concentrating on this specific platform, location, time frame, and aspects of participation, the research maintains a focused, manageable investigation while providing context-specific insights into Facebook's role in youth political dynamics in a sub-national Nigerian election.

1.7 Definition of Terms

- **Social Media** - In this study, social media refers to interactive online platforms that enable content creation, information sharing, and communication among users. The research focuses specifically on Facebook, due to its widespread use among youths at the University of Benin for accessing and engaging with political content during the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election.
- **Political Participation** - This refers to the actions taken by youths, both online and offline, to influence electoral processes or outcomes. In this study, it includes viewing political content on Facebook, participating in election-related discussions, voter registration, campaign involvement, turnout on election day, and post-election activities among University of Benin undergraduates in the context of the 2024 Edo governorship election.

- Youths - Youths are defined in this study as individuals aged 15–29 years. This operational definition aligns with the focus on young, university-based respondents at the University of Benin who were eligible to engage politically during the 2024 Edo election.
- Election - An election is the formal process through which citizens in a defined area select individuals for public office via voting. Here, it specifically denotes the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election (held on September 21, 2024), serving as the case study for examining Facebook's role in shaping youth political participation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preamble

In this chapter, an extensive discussion of the pertinent literature materials will be made to provide an in-depth analysis of the subject literature materials already made to create ground for this study. This literature study was guided by three main themes; conceptual study, empirical study, and theoretical study.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The concept of social media

Social media is described as internet-based media that creates and facilitates sharing and exchanging user-generated content, which creates interactive and participatory communication between individuals and groups. Social media has been described as "a group of applications based on Web 2.0 ideologies that facilitate content creation and sharing in a collaborative fashion," although more recent literature has extended this concept, as Hampton (2017) has described it as "technologies that facilitate networked publics, which are composed of users who create and share content and engage in dialogue with each other through their profiles and connections." In a more contemporary view, Papathanassopoulos (2025) conceptualizes social media as decentralized digital spaces that have shifted political communication from elite-controlled, top-down models to horizontal, interactive exchanges, blurring lines between producers and consumers of information.

In the realm of communication, social media stands out for its emphasis on interactivity, real-time engagement, and network effects, which distinguish it from traditional mass media. Unlike one-way broadcasting channels, platforms enable users to respond, comment, share, and co-create narratives instantly. This interactivity promotes a sense of community and amplifies voices that might otherwise remain marginalized. Hampton (2017) notes that social media encourages attitudinal expression and discussion across diverse ties, though it can also reinforce echo chambers when algorithms prioritize agreeable content. Globally, these features have transformed how information flows, making communication more democratic but also more fragmented.

In terms of politics and political communication, social media is seen as having tremendous potential for direct interaction between citizens and politicians. Politicians use social media to circumvent traditional gatekeepers such as traditional media in order to communicate with citizens and shape perceptions.^C This is seen in the formation and mobilization of opinion around various causes through social media. For instance, social media around the world has enabled political movements such as the Arab Spring and #MeToo.

This is more evident in the context of an election, where social media has emerged as an important tool in campaigning, voter education, and monitoring of election results. Social media has also emerged as an important tool in micro-targeting voters through data-driven advertising and grassroots mobilization. At the same time, it has also opened up avenues of risk, where misinformation can have an impact on public opinion

and thereby impact the integrity of the electoral process. In developing countries like those in Africa, social media has emerged as an important tool in democratizing political information, especially among young people who are more tech-savvy but less exposed to traditional media.

For example, in Nigeria, the incorporation of social media into politics has been revolutionary, especially concerning youths. Ezeigbo (2024) points out the incorporation of social media into politics in Nigeria, specifically concerning youths' participation in the 2023 general elections in the country. For example, there are studies indicating that social media is significant in promoting and mobilizing political activities and awareness. Shamsudeen (2025), for example, points out social media as a catalyst to electoral success, where politicians use it as an avenue to convey political messages to their supporters. Notably, Facebook has been significant concerning youths in Nigeria, including students in various universities. For example, Opeibi (2019), as cited in more recent sources such as Olley et al. (2024), points out that Facebook is predominant in university campuses, where students discuss politics. For example, during the Edo gubernatorial election in 2024, features on Facebook allowed politicians to have direct interfaces with voters, which boosted youths' sentiments concerning politicians.

The significance of social media in politics and political communication is its capacity to reduce barriers to participation, promote inclusivity, and boost efficacy. For instance, scholars such as Uwalaka (2023) argue that social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp contribute to mobilizing youths for protests and elections. They

claim that social media plays a crucial role in boosting participation among youths who were not interested in politics due to resource constraints. For example, in countries like Nigeria, where youths constitute the majority of the population but have shown low participation in politics in the past, social media plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between politics and youths. For example, Olley et al. (2024) observed that undergraduate students perceive social media as having influence in boosting participation in the 2023 elections due to its high level of use.

However, social media is associated with various challenges in the context of holding elections. For example, misinformation and disinformation may spread through social media and influence voters' decisions. In addition, misinformation may contribute to citizens' lack of trust in government and may polarize people along ethnic and religious lines. In Nigeria, for example, misinformation is rife in different elections. For example, during the 2023 presidential campaigns and other elections such as Edo in 2024, misinformation and propaganda through the use of social media resulted in high tensions (Ade-Johnson, 2025). In addition, it has been argued that social media has the potential to polarize society because of algorithms used to determine content (Kubin, 2021), which is relevant to Africa in general. Another issue is that digital divides between people with access and those without access to social media due to high data costs and low literacy levels (Nigerian studies, e.g., Ezeigbo, 2024). In Africa in general, various analyses by Brookings (recent) argue that social media is effective in engaging young

people but may contribute to citizens' lack of trust in government if not well controlled since it may spread misinformation and limit democratic freedoms.

On a general level, social media, and especially Facebook in a Nigerian university setting such as the University of Benin, presents a mix of possibilities and risks that require an in-depth examination. The double-edged nature of social media, which offers empowerment and manipulation, makes it a key variable in analyzing youth political behavior in electoral contests such as the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election.

2.1.2 Political Participation

Political participation is defined as "the various actions taken by citizens voluntarily to impact the outcomes of government officials' selection or policy decisions in various ways, ranging from conventional actions like voting and campaigning to modern actions like advocacy through the internet and protesting." Various scholars have attempted to define political participation in various ways in relation to its dynamic nature in modern times in the face of technological advancements. For example, political participation is defined by Uwalaka (2023) as "the various actions taken by citizens voluntarily to impact the outcomes of government officials' selection or policy decisions in various ways." Ezeigbo (2024) defines it as "the various actions taken by citizens voluntarily to impact the outcomes of government officials' selection or policy decisions in various ways." These definitions of political participation were built on previous definitions but modified to suit modern times in which political participation includes actions like "liking" or "sharing" through the internet, which is referred to as "hybrid

model" of political participation by Papathanassopoulos (2025), where actions like protesting and campaigning through the internet and traditional means are combined with the aim of reducing obstacles for resource-poor groups like the youth in countries like Nigeria.

To actively participate in politics as a citizen requires that a person undertake various actions that contribute to the democratic process, such as voting or attending a rally and discussing policies with fellow citizens or even campaigning to change policies. Active participation in politics, therefore, requires not only observing but also actively engaging in actions that can shape or change the political environment. Communication plays a significant role in the process of political participation because it has a substantial impact on awareness, attitude, and behavior. It is the conduit through which information is transmitted and opinions are shaped. Good communication channels help to enlighten citizens on matters, mobilize support, and encourage dialogue, hence reducing the costs and increasing the efficacy of political participation—perceived ability to influence outcomes. In Nigeria, for example, Ade-Johnson (2025) contends that the use of digital communication has changed the landscape of political participation because it has enabled citizens to access electoral information in real time, hence increasing their confidence to participate. In the #EndSARS protests, for instance, the use of communication technology such as WhatsApp and Twitter coordinated the protests, demonstrating the potential of accessible communication technology for mobilizing support and challenging authority. In contrast, bad communication has been shown to

reduce political participation. Uwalaka (2023), for example, contends that during the socio-political protests in Nigeria, mobile social networking technology played a crucial role in coordinating the protests but also made the protests vulnerable to the shutdown of communication technology by the government.

