



Research Article

Exploring the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Political Awareness Among Youths in Nigeria

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media among youths has transformed the landscape of political communication, particularly in developing democracies such as Nigeria. This study examines the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among youths in Nigeria, with specific attention to usage frequency, platform dynamics, and youths' understanding of political information. Adopting a qualitative desktop research design, the study relies on secondary data drawn from scholarly journal articles, books, and credible policy reports related to social media, political communication, and youth political socialisation. Political Socialisation Theory provides the theoretical lens for understanding how social media functions as a contemporary agent through which youths acquire political knowledge and awareness. The study is significant in shifting analytical focus from political participation to political awareness as a distinct outcome of social media engagement. By synthesising existing literature, the paper contributes to on-going debates on digital political communication and offers conceptual insights relevant to scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders interested in strengthening informed political awareness and democratic culture among Nigerian youths.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has revolutionised how citizens engage with politics, particularly among young people. Platforms such as Facebook, X formerly Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok now serve as critical spaces for political communication, offering unprecedented access to information and opportunities for civic engagement (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). In Nigeria, where youths form a significant proportion of the population, social media has become central to political discourse and participation, influencing perceptions of governance, policies, and democratic processes (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019). The adoption of electronic governance encourages quality service delivery in implementing the policies and programmes in Nigeria public sector, (Ezeamama, et.al 2025).

Despite the widespread use of social media among Nigerian youths, the extent to which these platforms enhance political awareness remains contested. The surge in globalization has precipitated an unparalleled proliferation of diverse organizations dedicated to addressing various needs, (Ezeamama, et.al 2025) Political awareness, defined as knowledge and understanding of political actors, institutions, processes, and current issues, is a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation. While social media can provide exposure to diverse political perspectives and facilitate civic learning, the prevalence of misinformation, algorithmic filtering, and entertainment-driven usage may undermine accurate political understanding (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Social media can effectively motivate young Nigerians to take to social media and political action, even when it is not used for destructive in-group organizing, (Obinna, et.al 2025).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Social media has emerged as a dominant platform for information exchange, political discourse, and civic engagement, particularly among youths in Nigeria, who constitute a significant proportion of the population. While social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok offer unprecedented opportunities for accessing political information, fostering debate, and encouraging civic participation, their influence on political awareness remains under-explored. Existing research predominantly concentrates on political participation,

activism, and mobilisation, often overlooking the nuanced ways in which social media shapes political awareness as an independent outcome.

Moreover, the unregulated nature of social media exposes users to misinformation, disinformation, and partisan content, which may distort understanding of political issues and undermine the quality of knowledge acquired online. Studies have indicated that exposure to biased or misleading political content can reinforce pre-existing beliefs rather than promote critical engagement, raising questions about the reliability of social media as a source of political information.

In the Nigerian context, where political literacy among youths is variable and the media landscape is complex, understanding how social media usage influences political awareness is essential. The youth demographic represents not only the future of the nation's democratic processes but also a key target for political mobilisation and civic education. However, the extent to which social media contributes to meaningful political knowledge, rather than superficial engagement or misinformation, remains ambiguous.

Therefore, examining the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among Nigerian youths is critical for identifying the opportunities and challenges inherent in digital political communication. Such understanding can inform strategies for promoting informed political participation, enhancing civic literacy, and strengthening democratic practices in Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among youths in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Explore how the frequency of social media usage shapes youths' political awareness.
2. Examine how different social media platforms influence youths' understanding of political issues.
3. Determine how social media shapes youths' understanding of political information.

2.1 Significance of the Study

This study provides several key contributions. Academically, it addresses a gap in the Nigerian literature by focusing on political awareness as a distinct outcome of social media usage. For policymakers, findings can inform strategies for youth engagement, civic education, and regulation of online political content. Civil society organisations and educators can leverage insights to develop interventions that improve digital literacy, foster critical evaluation of online content, and promote informed political participation. For youths themselves, the study offers awareness of how their social media habits influence their political understanding and engagement, supporting the cultivation of an informed, critically aware, and democratically active population.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Political Socialisation Theory, which explains how individuals acquire political knowledge, attitudes, values, and orientations over time. Political socialisation refers to the lifelong process through which people develop an understanding of political systems, institutions, actors, and norms through interaction with various socialising agents such as family, school, peers, and the media (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995).

Traditionally, political socialisation occurred through formal institutions such as schools and conventional mass media. However, contemporary scholarship recognises the growing role of digital media, particularly social media, as a central agent of political socialisation among youths (Bennett, 2008). Social media platforms expose youths to political information, discussions, narratives, and interpretations that shape how they understand political processes and public affairs.

