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**ASSESSING THE ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN  
FOSTERING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION STUDENTS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA**

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**Abstract**

*The study investigated the roles of social media on political participation of Faculty of Education students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was carried out in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka among Faculty of Education students. The population of the study consisted of 1080 final year students of the Faculty of Education and a sample of 140 was purposefully selected for the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Roles of Social Media on Political Participation" (QRSMOPP). Validity of the instrument was done by two experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability co-efficient of the instrument was 0.81. Mean was used to analyse the data. Results showed that students use social media for educational purposes, for entertainment and for connecting with friends. Findings also showed that the quality of information on media impacts on students' knowledge which in turn influence their political participation, the presence and approval*

*of peers as well impacts on political participation both on line and offline. The study recommended among others that students' use of social media should be guided.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Political participation, Students, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

The 21st century brought in lots of tremendous technological advancements which have changed different aspects of human interactions. One of such is the social media which as influenced human interactions all over the world. Social media refer to online platforms which allow people to connect and share ideas irrespective of locations. Social media are web-based communication platforms that allow users to download, post, connect, and cooperate with one another regardless of geography or time (Okocha & Ademueh, 2022). Prasanti (2023) opined that the ability of social media to enable people to interact even when they are not in person makes it one of the frequently used technology. These social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Blogs., WhatsApp, Telegram.

Social media use has positive impacts as well as negative impacts on the society. Scholars have noted that social media promotes the participation of youth in politics but its lack of monitoring can lead to aggressiveness and incivility in their discussions (Rowe, 2015). We can have social media impact negatively when there is an abuse especially by young persons which may include using social media to share irrelevant contents or false contents. Thus, the tendency for social media to impact negatively on young persons is a serious concern for the society. This Uji (2015) decried and noted that the society is now worried about how, and to what social and political ends, youth engage with media.

On the other hand, when social media is used for sending relevant messages, it is beneficial to the society. Social media is beneficial for learning, for business, for the health sector as well as for governance. Social media have great benefits for political development. The interactive nature of social media makes them fit to be used for

many purposes such as job search, socialization, education, entertainment, governance, political participation (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). The benefits include: makes politicians reach a larger audience, dissemination of information and building of support (Ohaja *et al*, 2023; Okereke *et al*, 2024a).

Social media can promote participation in governance especially among young persons. Political participation means the involvement of people in their governance. Salman and Saad (2015) define political participation is an activity carried out in order to influence decisions made by the government. Political participation includes getting voter's card, voting, campaigning, reporting issues to public officials, reading pamphlets, joining political organizations, peaceful demonstrations, engaging in community activities among others (Okereke *et al*, 2024a; Salman & Saad, 2015). Hassan *et al* (2016) classified political participation into offline participation (getting voter's card, voting during elections and engaging in political campaign rallies) and online participation (engaging in discussions online).

Social media could influence young persons' participation in politics. Hassan *et al*. (2016) attributed this to the technology savvy nature of young persons. Young university students are also fascinated by social media. They are always busy with phones even during lectures. These young people are always ready to use social media especially for entertainment and education. A study in Malaysia (Hassan *et al*, 2016) showed that undergraduate students are well exposed to social media because they have social media accounts and greater time spent to login and update social media account. Students in universities use social media to participate in politics such as joining discussions on line, campaigning for their candidates, getting information on governance among others.

University students participate in politic in their schools as well. They take part in voting to choose leaders at departmental, faculty and school levels. Their involvement or participation in leadership in the school can be influenced by their use of social media. While many university students use social media on daily basis and even engage in discussions and debates online, they sometimes mess up

politics in the school setting. Many students still show apathy towards school politics by staying away from voting in school leaders, some students as well do many unthinkable things at that level such as bribing and threatening opponents just to get votes and get into departmental and faculty positions.