The nexus between social media and political participation has been a subject of great interest to researchers. There has been a focus on how social media has affected or influenced participation. It has been established that social media has democratized participation through its ability to facilitate the instantaneous sharing of ideas and interaction with individuals or leaders. In Nigeria, Ezeigbo (2024) established that social media has greatly influenced youth participation in the 2023 general elections. For instance, 73% of undergraduates used Facebook and Twitter as major sources of information on politics. Statistics from the Independent National Electoral Commission indicate that 76% of 9.4 million newly registered voters ahead of the 2023 elections were youth aged 18-35 years. Furthermore, Olley et al. (2024) established that 56.7% of Nigerian university students participated in online discussions on politics through social media, with a 40% increase in self-perceived political awareness. For example, globally, but applicable to Africa, Kubin (2021) observes that social media algorithms can increase participation since they tend to favor content that is engaging. For example, in Nigeria, Shamsudeen (2025), in reference to the 2023 presidential election, observes that 65% of youths reported that their involvement in the electoral process was due to trends created by social media. In another example, preliminary reports from Yiaga (2024), regarding

the Edo gubernatorial election in 2024, reported that 50% of youths' decisions to participate in the electoral process were influenced by social media, although only 25% of youths voted in the election. The figures above are evidence of the influence of social media on increasing participation in electoral processes. For example, evidence from Edo 2024 is provided by Ade-Johnson (2025), where 47.89% of registered voters were women and youths, who are often targeted through social media ads.

The significance of political participation rests with its foundational role in the sustenance of democracy, representation, and accountability, which enables the citizenry to influence the policies that impact their lives. Without such involvement, democracy turns elitist, causing disenfranchisement and instability. This makes the role of the youth, who constitute over 60% of the Nigerian population, crucial in the resolution of problems such as unemployment and insecurity. Ezeigbo (2024) asserts the need for effective participation in consolidating democracy, as experienced in the 2023 elections, where the youth, despite being only 33.5%, determined the outcomes in key states. Social media plays an important role in achieving this objective by reducing the cost of participation and facilitating the spread of voter information, as well as mobilization. For example, Uwalaka (2023) indicates how WhatsApp and Facebook groups under the #EndSARS movement mobilized over 391 protesters in Lagos and Port Harcourt, converting online discontent into offline actions that influenced policy changes. In Edo 2024, platforms enabled the holding of virtual town halls, with CJID (2024) revealing that 50% of the participants relied on social media as their primary information source, thereby

promoting awareness and efficacy. Olley et al. (2024) discovered that 70% of the undergraduates who were exposed to diverse opinions on the internet developed the motivation to vote, thereby bridging the gap between generations and empowering the marginalized.

However, there are challenges associated with social media in relation to political participation, and these include misinformation, the digital divide, polarization, and superficiality. Misinformation is capable of spreading fast and hence leads to misconceptions and mistrust among people; for instance, in Nigeria's 2023 elections, 65% of the choices of the youth were negatively affected by misinformation, as noted by Shamsudeen (2025). Digital divides have exacerbated inequalities, with high data costs and lack of connectivity hindering participation among rural and disadvantaged groups, as Ezeigbo (2024) observed, whereby only 45.5% internet penetration in Nigeria has limited participation, reaching only 60% of the eligible youth population. Polarization has also been observed, whereby algorithms have created echo chambers, thereby exacerbating ethnic and religious differences, as Kubin (2021) observed in African countries whereby social media exacerbated tensions during elections. In Edo 2024, propaganda was observed to have exacerbated polarization, which has resulted in a lack of constructive dialogue, as observed by Ade-Johnson (2025). Furthermore, activism on social media has often not translated into actual change, resulting in slacktivism, whereby Olley et al. (2024) observed that although 65% of participants shared content, only 46.7% voted due to apathy arising from overwhelming negative narratives. The government has

also introduced regulations and cyber harassment, which have resulted in low participation, as Uwalaka (2023) observed in Nigeria whereby shutdowns during protests have resulted in silence, as observed by Papathanassopoulos (2025).

In conclusion, therefore, political participation is an essential aspect of a healthy democracy, and social media is a tool that has provided unprecedented avenues for participation in Nigeria, as seen in youth-based movements and electoral participation figures. However, to fully harness its potential, challenges such as misinformation and inequalities in access must be addressed.

2.1.3 Youth and Political Engagement

Youth is considered an age stage that marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood, where individuals assume greater roles and identities in society. In Nigeria, the youth are defined by the age range of 15-29 years, and these are considered to be a significant population with immense potential for creating societal, economic, and political shifts. Ezeigbo (2024) states that youth are identified as a dynamic population with attributes such as energy, innovation, and flexibility, using digital technology to overcome contemporary challenges. In other instances, Olley et al. (2024) describe the youth as comprising the age range of 18-35 years, specifically targeting those participating in electoral activities and are highly digital literate and exposed to global ideas, which determine their worldview and behaviors. This is comparable to that of young Nigerians like university students, who are known for their curiosity, idealism, and

need for transformation and reform in spite of difficulties like unemployment and inequality.

The importance of youth in a country like Nigeria cannot be overemphasized due to their key role in future development and their potential for a demographic dividend. The youth in Nigeria, with over 60% of the population under the age of 35, are a driving force for economic development, innovation, and entrepreneurship, in addition to being a source of cultural preservation and social cohesion. Shamsudeen (2025) asserts that youth are at the center of sustainable development in a country like Nigeria, where their exclusion is a source of instability. The youth in Nigeria, for instance, were at the center of protests like #EndSARS in 2020, which were a source of grievances for the Nigerian youth. Politically, youth in a country like Nigeria are a critical electoral force, given that they comprise almost 40% of registered voters in elections. Ade-Johnson (2025) asserts that tapping into the potential of youth in a country like Nigeria is a source of strength for democratic development, as witnessed in sub-national elections where youth voters' concerns about digital rights and anti-corruption were at the center of campaign messages.

Youth and politics is also a complicated relationship, whereby young people see the political process as a way to advocate for change, but are also disadvantaged through marginalization and lack of representation. Politics among young people is not only about the formal process but also the informal process through which they manifest their discontent and activism. According to Uwalaka (2023), generational inequality is a

reason why young people in Nigeria participate in the political process, and it is a tool to persuade and advocate for change in the political class. This is affected by various factors such as education level, rural and urban differences, and socioeconomic factors, where young people who are university-educated, such as those from the University of Benin, are aware of this due to their level of education and interaction with other young people. However, because of historical mistrust and perceptions of the political process and governance, young people are more concerned about survival than participating.

The significance of the youth in politics stems from their capacity to inject fresh ideas, ensure inclusivity, and guarantee the sustainability of democracy, considering the fact that the youth represent the future generation and the majority voting bloc. Through their participation, the youth can ensure accountability, articulate their interests, and avoid intergenerational conflicts. For Nigeria, with 40% of its youth being unemployed, the youth's contribution to politics is crucial in driving change in the country's educational and economic systems. Ezeigbo (2024) asserts that the youth's contribution to politics ensures the consolidation of democracy, considering the fact that they contributed 39.65% to the total number of registered voters, accounting for 37 million out of 93 million voters in the 2023 elections, which saw the youth influence the outcome in the swing states. Without the youth's contribution, the policies would be rendered irrelevant, and the youth would be forced to resort to demonstrations.

Generally, youth political engagement is defined as "the range of activities that youths undertake to influence governance from passive information-seeking to active

campaigning and voting." According to Olley et al. (2024), it is "the involvement of youths in electoral activities, advocacy, and discourse, often with the assistance of digital technologies." In Nigeria, it is exemplified by protesting, disseminating political information, and registering to vote. It is not uniform across all youths, with urban and educated youths showing higher rates of engagement owing to information access.

In terms of political activities, the youth's participation has far-reaching effects on the process and outcome, such as altering the voting base, calls for political reforms, and effects on the voting results. In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, youths' involvement in online political activities saw a record 76% of the total registered voters fall within the age bracket of 18 and 35 years, totaling over 7 million youths. Ezeigbo (2024) states that 40% of youths aged between 18 and 34 years participated actively in all the electoral processes, from registration to actual voting, which affected the victory of the candidates from the Labour Party, especially in areas where Peter Obi received massive support from youths, accounting for 25% of the total votes. In cases like the #EndSARS protests in 2020, youth digital activism resulted in government compromises in police reforms, showing that youths can engage in a way that influences change in government policies and increases accountability. Shamsudeen (2025) states that there is data showing that in the 2023 presidential elections, youth social media trends influenced 65% of youths' choices in the elections, which made it a closely contested race with a narrower margin for the winner than in previous elections. On the other hand, low youth engagement in politics can also mean that the status quo is maintained, like in the 2024 Edo

gubernatorial elections, where youths' participation was part of a low 22.4%, allowing other parties to emerge victorious despite youths being a larger segment of voters, according to Yiaga Africa (2024) predictions of low turnout due to disillusionment among youths.