In the context of this study, Political Socialisation Theory provides a relevant framework for explaining how Nigerian youths develop political awareness through social media usage. Frequent interaction with political content on social media enables youths to learn about political actors, governance structures, and public policies outside formal civic education systems. Through observation, discussion, and shared meanings within online networks, youths gradually construct their understanding of political realities.

The theory is particularly suitable for this study because it emphasises political awareness as a learning outcome, rather than participation alone. It allows for an examination of how exposure to political information on social media contributes to youths' understanding of politics, even in the absence of direct political action. Within the Nigerian socio political context, where youths increasingly rely on digital platforms for political information, Political Socialisation Theory offers a strong explanatory lens for understanding how social media shapes political awareness.

By adopting Political Socialisation Theory, this study situates social media as a contemporary political socialising agent and provides a framework for analysing how digital communication environments influence youths' political understanding and democratic consciousness.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Conceptualising Political Awareness

Political awareness refers to the degree of knowledge, understanding, and consciousness individuals possess regarding political processes, actors, institutions, and public policies. It encompasses the ability to recognise political issues, critically evaluate political information, and make informed decisions regarding civic and political participation (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2011). In essence, political awareness goes beyond mere exposure to political events or participation; it involves a nuanced comprehension of the political landscape and the capacity to interpret the implications of political actions on society.

Among youths, political awareness is particularly significant because this demographic represents a substantial proportion of the electorate and the future leaders of a nation. Awareness influences civic engagement, including voting behaviour, participation in public debates, and activism, thereby affecting the overall health of democratic processes (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). In contexts such as Nigeria, where political literacy varies widely and structural challenges may hinder formal civic education, the cultivation of political awareness among youths becomes critical for fostering informed engagement.

Existing scholarship highlights that political awareness is multidimensional, encompassing knowledge of political institutions, awareness of policy issues, understanding of governance processes, and familiarity with political actors (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). The development of political awareness is influenced by various factors, including education, media exposure, social networks, and civic experiences. Notably, the rise of digital media has introduced new avenues for the acquisition of political knowledge, presenting both opportunities and challenges for youth engagement in politics (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). Education all over the world is perceived as a life transforming activity, which empowers its receivers to make concrete contributions to the development of a society, (Ezeamama et.al 2025).

Conceptualising political awareness involves recognising it as an active, interpretive process rather than a passive reception of information. For Nigerian youths, political awareness is shaped not only by traditional civic education and media exposure but increasingly by engagement with digital platforms, which mediate their understanding of political realities. Therefore, examining political awareness in the context of social media usage provides critical insights into how youths interpret and respond to political information in contemporary Nigeria.

4.1.1 Social Media and Youth Engagement in Politics

The advent of social media has transformed the ways in which youths engage with political processes globally, offering platforms for information exchange, debate, and mobilisation (Boulianne, 2015). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok allow users to access political news, interact with political actors, and participate in discussions on governance and public policy, often in real time (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). Unlike traditional media, which primarily delivers information in a one-way format, social media facilitates interactive engagement, enabling youths to comment, share opinions, and contribute to political discourse. The adoption of electronic governance encourages quality service delivery in implementing the policies and programmes in Nigerian public sector, (Ezeamama et.al 2025).

In the Nigerian context, studies indicate that youths increasingly rely on social media as a primary source of political information. Oladejo and Alabi (2020) found that Nigerian university students frequently access social media to follow political events, discuss policy issues, and stay informed about political actors. Similarly, Adebayo (2021) emphasised that social media serves as a critical tool for political engagement among Nigerian youths, especially in contexts where traditional civic education is limited or inaccessible. These platforms are particularly significant during election periods, political protests, and policy debates, where information is disseminated rapidly and broadly. Ezeamama (2019) noted that organizational commitment is being proven as a catalyst for enhancing job satisfaction level of employees.

However, the nature of youth engagement on social media is complex. While social media increases opportunities for participation, engagement is often shaped by selective exposure to information, confirmation bias, and algorithm-driven content curation (Enikolopov, Petrova, & Zhuravskaya, 2016). Consequently, not all social media interactions translate into substantive political awareness or informed decision-making. Nonetheless, the platforms provide youths with avenues to observe political processes, express opinions, and participate in civic discourse, highlighting their potential as tools for enhancing political awareness.

Overall, the literature suggests that social media plays a dual role in youth political engagement: it facilitates access to information and participation while simultaneously presenting challenges related to content credibility and superficial engagement. This underscores the importance of examining how Nigerian youths engage with social media and how such engagement shapes their political awareness.