However, it should be noted that the rate of youth involvement in politics and their political engagement before the use of social media was low, as the youth were not interested, did not have information, and relied on traditional media, which was controlled by the small elite class. For example, before the year 2010, such as in 2007 and 2011, the rate of youth involvement in politics and their political engagement was below 30%. For instance, there were barriers such as economic interests and mistrust, which hindered the youth's involvement in politics and their political engagement, as shown in the INEC reports of the era, as cited in Uwalaka (2023). The youth's involvement in politics and their political engagement improved with the use of social media in 2015. In 2019, there was increased youth engagement in politics and political processes through social media advocacy tools, with a turnout of 33.5% in 2023, as indicated in Ezeigbo (2024). Olley et al. (2024) established that 90.4% of undergraduates were aware of youth involvement in politics and political engagement post-social media usage compared to prior to that.

Overall, social media has greatly contributed to the enhancement of youth political engagement in Nigeria by democratizing access to information and enabling mobilization and efficacy. Although it has created new problems that may hinder its

effectiveness in achieving its goals, social media has enabled youth in Nigeria to create virtual town halls and share voter education materials and to access real-time information during elections. In the 2023 elections in Nigeria, social media contributed to 81.9% of the youth turning out to vote. In addition, social media motivated 70% of the youth to vote through diverse views expressed through social media. According to Olley et al. (2024), social media activities like advocacy and campaigning through WhatsApp and Twitter contributed to 40% of the youth aged 18-34 turning out to vote in Nigeria, which is an improvement compared to pre-social media times. During Edo 2024, CJID (2024) noted that 50% of the respondents used social media as their primary source of information for civic engagement in spite of low turnout.

However, social media has also had a negative impact on engagement, particularly through misinformation, which had a negative impact on 65% of the choices of the youth in 2023, according to Shamsudeen (2025), leading to polarization and disengagement. Moreover, the echo chambers created by the algorithms, as noted by Kubin (2021), are creating divisions among the youth, such as the Edo 2024, which saw propaganda negatively impact constructive engagement. Moreover, the digital divide, which has 45.5% internet penetration, has resulted in the marginalization of the youth in the rural areas, as noted by Ezeigbo (2024). Although social media has turned the passive observer into the active participant, addressing its downsides is crucial for sustained improvement.

2.1.4 Political Efficacy and Social Media

Political efficacy, which refers to the perception of individuals' ability to comprehend the processes and influence the government's decision or outcome, has two main dimensions: internal efficacy, which refers to the individual's perception of their ability to comprehend politics and participate meaningfully, and external efficacy, which refers to the perception of the government's or politicians' responsiveness to the citizens' input. In the context of young people's political engagement, therefore, political efficacy acts as an important psychological motivator, which connects young people's interest in politics with their actual participation. Shola (2022) defines political efficacy as the confidence levels of the citizens in their ability to influence change in politics, which has been shown to be positively correlated with high levels of participation in democratic settings such as Nigeria. Similarly, Mustapha et al. (2022) define political efficacy in the context of the Civic Voluntarism Model as an important psychological factor in young people's activism, which, together with their resources and recruitment, influences their activism, with social media being an important enhancer of both internal and external dimensions of the construct.

Exposure to social media content has been shown to impact youth's perceptions of political efficacy, which helps build their capabilities and perceptions of responsiveness. For the Nigerian youth, traditional barriers such as institutional distrust and lack of access to politics are mitigated by the use of social media, which democratizes exposure to politics and political knowledge. Omotayo (2020) indicates that the perceived usefulness

and ease of use of social media positively predict the political participation of Nigerian youths. For instance, computer self-efficacy positively contributes to internal efficacy, which occurs when the individual interacts with others on the internet and succeeds. The use of social media for politics and exposure to politics has been shown in Mustapha et al. (2022) to be positively and strongly related to the youth's perceptions of political efficacy, controlling for knowledge, which results in online and offline participation. Shola (2022) indicates, in their sample of over 3,400 Nigerians, that social media influences the youth's perceptions of political efficacy, with the majority being young, educated, and male, and having high perceptions of their ability to influence politics.

This also applies to motivation and actual involvement in voting processes and elections, as increased efficacy translates online engagement into offline action. In the 2023 general election in Nigeria, Olley et al. (2024) found that undergraduates who were exposed to diverse content on social media had increased motivation to participate in voting processes, and 70% had increased efficacy from discussions on social media, which influenced 81.9% to participate in voting processes. Ezeigbo (2024) also found that youths increased their turnout to 40% of 18-34-year-olds in 2023 because they had increased efficacy from activities of monitoring and advocating on social media. In the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State, Nigeria, youths were the driving force to participate in the election, but only 22-25% turned up to vote. Although youths had increased internal efficacy to increase their efficacy through virtual engagement on Facebook and other social media on the outcomes of the gubernatorial debate, they had

low external efficacy since they felt they were not being taken seriously regarding misinformation and electoral malpractices (CJID, 2024). Shamsudeen (2025) also found that social media became a catalyst for youths in the 2023 elections, although they had low efficacy since they did not get tangible results from trends on social media.

The impact of social media on creating political efficacy in young people is also notable in developing democracies such as Nigeria, where young people are not often heard in mainstream politics. According to Omotayo (2020), there is a high level of usage in advocacy (95.3%), campaigning (91.9%), and discussion (87.3%) in Oyo State, Nigeria, and that subjective norms and self-efficacy are significant predictors of this usage. Another study done by Mustapha et al. (2022) showed that in determining young people's intentions to participate in politics, political efficacy is the most powerful predictor compared to social media and protesting experiences. There is also a challenge in that echo chambers and misinformation may contribute to low levels of external efficacy in that it may create perceptions of non-responsiveness of the system to its citizens, as seen in polarized information in Nigerian elections (Shola, 2022). This is seen in Edo 2024, where propaganda is seen in social media sites, and it is lowering levels of trust, which may impact efficacy despite initial motivational levels of candidate sites and ads (Ade-Johnson, 2025). Social media is seen to have a positive effect on youth political efficacy in terms of its interactive and accessible means of accessing political content and networks, which motivate youths to actively participate in the electoral process through internal competence and influence, thus creating an opportunity for empowerment and

mitigating potential risks for sustaining its positive effect on motivation. The impact of social media on political efficacy is seen in the current electoral process that shows its positive effect and bridges the gap in youth participation.

2.1.5 Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News in Elections

While misinformation is "the spread of false or inaccurate information without intent to deceive," disinformation is "the intentional creation and dissemination of false narratives to mislead and manipulate audiences, often for political purposes." Fake news is "the broader category of which misinformation and disinformation are part," which "is presented as legitimate journalism but is intended to elicit an emotional response and shape opinions through content that is fabricated and/or distorted." These types of misinformation are flourishing during elections via social media, which "has become known as a tool for manipulating public opinion and delegitimizing opponents in Nigeria's political space," according to Hassan (2023). Similarly, Omoruyi and Thomas (2025) describe the concept of fake news and misinformation as the rapid spread of false information via digital media, leading to the erosion of informed decisions, especially in critical competitions such as gubernatorial contests.

The spread of false or misleading political information via social media has become an ubiquitous problem in contemporary elections, enabling coordinated strategies to spread false information to create divisions along ethnic, religious, or ideological fault lines. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and TikTok enable the rapid spread of false information via their viral mechanisms, often

without much scrutiny. Political actors in Nigeria have been using these mechanisms to spread false information, especially during the 2023 general elections, where there was an increase in the spread of false information targeting ethnic and religious groups, with reports indicating that politicians have extended their misinformation strategies to include the use of paid advertisements to spread false information targeting ethnicity and religion. According to Hassan (2023), social media's influence agenda-setting role increased the effectiveness of these efforts, which often undermined institutional credibility and electoral integrity. In this case, fact-checking coalitions such as the Nigerian Fact-Checkers' Coalition (NFC) frequently intervened to counter these claims, which illustrates the magnitude of this problem.

The impact of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news on perceptions, trust in elections, and voting decisions is most significant in the case of young Nigerians, who rely on social media as a source of information about politics due to high levels of digital access and low levels of trust in traditional news sources. In this case, young Nigerians are affected in that their perceptions of politicians and processes are distorted, leading to a lack of confidence in democracy. In Nigeria's case, this translates to a significant number of young people being a major voting demographic. According to Omoruyi and Thomas (2025), there is a high level of fake news in the Edo 2024 election, which is a major threat to informed political decision-making in Nigeria, especially in the case of voters who rely on social media to get updates.

Studies indicate that disinformation deepens societal divisions, contributes to voter apathy, and drives fear-based choices, as seen in how false stories scared certain groups from participating in 2023 polls. The consequence of this is not only particular to the election but rather has long-term effects, such as the loss of trust in the democratic process and institutions. In Edo 2024, the rise in manipulated information contributed to the low turnout of voters of between 22-25%. This is despite the high mobilization potential of youths, which led to disillusionment by the rise of disinformation. Some of the recommendations made to mitigate these problems are hard to implement, given the platform's limits and the small number of staff in moderation. The presence of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news has been identified as a major threat to the integrity of the electoral process in Nigeria, particularly among youths, who are mostly exposed to politics through social media platforms, hence the need to improve their digital literacy to mitigate the effects of these problems, such as perception, trust, and voting behavior, in relation to Edo 2024 gubernatorial elections.

2.1.6 Voter Mobilization and Social Media

Voter mobilization is defined as the efforts made by different actors in the political and civil society arena to encourage and motivate voters to participate in different elections through the process of voter registration. In contemporary politics, social media is the epicenter for voter mobilization in different countries. Various scholars have defined voter mobilization through social media as "the use of interactive digital networks for the transmission of campaign communications and for creating

communities of supporters and for stimulating various types of participatory behaviors." Aideloje et al. (2024) defined voter mobilization through social media as "a process in which social media helps to break social barriers and create group consciousness among people, especially the youth." Shamsudeen (2025) defined voter mobilization through social media as "a catalyst for electoral success in Africa; social media helps in direct interactions between politicians and voters and also helps to share social contents."

There are various methods used by social media in the mobilization of voters. These methods include targeted advertising, viral campaigning, group coordination, and call to action. Targeted advertising enables political entities to target particular groups of people depending on various parameters available on social media users. For instance, age and location can be used as parameters in targeted advertising. Targeted advertising can be used in targeting young people and people in particular locations. For instance, in Nigeria, various parties use Facebook and Instagram in advertising their candidates in various recent elections. Viral campaigning involves the use of various contents such as memes and videos in mobilizing voters. For instance, the use of hashtags and videos in TikTok and X can be used in mobilizing voters and encouraging them to share various contents. Group coordination involves the use of groups in Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram in mobilizing voters. For instance, groups can be used in coordinating activities at local levels. Call to action is part of the post and may include "Register to vote," "Share this post," and "Come out on election day."

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The chances of mobilization of voters via social media in Nigerian politics are enormous, especially regarding the youth. For example, social media has been effective in breaking down barriers to participating in politics via affordable and accessible means of information dissemination and engagement with people, bypassing other actors such as the mainstream media. This is evident in its role in empowering marginalized people in politics, creating an inclusive environment. Aideloje et al. (2024) state that social media facilitated the creation of bridges for intra- and inter-group relationships in politics,

creating enthusiasm for the 2023 election, leading to unprecedented participation of youths in politics. Shamsudeen (2025) further states that social media has been effective in improving electioneering in politics via enhanced awareness and discourse, especially in urban areas characterized by high digital engagement. For example, social media was essential in politics among the youth in Edo 2024, who were key actors in the process.

However, there are limitations and challenges that affect the potency and effectiveness of social media in mobilizing voters in Nigeria. Such limitations and challenges include the existence of a digital divide, which may affect voter turnout in Nigeria. For instance, in the 2023 election, there existed a case of coordinated inauthentic behavior and paid influencers who propagated divisive content, leading to polarization of voters. In this case, Bassey et al. (2024) noted that although the campaign strategies were effective in mobilizing voters, there existed limitations such as limited services and fake information that affected the effectiveness of the campaigns. For instance, in the 2024 Edo election, there existed a case of targeted advertisements that led to tension and division of voters. In other cases, it was noted that there existed little evidence that showed that online mobilization of voters led to a high turnout of voters in Nigeria due to apathy and lack of trust. In this case, voters may end up practicing slacktivism, where they like and share content but fail to participate in the voting process.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). These theories provide a robust framework for examining how University of Benin undergraduates actively select and process political content on Facebook, and how this influences their political participation during the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election.

2.2.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

According to the "Uses and Gratifications Theory," media audiences or consumers are "active seekers of content that satisfies various social and psychological needs." Such needs may be related to surveillance or information seeking, self-identity, social integration, entertainment, or diversion. "Uses and Gratifications Theory" is dissimilar from other audience theories that focus on passive media consumption. It highlights individuals' motivations or gratifications to use media or media content. In terms of this study, "Uses and Gratifications Theory" is instrumental in understanding why UNIBEN undergraduates use Facebook to participate in politics during the 2024 Edo election. "Uses and Gratifications Theory" is applicable to this study because it explains how youths use Facebook to satisfy their needs or gratifications to be updated on current knowledge of candidates' promises and updates on the election and other issues happening in Edo State. Furthermore, it explains how youths use Facebook to satisfy their needs or gratifications to feel part of a group of individuals who share common

interests or to satisfy their needs or gratifications to establish or express their self-identity or self-concept.

This is evidenced by more recent works in Nigerian settings. For example, in examining youth in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, social media like Facebook satisfies the needs for surveillance, integrative social interaction, and identity and thus boosts political knowledge and participation among undergraduates. In Edo 2024, where social media was used for timely information in local campaigns, UGT helps us understand how gratifications shape exposure to political information and its effect on candidate support and registration/voting intentions.

2.2.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

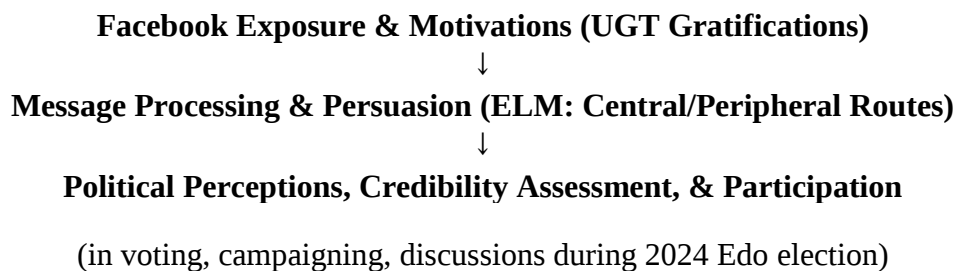
The Elaboration Likelihood Model has identified two routes to persuasion. The central route is based on high elaboration likelihood and involves motivated individuals' evaluation of arguments and evidence presented in the message. On the other hand, the peripheral route is based on low elaboration likelihood and involves less motivated individuals' use of peripheral cues, which may include the attractiveness of the source, number of likes and shares, and emotional appeals and endorsements.

Based on this model, this research aims to examine how UNIBEN undergraduates are persuaded by Facebook political messages during the 2024 Edo election. For example, highly motivated undergraduates, such as those with high political interest and prior knowledge, are likely to use the central route and evaluate arguments and evidence presented in the message, which can eventually lead to informed participation (such as

deliberate voting and campaign involvement). Conversely, less motivated undergraduates, such as those with low motivation due to school demands, are likely to use the peripheral route and are influenced by peripheral cues, which can eventually make them more vulnerable to manipulative and superficial political posts. This model is particularly well-suited for use in this study because Facebook’s algorithmic feeds and interactive capabilities (such as comments and sharing) offer a means of examining argument quality and peripheral cues. Edo 2024 was marked by misinformation and targeted ads; ELM offers insight into how different outcomes may have resulted from central and peripheral processors’ engagement with false narratives and biased content.

2.2.3 Integration of Theories and Link to Study Objectives

The two theories integrate into a sequential model:



UGT accounts for why youths select Facebook and the gratifications sought (motivational entry point), while ELM explains how they process content encountered, leading to attitude formation and behavioral outcomes like participation. This framework directly supports the research objectives:

Objective 1 (impact on participation): UGT gratifications → ELM processing → actual behaviors (e.g., registration, turnout).

Objective 2 (politician image/credibility): ELM peripheral cues → perceptions; central route → deeper trust assessment.

Objective 3 (peer/social influence via content): Integrated through UGT social needs and ELM peripheral validation (likes/shares).