4.1.2 Platform-Specific Dynamics of Political Communication

Different social media platforms offer unique features and modes of interaction that shape the ways youths access and engage with political information. The design, content format, and user demographics of each platform influence how political messages are received, interpreted, and shared. Facebook, for instance, is widely used for sharing news articles,

long-form posts, and multimedia content, allowing users to comment and engage in discussions with friends and wider communities (Enikolopov, Petrova, & Zhuravskaya, 2016). Twitter, on the other hand, facilitates rapid dissemination of concise messages, trending hashtags, and real-time political updates, making it particularly effective for immediate reactions to political events (Brennen, Simon, & Nielsen, 2020).

Instagram and TikTok represent platforms where visual and entertainment-oriented content predominates, blending political information with humour, satire, and creative storytelling. Research indicates that youths often encounter political messages on these platforms indirectly through memes, short videos, and influencer-generated content, which can shape perceptions and influence political discourse subtly (Brennen, Simon, & Nielsen, 2020; Sun & Hsu, 2022). The interactive features on these platforms, such as likes, shares, and comments, encourage participatory engagement but may also reinforce echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs.

In the Nigerian context, platform-specific dynamics are particularly significant given the diverse ways youths consume political information. Oladejo and Alabi (2020) note that Facebook is commonly used by older youths and university students for detailed discussions, whereas TikTok and Instagram appeal to younger audiences who prefer short, visually engaging content. The variations in platform design, content presentation, and engagement mechanisms suggest that the type of social media used can influence not only the level of political awareness but also the quality and depth of understanding.

Overall, understanding the platform-specific dynamics of social media is essential for analysing how youths acquire political knowledge and form perceptions of political actors and processes. The differences in content format, interactivity, and user engagement highlight the need to consider each platform's unique influence when examining the relationship between social media usage and political awareness.

4.1.3 Social Media Usage Frequency and Youth Political Awareness

The frequency with which youths engage with social media has been identified as a significant factor in shaping political awareness. Frequent exposure to political information on social media platforms increases the likelihood of encountering news updates, policy debates, and discussions involving political actors, thereby expanding users' awareness of political issues (Boulianne, 2015). Regular engagement enables youths to remain informed about on-going political developments and to familiarise themselves with the language and symbols of political discourse, which are essential components of political awareness. Scholars argue that repeated interaction with political content enhances cognitive accessibility, making political information more readily available for interpretation and discussion (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). From this perspective, frequency of social media usage facilitates learning through continuous exposure, even when users do not deliberately seek political information. Incidental exposure to political messages, particularly through timelines and shared content, has been shown to contribute to increased political awareness among young users (Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013).

However, the relationship between usage frequency and political awareness is not linear. While frequent use may increase exposure, it does not necessarily guarantee deeper understanding. Some studies suggest that excessive social media use may lead to information overload, superficial engagement, or reliance on headlines and summaries rather than critical analysis (Prior, 2007). In such cases, political awareness may remain shallow, characterised by recognition of issues rather than comprehensive understanding.

In the Nigerian context, frequent social media usage among youths has been linked to heightened awareness of political events, particularly during election periods and moments of political unrest (Adebayo, 2021). Social media platforms often serve as alternative sources of political information where traditional media access is limited or perceived as biased. Nonetheless, the quality of awareness derived from frequent usage is shaped by the credibility of sources encountered and the users' ability to evaluate information critically.

Overall, existing literature suggests that frequency of social media usage plays an important role in shaping youth political awareness by increasing exposure to political information. Yet, the depth and accuracy of such awareness depend on how youths engage with content and the nature of information circulated on these platforms. This highlights the need for qualitative exploration of youths' experiences to understand how frequent social media use translates into political awareness within the Nigerian socio-political environment.

4.1.4 Social Media and Youths' Understanding of Political Information

Social media has increasingly become a primary source through which youths access and make sense of political information. Unlike traditional media, which often present political content in structured and institutionalised formats, social media platforms offer a fluid and interactive information environment where political messages are embedded within everyday communication (Loader et al., 2014). This shift has significant implications for how youths understand political actors, processes, and public policies, particularly in contexts where access to formal civic education is limited.

Existing literature suggests that social media contributes to youths' understanding of political information by increasing accessibility and immediacy. Frequent exposure to political updates, commentaries, and user generated discussions enables youths to familiarise themselves with political terminology, key actors, and on-going policy debates (Boulianne, 2015). Through features such as timelines, hashtags, and shared posts, political information is continuously circulated, allowing youths to construct meaning through repeated encounters with similar issues across different contexts.