Objective 4 (overall Facebook effects): Combined theories explain motivation-to-processing pathway in Edo context.

2.2.4 Justification for Theory Selection

These two theories were chosen over other possible ones (e.g., Agenda Setting, Social Influence, or Technological Determinism) because they most accurately describe the active and engaged user experience of Facebook in a digital electoral environment. UGT focuses on motivations and selective usage, and ELM covers persuasion and processing in a complete and empirically-supported model of youth engagement. Recent social media and youth electoral behavior research in Nigeria tends to rely on UGT to inform motivations of social media engagement and concepts of ELM to inform persuasion effects, and this pair of theories is well-suited to your proposed quantitative survey design in Chapter 3.

This dual framework ensures focused, relevant explanations of Facebook's role in shaping UNIBEN youths' political participation during the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the connection between social media and political engagement of citizens of all age groups , youths included across various political atmospheres . This section examines these studies that are pertinent to the present study . The empirical papers examined are:

Olley, et al in 2024, conducted a study “Undergraduate Students’ Perception of Social Media and Youth Political Participation in Nigeria’s 2023 General Elections”. The major aim was to investigate undergraduate students' perception of the role of social media in enhancing political participation among youths in Nigeria during the 2023 general elections, thereby filling in the gap in understanding the impact of social media on political participation.

The methodology employed in this research is quantitative, whereby questionnaires were administered to 341 undergraduate students at Edo State University, Uzairue, as a purposeful sample of active social media users and youths.

Key findings showed that there were positive perceptions of political participation, as 90.4% of the respondents were familiar with concepts of political participation. Moreover, 77.1% of the respondents most frequently got information on political participation through WhatsApp, followed by other social media applications. Significantly, 81.9% of the respondents perceived that messages, trends, and information on social media influenced youths to participate in voting. Moreover, 90.4% of the respondents perceived that social media was powerful enough to promote youth political

participation. A quote from the study is as follows: "Most respondents (90.4%) think that social media was powerful enough to promote political participation in youths during the elections."

The key findings of the study indicated the need to enhance the credibility of online news, enhance the transparency of the electoral process, enhance the youth programs, particularly in rural areas, and reduce the cost of data to sustain online political participation. Although the aforementioned research provides information on the elections at the national level, gaps remain in the findings, which this research aims to address. For instance, the perceptions of the students in one university in Edo State, Nigeria, during the 2023 national-level elections were considered, yet Facebook as the medium of choice, the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election, and the transfer of platform-specific exposure to the actual participation behaviors of undergraduates in Benin City, Nigeria, were not considered. Although the aforementioned research provides information on the elections at the national level, gaps remain in the findings, which this research aims to address, yet the depth of the information on the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election, which your case study considered, cannot be compared with the information gathered in the aforementioned research.

The second study is by Ezeigbo, Marryann E. in 2024, titled "Social Media and Youths Participation in 2023 General Elections in Nigeria." The main aim of conducting the study was to assess how social media contributed to the participation of Nigerian youths in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, including voter registration, campaigning,

discussions, and voting. In addition, it was to bridge the existing information gap in relation to how social media contributed to the participation of Nigerian youths in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This is because of the low historical participation rate of youths in previous general elections in Nigeria. Therefore, the researcher sought to know how WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), Facebook, and YouTube contributed to the participation of youths aged between 18 and 34 years in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. These were the youths with a 40% turnout in registered voters but were characterized by low participation or apathy in previous general elections in Nigeria.

The methodology employed an online survey research design with simple random sampling to gather responses from 384 Nigerian youths (primarily active social media users), analyzed descriptively with frequencies, percentages, tables, and a bar chart to show platform usage and activity patterns.

The study provides valuable national-level insights into social media's motivational role but leaves gaps that this research addresses: it focuses on the 2023 general elections and various social media while this study narrows to a specific platform like Facebook, sub-national contexts such as the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election (where local issues, ethnic dynamics, and state-level campaigns differ), and a targeted population like undergraduates at the University of Benin in Benin City.

In Alodat, A. M., et al.'s study "Social Media Platforms and Political Participation: A Study of Jordanian Youth Engagement in 2023," the authors used data

collected among Jordanian youth in a politically engaged period. The main aim of the authors was to examine the direct and indirect impact of social media use (amount and intention of use) on political participation among Jordanian youth since there is little research in this area. They tried to fill the theoretical void concerning factors that moderate this relationship (such as gender and education), as past research has neglected this aspect of the relationship between social media and political participation in general, and in non-Western democracies in particular, where youth are at a disadvantage in traditional political participation and highly engaged in social media use.

The methodology utilized a quantitative survey approach with a structured questionnaire distributed to 400 Jordanian youths (aged 18-35, purposive sampling of active social media users), analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to test direct effects and moderation (e.g., gender as a moderator on frequency/purpose of use). Data was collected online to capture digital-native respondents.

Some of the key findings were:

- Social media usage had a positive and significant impact on political participation.
- Frequency and purpose of social media usage were significant predictors of political participation.
- Gender had a positive moderation effect on frequency and purpose of social media usage.
- "For example, it was found that social media use for informational and discussing purposes was less likely to impact female respondents due to cultural influences."

- One of the key findings was:
- "Social media has a favorable and considerable impact on political participation. Social media facilitates more extensive political participation among youth despite limitations in the physical world."
- Recommendations made:
- "Promoting digital literacy among women and men in a way that is inclusive of both genders"
- "Using social media for more purposeful use in civic education and for designing policy to harness social media for youth empowerment in democratic participation"

The study offers valuable cross-cultural insights into social media's mobilizing potential in a youth-heavy, semi-authoritarian context but leaves gaps that this research addresses: it focuses on Jordanian youth broadly without platform-specific analysis , sub-national electoral dynamics , or a targeted population in a single locale. It also does not explore translation from online exposure to offline behaviors in a recent, election-specific case.

Another study by Sajid, Muhammad; Javed, Janat; and Warraich, Nosheen Fatima in 2024 titled ‘The Role of Facebook in Shaping Voting Behavior of Youth: Perspective of a Developing Country’.

The research was conducted in and around the July 2018 elections in Pakistan. The research involved a survey of youth voters to determine their perceptions in real time. The main aim of this research was to determine the impact of Facebook usage on the

political perceptions of educated youth in the 2018 Pakistani General Elections, which filled a significant gap in knowledge regarding social media's instigative impact on voting behavior in resource-scarce developing countries where information sources are not easily accessible.

The research attempted to bridge a significant gap in knowledge regarding social media's instigative impact on voters' behavior in the 2018 Pakistani General Elections by using Facebook's specific features such as posts, comments, shares, and ads, which is a significant gap in previous research that considered social media in a general sense without specific research on social media and elections. The methodology of this research is quantitative in nature and involved a structured questionnaire survey of 384 young Pakistani voters aged 18-35 years, purposive sampled from educated and Facebook-using youth.

Some of the key findings were as follows:

Facebook had a significant impact on voting patterns, as educated youth saw it as one of their major sources of political information. The more they were exposed to it, the more their perception changed. The regression findings showed Facebook as an "instigator" in influencing voting patterns. "Facebook has presumed the role of an instigator in shaping the voting behavior of educated youth," as per the findings of Sajid et al (2024).

Recommendations: Digital literacy should be encouraged to curb misinformation on social media. The government should regulate political ads on social media. Facebook should be utilized as a tool for positive voter education in future.

The study provides strong evidence of Facebook's electoral influence in a developing context but leaves gaps that this research addresses: it centers on the 2018 national elections without a sub-national focus or specific emphasis on a definitive population in a localized setting. Another study done by Yang, Hongwei Chris in 2020 on the topic 'Social Media Use, Political Participation, and Civic Engagement in Election 2016' with the main objective being to explore the relationships between the general and political use of social media (Facebook) and the online/offline political participation and civic engagement of youth during the 2016 U.S. election, with the aim of closing the knowledge gap on the differential effects of the general and political use of social media on the online/offline political participation and civic engagement of college students, as they are the youth and the target group of the digitally native generation in the context of the U.S. high-stakes election.

The methodology used an online survey of 3,810 U.S. college students in a swing state, analyzed with hierarchical regression models controlling for demographics, political interest, and other variables to isolate social media's predictive power.

Some of the key findings showed that "general Facebook use had a weak negative effect on participation and engagement, which might be caused by distractions and superficiality," while "political use of Facebook was a strong positive predictor of online and offline political participation and civic engagement." Online social capital was found to "boost political use of Facebook but does not directly predict participation." Further, Yang stated, "Political use of Facebook is a much more important and positive predictor

than their general use of Facebook for online/offline political participation and civic engagement." Some of the recommendations made were "to encourage political content on social media sites, to develop media literacy to increase efficacy, and to develop strategies to translate online social networks into real-world civic engagement."

While this research provides rich findings on the complex involvement of social media in youth electoral activities, there are also gaps in this research which this current research aims to fill, which are not specifically addressed in this research, such as the lack of focus on sub-national elections (such as Edo 2024 gubernatorial), features of social media in a developing country, and a specific population of interest, such as Nigerian undergrads who have unique barriers to navigate (such as data costs and misinformation in sub-national elections). The Edo 2024 case study is an improvement over this research as it offers context-specific findings from a non-Western, youth-dominant democracy.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

To examine the impact of Facebook as a political/mobilisation tool on youths' political participation and voting behavior in the 2024 Edo State governorship election, this study will employ a survey research design. A questionnaire will be used as an instrument for collecting data from undergraduate students of the University of Benin (UNIBEN) on the patterns of their Facebook use and the level of influence of political messages posted by Facebook users on their perception of politicians' image, credibility of the message, peer influence, and level of participation in the election process (including voting).

Okore (2001) asserts that survey research is applicable in the measurement of public opinions, attitudes, and orientations that are prevalent among a large population of people at a specific period. He further explains that "survey research involves collecting data from a target population through the use of instruments such as questionnaires or interviews and then analyzing it statistically for the purpose of drawing conclusions from it and providing solutions to the identified research problem." Ohaja (2003) describes a survey as "an investigation into the characteristics of a sample by means of questioning, with a view to making generalisations about a population in which we are interested." A survey is most frequently used in attitudinal and behavioral trends, where the researcher

is interested in discovering what underlying demographic trends influence these attitudes and behaviors.

The survey method was therefore chosen for this study because it would allow the researcher to gather data from a large number of respondents within a short period of time. The survey method was also deemed appropriate for this study because it is used to assess human opinions, perceptions, and behaviors, all of which would be used to determine how Facebook impacts UNIBEN students' political engagement in the 2024 Edo governorship election.

3.2 Population of Study

This generally refers to the totality of all elements, subjects or numbers which possess specific characteristics within a given geographical location. The primary population of this study is students in the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria with the focus on four departments in Ekehuan campus. An independent enquiry was carried out by the researcher to determine the total population of Ekehuan Campus across the faculty of arts, environmental science and the institute of education, consisting of four departments; mass communication, theatre arts, fine and applied arts and early childhood education, cutting across all levels of full time students from 100 to 400 levels. These four departments were chosen, deliberately excluding the department of advertising, public relations, broadcasting, and film and multimedia studies because as at the time this research was conducted, the departments were not fully stabilized. The total population

arrived at was two thousand and sixty students for these four departments in Ekehuan campus. The table above shows the total population of two thousand sixty four students in the Ekehuan campus of UNIBEN.

Table (I): Sampling size

Department	Population
Mass communication	1012
Fine Arts	429
Theatre Arts	608
Institute of Early childhood education	236
Total	2285

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size will be obtained using the Taro Yamane's formula to determine the amount of respondents needed for the study

Formula:

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

Where n = sample size required

N = total number of people in the population

e= sampling error (usually .10, .05 and .01 acceptable error)

^ = raised to the power of

Therefore, using the population strength of each department of Ekehuan campus by employing stratified sampling method, we will arrive at a corresponding sample size. Using Taro Yamane's formula will help get a sample size with the stated population above.

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

$$N = 2285$$

$$e = 0.05$$

Therefore:

$$n = 2285 / (1 + 2285(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 2285 / (1 + 2285(0.0025))$$

$$n = 2285 / (1 + (2285 \times 0.0025))$$

$$n = 2285 / 5.71$$

$$n = 2285 / 6.71$$

$$n = 340.53 = 341$$

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Multi stage sampling technique was used for this study. The 341 students sampled from the University of Benin were grouped on the basis of their respective department and levels of study, using purposive sampling technique. After which random sampling

was carried out to ensure that the students were represented adequately in the sample population.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

Data for this research were obtained through questionnaires which were distributed to students in Ekehuan Campus of the University of Benin, Nigeria

3.6 Validity and Reliability of research instrument

The research instrument was validated through face validity by the research supervisor for scrutiny, editing, and approval. This step ensured that all pertinent areas of the research instrument were sufficiently addressed. Also, objectivity in the research project was not affected. All the corrections and recommendations of the research supervisor were incorporated into the instrument prior to administering it to the respondents. To validate the reliability of this instrument, a pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the administered questionnaires was utilized for analysis, presentation, and interpretation. Data collection from the administered questionnaires was analyzed using simple percentages and presented in tables. Relevant information was provided for clarity and understanding at the bottom of each table.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a breakdown of all collected and collated data for this study. The analysis and interpretation will be based on the questionnaire distributed for this study.

The questionnaire would also be placed in the appendix of this Study

4.2. Data Presentation

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15–19	82	24%
20–24	157	46%
25–29	102	30%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

The data in this table show that the majority of respondents (46%) fall within the 20–24 age group, followed by 25–29 years (30%) and 15–19 years (24%). This indicates that the study is dominated by young adults who are typically more active on social media and more likely to engage in political discussions. The distribution suggests that the findings are highly reflective of the core youth population in tertiary institutions.

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	184	54%
Female	157	46%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

This table reveals that 54% of respondents are male while 46% are female. This relatively balanced distribution implies that both genders are adequately represented in the study. Therefore, the findings can be considered inclusive and not significantly biased toward a particular gender.

Table 3: Years of Facebook Usage

Years of Usage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	20	6%
1–2 years	61	18%
3–5 years	109	32%
More than 5 years	151	44%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

From Table 3, a large proportion of respondents (44%) have used Facebook for more than five years, while 32% have used it for 3–5 years. This suggests that most respondents are experienced users of the platform. Their prolonged exposure increases the likelihood that Facebook significantly influences their political awareness and engagement.

Table 4: Daily Facebook Usage Time

Usage Time	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	41	12%
1–2 hours	116	34%
3–4 hours	109	32%
5+ hours	75	22%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents spend between 1–2 hours (34%) and 3–4 hours (32%) daily on Facebook. Additionally, 22% spend more than 5 hours. This indicates high daily engagement, which increases exposure to political content and enhances the platform’s potential influence on political participation.

Table 5: Frequency of Exposure to Political Content

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	14	4%
Rarely	41	12%
Sometimes	102	30%
Often	116	34%
Always	68	20%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

The data indicate that most respondents encounter political content frequently, with 34% reporting “often” and 20% “always.” Only a small fraction (4%) reported never seeing

such content. This suggests that Facebook served as a major channel for political information during the Edo 2024 election, exposing a large number of youths to election-related messages.

Table 6: Types of Political Content Seen

Content Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Candidate campaign posts	89	26%
Political advertisements	48	14%
Live videos/rallies	41	12%
Shares/comments	61	18%
News/articles/memes	82	24%
None	7	2%
Other	13	4%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

Table 6 shows that candidate campaign posts (26%) and news/articles/memes (24%) are the most commonly seen content types. This indicates that both formal political communication and informal, user-generated content play significant roles in shaping political awareness. The presence of shares and comments (18%) further highlights the interactive nature of political discourse on Facebook.

Table 7: Facebook Increased Political Interest

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	20	6%
Disagree	41	12%
Neutral	68	20%
Agree	130	38%
Strongly Agree	82	24%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

The results show that 62% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Facebook increased their interest in the election, while only 18% disagree. This demonstrates that Facebook is an effective tool for stimulating political interest among youths, thereby contributing to increased awareness and engagement.

Table 8: Friends Motivated Registration

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	48	14%
Disagree	68	20%
Neutral	75	22%
Agree	95	28%
Strongly Agree	55	16%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

Table 8 indicates that while 44% of respondents agree that friends' posts motivated them to register to vote, a notable 34% disagree. This suggests that peer influence exists but is not universally strong. It implies that while some youths are influenced by their social networks, others rely on personal decisions or alternative sources.

Table 9: Facebook Helped Understand Voting

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	27	8%
Disagree	55	16%
Neutral	82	24%
Agree	109	32%
Strongly Agree	68	20%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

The findings reveal that over half of the respondents (52%) agree that Facebook helped them understand voting procedures. This indicates that social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as an educational platform that simplifies political processes for young voters.