However, scholars caution that understanding political information through social media is shaped not only by exposure but also by the interpretive environment of these platforms. Social media content is often fragmented, emotionally charged, and influenced by personal networks, which can shape how political information is perceived and understood (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018). Youths may rely on peer commentary, influencers, or trending narratives to interpret political events, rather than institutional

sources, which affects the depth and coherence of their understanding.

In developing democracies such as Nigeria, social media plays a particularly influential role in shaping political understanding among youths. Studies indicate that Nigerian youths often turn to social media to compensate for perceived shortcomings in traditional media, including issues of credibility, access, and representation (Adebayo, 2021). Through social media engagement, youths develop awareness of political events and policies, although this understanding is often shaped by informal discussions, opinionated narratives, and personalised interpretations of political information.

The literature also highlights that understanding political information through social media is an active process. Youths do not merely consume information but engage in meaning making through commenting, sharing, and discussing political content within their networks (Kim et al., 2013). This interactive dimension allows for collective interpretation but may also lead to selective understanding, where certain perspectives are amplified while others are marginalised.

Overall, existing studies indicate that social media significantly shapes youths' understanding of political information by influencing how political issues are accessed, interpreted, and discussed. While these platforms enhance exposure and engagement, the nature of the information environment raises important questions about the depth, coherence, and reliability of political understanding developed through social media. This underscores the need for continued scholarly attention to how youths in Nigeria interpret political information within digital spaces.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative desktop research design to examine the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among Nigerian youths. The approach involves reviewing and analysing existing literature, including scholarly journal articles, books, policy documents, and credible online sources, to generate insights relevant to the research objectives (Bowen, 2009).

Data were collected by systematically selecting sources that focus on social media usage, youth engagement, political awareness, and misinformation. The content from these sources was critically analysed to identify key ideas, patterns, and arguments that address the study's research objectives. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring proper citation of all sources and using only credible and verifiable data. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes political awareness among Nigerian youths without the need for primary data collection.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among youths in Nigeria through a qualitative desktop research approach. Drawing on existing literature, the study highlights the growing centrality of social media as a key source of political information for youths and its significance in shaping their awareness and understanding of political actors, processes, and public policies. Social media platforms have expanded access to political information, enabling youths to engage with political issues beyond the constraints of traditional media and formal civic education structures.

The review of literature demonstrates that frequent social media usage enhances exposure to political information and facilitates familiarity with political discourse. However, political awareness derived from social media is not uniform or guaranteed in depth. The understanding developed by youths is shaped by the nature of content encountered, platform-specific dynamics, and the interpretive role of peer networks and digital interactions. As such, social media serves both as an enabler of political learning and as a space where political understanding may remain fragmented or selectively constructed.

In the Nigerian context, where youths represent a substantial demographic group and play an increasingly visible role in political conversations, social media has become a critical arena for political socialisation. The literature suggests that while these platforms support awareness and engagement, the quality of political understanding depends largely on how information is framed, circulated, and interpreted within digital spaces. This underscores the importance of media literacy and critical engagement in

enhancing meaningful political awareness among youths.

Overall, the study contributes to existing scholarship by shifting attention from political participation alone to political awareness as a distinct and important outcome of social media use. By synthesising existing studies, it provides a clearer understanding of how social media shapes youths' political awareness in Nigeria and highlights the need for further qualitative and context-specific research. Such efforts are essential for strengthening informed civic engagement and supporting democratic development in the digital age.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analyses, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening media literacy education: Educational institutions and relevant stakeholders should prioritise media literacy programmes that equip youths with the skills to critically engage with political information on social media. Such initiatives can enhance youths' ability to understand political issues, assess information sources, and develop informed perspectives on governance and public policies.
2. Responsible use of social media for civic education: Government agencies, civil society organisations, and electoral bodies should leverage social media platforms more effectively for civic education by providing accurate, accessible, and youth friendly political information. Consistent and credible engagement can support deeper political understanding among youths and promote informed democratic participation.
3. Encouraging credible political content creation: Media organisations, political communicators, and content creators should be encouraged to produce clear, balanced, and informative political content tailored to social media platforms. Improving the quality of political communication online can contribute to more coherent and meaningful political awareness among youths.
4. Promoting further research on digital political awareness: Future studies should adopt diverse qualitative and mixed method

approaches to explore youths' political awareness across different social media platforms and socio cultural contexts in Nigeria. Such research would deepen understanding of evolving digital political communication patterns and inform policies aimed at strengthening youth political awareness and engagement.

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