Table 10: Facebook Influenced Participation Decision

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	34	10%
Disagree	61	18%
Neutral	75	22%
Agree	109	32%
Strongly Agree	62	18%
Total	341	100%

Source: Field study 2026

Table 10 shows that 50% of respondents agree that Facebook influenced their decision to participate in the election. This highlights the platform's role in shaping political behavior, suggesting that exposure to political content can translate into real-life participation.

Table 11: Political Participation Activities (Multiple Responses)

Activity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Registered to vote	232	68%
Voted	198	58%
Attended rally	82	24%
Shared campaign posts	157	46%
Joined voter groups	95	28%
Persuaded friends	109	32%
Monitored results	184	54%
None	41	12%

Source: Field study 2026

The table reveals high levels of political engagement, with 68% registering to vote, 58% voting, and 54% monitoring election results. Additionally, a significant number shared posts (46%) and persuaded others (32%). This indicates that youths are not only passive consumers of information but also active participants both online and offline.

Table 12: To what extent do you agree with the following statements ? (Likert Scale)

For APC candidate (Monday Okpebolo)

Activities	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
Facebook made him seem trustworthy	75	109	68	55	34	341
His Facebook videos showed competence	82	116	61	48	34	341
Negative posts reduced my trust in him	150	102	48	27	14	341

Source: Field study 2026

The findings show a moderately positive perception of the APC candidate based on Facebook exposure. A significant number of respondents agreed that Facebook made the candidate appear trustworthy and competent, as seen in the higher frequencies for “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” in both items. This suggests that his online presence contributed positively to his public image. However, the most striking result is the strong agreement that negative posts reduced trust in the candidate, with a large majority selecting “Strongly Agree” and “Agree.” This indicates that while Facebook can enhance a candidate’s image, it is even more powerful in shaping negative perceptions.

Overall, the results imply that Facebook played a dual role—promoting the candidate’s strengths while also amplifying negative narratives that significantly affected trust. Based on Facebook exposure, there was a moderately positive impression of the APC candidate. It was shown from the high frequency for agree and strongly agree responses in the two items regarding the candidate being viewed as trustworthy and competent.

Nevertheless, the most notable finding was the high number of responses indicating their belief that negative information posted about the candidate had decreased their trust in him, with the dominant response falling under the category of strongly agree. This shows that Facebook not only has the ability to promote but also has the power to mold one’s negative image. Overall, Facebook was used by the candidate to showcase his good qualities while at the same time creating negative impressions among people.

**Table 13: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Likert Scale)
For PDP candidate (Asue Ighodalo)**

Activities	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
Facebook made him seem trustworthy	89	123	61	41	27	341
His Facebook videos showed competence	95	123	55	41	27	341
Negative posts reduced my trust in him	143	109	48	27	14	341

Source: Field study 2026

The findings indicated that the PDP candidate had a slightly better positive perception than others in terms of a larger percentage who agreed that he was presented as trustworthy and competent through Facebook. The results indicate that his use of Facebook for communication served him well in terms of projecting himself positively. However, just like the APC candidate, the majority of respondents agreed that negative postings lowered their level of trust in him. From this, we note that political candidates are prone to being affected by negativity irrespective of how positive people might think about them. It is clear from the results that even as one utilizes Facebook to project themselves positively, negative information has a way of spreading very fast.

**Table 14: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Likert Scale)
For PDP candidate (Olumide Akpata)**

Activities	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree(1)	Total
Facebook made him seem trustworthy	89	116	68	48	27	341
His Facebook videos showed competence	89	116	61	48	27	341
Negative posts reduced my trust in him	157	102	41	27	14	341

Source: Field study 2026

The findings reveal that there is a moderate view on the competence and trustworthiness of the LP candidate, with many of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agree. This shows that the Facebook platform played a significant role in influencing the views of the candidate. On the contrary, it should be noted that the LP

candidate got the highest rate in agreement concerning the impact of the negative message on their views. This means that the negative communication has played a significant role in influencing the views of the respondents. From the results, it can be concluded that negative communication plays an important role in shaping candidates' images and is more influential than positive communication.

Table 15: Opinion Formation (Likert Scale)

Activities	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
Posts changed my candidate choice	63	108	93	45	32	341
Seeing many people support a candidate made me also support them	93	140	69	26	13	341
Facebook groups influenced my views	75	123	76	38	29	341
Popular students posts influenced my views	78	131	84	27	21	341
I shared posts to influence my friends	72	123	76	41	29	341

Source: Field study 2026

As can be seen from the data in Table 15, social media have an important role in affecting the political opinions of youths through social influence.

It should be noted that a large number of participants agreed that:

- The posts affected their selection of candidates;

- They chose to support the candidates because of the popularity of those candidates (Bandwagon effect);
- They were convinced in their political opinions by Facebook groups and students' posts.

This suggests that youths' political opinions are not generated in a vacuum but are also affected by peer effects and group processes on social media.

Moreover, the fact is that many youths admitted that they posted political information in order to affect others, which means that they do not act as mere consumers of political news but as its disseminators.

Table 16: Credibility of Social Media Messages (Likert Scale)

Activities	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
Verified candidates pages are trustworthy	82	130	61	48	20	341
Posts with 100+ likes/shares seem credible	101	143	61	25	11	341
I saw fake election news during Edo 2024 election	156	140	41	27	11	341
I verify info before sharing	47	89	75	82	48	341
Facebook political messages are credible	63	95	82	68	33	341

Source: Field study 2026

These results depict an inconsistent level of perception in regards to credibility among the respondents when it comes to political messages on Facebook.

First, it should be noted that numerous respondents found that:

- Verification is a sign of credibility
- Facebook posts that receive a large amount of likes are credible

It implies that young people use easily recognizable indicators like verification and popularity to determine the credibility of the information they see.

However, an extremely high number of respondents indicated that they were exposed to fake political news, which proves that young people know about the problem of fake news on Facebook. Despite the awareness of the issue, it is clear that the respondents did not show consistent answers when it comes to verifying information before sharing.

Finally, the answers given by young people regarding credibility are rather moderate.

To conclude, the findings demonstrate inconsistency since young people are aware of fake news but still rely on superficial indicators.

4.3. Discussion of Findings and Answers to Research Questions.

In order to ensure the objectives of this study are answered, the research questions for this study have been answered with the aid of data acquired from a questionnaire. Therefore, the answers to the research questions will be based on findings discovered from the questions in the questionnaire.

4.3.1. Research Question 1: What is the impact of social media on youth political participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election?

Clearly, from the above findings, there is evidence showing how the social media channel, especially Facebook, had contributed positively to the level of youths' political participation during the 2024 Edo State governorship election. In this regard, the level of exposure to political issues among the respondents was significantly high. The percentage of those who reported that they often or always encounter such kind of content was at 54%. Such high exposure has played a significant role towards raising their awareness concerning political matters. Moreover, 62% of the respondents admitted that Facebook raised their interest in political matters. In this case, the contribution made by Facebook is much more than providing information about political matters because it increases the respondents' interests in participating in politics. What is more interesting is that the increased interest has resulted in their active involvement in political actions including voter registration and participating in the election. Finally, half of the respondents admitted that Facebook had directly influenced their involvement in the election.

4.3.2. Research Question 2: Does social media influence youths' perceptions of politicians' images?

Moreover, the research findings further establish that social media has a great effect on the formation of youths' perception towards political figures. While respondents rated the candidates moderately with regards to their perceptions of them based on their trustworthiness and competence, what is most noteworthy about the research findings is

the high significance of negative political information. Based on the high mean scores given to the effect of negative posts, it can be established that youths are easily influenced by the messages they receive via social media and politics becomes a creation through social interactions. Not only do youths get to see the messages from political actors in form of ads or campaigns, but they also receive a lot of user-generated messages. The inclusion of informal political information implies that politics is not merely formed through planned communication techniques by political candidates, but rather through interpersonal relationships among individuals.

4.3.3. Research Question 3: To what extent does one youth's political activity on social media affect other youths' political thinking?

From the results, peer influence through social media exerts a moderately high impact on the political attitudes of youths. It was evident that most respondents felt their political attitudes had been impacted by other people around them, especially in relation to their actions and perceptions. Evidence of this includes the bandwagon effect, student influences and involvement in Facebook groups, which scored relatively high mean scores. Additionally, many respondents indicated that their friends' posts made them more inclined towards registering to vote. Though many other respondents disagreed, it is quite clear that peer influence occurs, though not necessarily for everyone. It can therefore be said that while many youths keep an independent mind, there are those who are highly influenced by the opinions and actions of their peers. In summary, the use of

social media brings about an interconnected platform where political perceptions are shared and reinforced among peers.

4.3.4. Research Question 4: What level of credibility do Nigerian youths attach to political messages on social media?

Findings from this study indicate that youths from Nigeria possess both positive and negative perceptions about the credibility of messages in politics conveyed on social media. First, there are some levels of trust that exist when it comes to certain messages. In particular, messages that have verified pages and messages that receive more likes are seen as credible. Nevertheless, it is clear from the findings that respondents possess a great understanding of the prevalence of false information on social media. The high exposure rate to fake news shows that youths understand the dangers associated with such content in politics. Nevertheless, even though they understand such information, they do not always verify messages. Such circumstances give rise to what could be referred to as a credibility paradox. This is because, while recognizing the presence of such information, youths end up using superficial aspects like number of likes as their basis of assessment.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations based on the results. The study examined the impact of social media on youth political participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election, focusing on undergraduates of the University of Benin.

5.2. Summary

This research investigated the influence of social media, with particular focus on Facebook, on political participation of youth in the 2024 governorship election in Edo State by employing data gathered from 341 participants. Based on the findings obtained from the presentation of data, some critical observations were made.

First, there was an indication that the respondents were mainly youth as they comprised 46% who were within the 20-24 years old age bracket. Therefore, this study was conducted based on the most active Facebook users, who can also actively participate in politics.

In addition, the data shows that many participants used Facebook actively and had been doing so for more than three years. The majority of them spend between 1-4 hours daily on the site. This indicates that the level of exposure of participants on Facebook is high, hence the possible influence of political content they come across on the platform.

Moreover, participants encountered a lot of political content on Facebook, most of which came from various candidates' campaigns. Other contents include political advertisements, news articles, memes, and user interaction. This demonstrates the extent of political content available and consumption on Facebook, which can be both formal and informal in nature.

In addition, Facebook was seen to significantly contribute to the stimulation of political interest and political participation among students. The majority of the participants indicated that social networking had contributed towards their increased interest in politics, made them more aware about how to go about voting, and even encouraged them to participate in the elections. Such an observation can be made from the very high level of political activity, such as voter registration, voting, and tracking election results, as well as campaigning through the social network.

The findings also indicate that social media have a lot of influence when it comes to the perception of political candidates in society. In general, people formed rather moderate or favorable views about political candidates due to information on Facebook. At the same time, negative political messages proved to be highly effective at lowering people's trust in political candidates. Moreover, peer influence was found to play a vital role in political opinion formation. Some respondents admitted that friends' posts, peer discussions, and common opinions among students were able to shape their political views as well as determine candidates. It can serve as evidence for the existence of the bandwagon effect in relation to the formation of political affiliation.

Finally, it should be noted that there is an ambivalence with regard to political message credibility on Facebook. Generally speaking, participants usually trust politically oriented pages that have been verified by Facebook and those posts with numerous likes and shares; however, they are aware of the presence of fake news on the website. Despite all this, youths still have difficulties verifying information because of the "credibility paradox" – they recognize misinformation yet cannot verify the content. On balance, the results of this research demonstrate the importance of Facebook's impact on youth engagement in politics during the Edo 2024 governorship election campaign.

Conclusion

From the above research, it is clear beyond doubt that social media, especially Facebook, was very useful in making sure youths get more politically engaged in the 2024 Edo state governorship election. Higher exposures were related to higher interest in engaging in politics (62%), knowledge about procedures in politics (52%), and actions like registering as voters (68%) and voting (58%) compared to the low rate of participation of 22%. All this shows how Facebook can be used as a tool in increasing youths' political engagement and raising awareness and reducing information gap in a resource limited setting.

Social media was very influential in shaping how youths perceive politicians where although moderately, perceptions about politicians' reliability and effectiveness were influenced greatly by the postings that youths found negative (means greater than

4.0). There was some slight preference of PDP politicians over APC and LP politicians in terms of campaign politics. The influence of peers' activities on social media was moderate because they managed to sway people's perceptions through bandwagon effect, group effect, and 44% motivation to register because friends posted about it on social media.

Assessment of credibility showed that youths relied more on heuristics, such as likes and verified pages, and had high perception about fake news without enough verification efforts. This "credibility paradox" may expose youths to manipulation despite their high awareness. In conclusion, although social media increases participation and engagement among youths, there is risk associated with unchecked aspects of social media usage. These results validate the positive role of social media in democratizing Nigerian youths.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations was put forward.

1. INEC should conduct a digital literacy campaign through educational institutions and social media platforms, focusing on fact-checking and source validation to mitigate the problem of a low average verification rate.
2. INEC should engage social media platforms in election observation, collaborating with Meta for fake news identification during elections, as done in Edo 2024.

3. Political actors should emphasize on credible sources and live videos in terms of competence-related content, considering that trust ratings are moderate; react to negative perceptions with facts.
4. Youths' should create fact-checking squads within the university, utilizing apps such as Dubawa or InVID, addressing the credibility paradox issue.
5. Youths' and the civil society should promote a balanced consumption culture by sourcing from other media aside from Facebook, avoiding peer confirmation bias.
6. Future researchers should undertake longitudinal research focusing on the impact of social media use before and after the elections to promote sustained engagement.
7. Future researchers should examine differences between social media platforms (such as TikTok compared to Facebook), especially considering future elections, e.g., 2027.

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APPENDIX

Department of Mass communication
University of Benin
9th April, 2026.

Dear Esteemed Respondent,

My name is Isah Farida Itsehme, an undergraduate student in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin. I am currently conducting a research study on the impact of Facebook on youth participation in the 2024 Edo State governorship election.

This questionnaire is designed to gather relevant information on how Facebook influences youth involvement in electoral processes in Nigeria. Kindly respond to the questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge.

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and will be used strictly for academic purposes only.

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Age group

- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29

2. Gender

- Male
- Female

3. How long have you used Facebook?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

SECTION B: FACEBOOK USAGE DURING EDO 2024 ELECTION

4. Average daily Facebook usage time

- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 5+ hours

5. Frequency of seeing political content during Edo 2024 campaign

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

6. Types of political content you saw MOST

- Candidate campaign posts
- Political advertisements
- Live videos/rallies
- Shares/comments
- News articles/memes
- I did not see any political content
- Other

SECTION C: FACEBOOK'S EFFECT ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

7. Facebook increased my interest in Edo 2024 election

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

8. Friends political posts motivated me to register to vote

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

9. Facebook helped me understand voting procedures

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. Facebook influenced my participation decision

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

11. Election activities you participated in (tick all that apply)

- Registered to vote
- Voted Sept 21
- Attended rally
- Shared campaign posts
- Joined voter groups
- Persuaded friends to vote
- Monitored election results
- None of the above

SECTION D: FACEBOOK'S INFLUENCE ON CANDIDATES IMAGE

Rate agreement: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

12. For APC candidate (Monday Okpobolo)

- Facebook made him seem trustworthy
- His Facebook videos showed competence
- Negative posts reduced my trust in him

13. For PDP candidate (Asue Ighodalo)

- Facebook made him seem trustworthy
- His Facebook videos showed competence
- Negative posts reduced my trust in him

14. For LP candidate (Olumide Akpata)

- Facebook made him seem trustworthy
- His Facebook videos showed competence
- Negative posts reduced my trust in him

15. Facebook MOST shaped your opinion about:

- APC (Monday Okpebolo)
- PDP (Asue Ighodalo)
- LP (Olumide Akpata)
- None of the above

SECTION E: PEER INFLUENCE THROUGH FACEBOOK AND CREDIBILITY OF FACEBOOK CONTENT

16. Rate agreement: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

- Facebook posts changed my candidate choice
- Seeing many people support a candidate made me also support them
- Facebook groups influenced my views Popular students posts influenced my views
- I shared posts to influence my friends
- Verified candidates pages are trustworthy
- Posts with 100+ likes/shares seem credible
- I saw fake election news during Edo 2024 election
- I verify info before sharing
- Facebook political messages are credible

17. Rate agreement: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

- Verified candidates pages are trustworthy
- Posts with 100+ likes/shares seem credible
- I saw fake election news during Edo 2024 election
- I verify info before sharing
- Facebook political messages are credible