Research has shown that although many people participate online in politics, it is only few persons that that may actually go on to get involved offline (Uji, 2015). In other words, even though people use social media well and also join in discussions online, they may not participate in the real activities in the society and they may constitute nuisance in the political sphere in real life situations. Anim *et al* (2019) reported that young people get information consciously or unconsciously from social media. This information may be misunderstood or may be fake information and this could inform what they exhibit in real life situations in school politics. This research is interested in finding out the influence social media has on political participation of Faculty of Education students, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Furthermore, studies have been limited to the influence of social media on election and social media as a factor in promoting political participation in elections in Nigeria (Ohaja *et al*, 2023; Okocha *et al*, 2022; Uwalaka, 2021; Mustapha & Omar, 2020). Consequently, there is paucity of literature on roles of social media on university students' participation in especially University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Therefore, this study is interested in finding out the roles of social media on political participation of Faculty of Education students, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The general purpose of this study was to find out the roles of social media on political participation of Faculty of Education students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Specifically, the study sought to find out:

- i. what the students use social media to do; and
- ii. the roles social media in fostering political participation among university students.

## Research Questions

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What are the uses of social media platforms for university students?
2. What are the roles of social media on political participation of university students?

## Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in The University of Nigeria, Nsukka among Faculty of Education students. The population of the study consisted of 1080 final year students of the Faculty of Education and a sample of 140 was purposefully selected for this. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Influence of Social Media on Political Participation” (QISMOPP). Validity of the instrument was done by two experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability co-efficient of the instrument was 0.81. Mean was used to answer the research questions. Items with mean ratings of 2.50 and above were accepted and those below 2.50 were rejected.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What are the uses of social media for Faculty of Education students?

**Table 1: Mean responses of students on what they use social media for**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	For reporting issues to appropriate authorities	2.25	Disagree
2	For sourcing information for assignments	3.31	Agree
3	For entertaining and keeping oneself busy	3.08	Agree
4	For business	2.08	Disagree
5	For networking/connecting with people of like minds	3.17	Agree

Table 1 shows the responses of students on what they use social media to do. The result showed that the respondents use social media for sourcing educational information, for entertaining themselves and for networking/connecting with friends with mean ratings of 3.31, 3.08 and 3.17 respectively. Students did not agree on using social media to report issues to authorities and for doing business with social media and the mean ratings are 2.2 and 2.08 respectively.

**Research Question Two:** What are the roles of social media in fostering political participation of Faculty of Education students?

**Table 2: Roles of Social Media in fostering Political Participation**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Social media promote communication but can lead to impoliteness on political opponents	3.17	Agree
2	Activities of peers in social media influence one's political participation	3.10	Agree
3	Social media expose young persons to violence	2.98	Agree
4	Active participation in discussions promotes self-efficacy which impacts positively on political participation	3.35	Agree
5	Social media can increase desperation to win leading to bribing or lobbying	3.26	Agree
6	Social media compel people to join a given party/idea/candidate	2.00	Disagree
7	Quality of information on social media can influence how people participate in politics	3.33	Agree
8	Social media provides information on political issues	3.37	Agree

Table 2 shows the responses of the roles of social media on the political participation of Faculty of Education students. Result showed that social media promote impoliteness on political opponents, activities of peers in social media influence one's political

participation, expose young persons to violence, students believe that active participation in discussions promotes self-efficacy which impacts positively on political participation, social media can increase desperation to win leading to bribing or lobbying, agreed that quality of information on social media can influence how people participate in politics and that social media provides information on political issues. Respondents disagreed on item 6 that social media compels people to support a given idea/candidate/party as the item has a mean of 2.00 which is less than 2.50 bench mark.

### **Discussions**

Result also showed that students use social media to seek information as students. This is in line with the report of Akinwalere and Adeosun (2022) that students use social media to get educational knowledge. The study further showed that social media is used to entertain people and this is in line with the finding of Ghori et al. (2019) which showed that students use social media for entertaining themselves.

The study found out that the presence, involvement or activities of peers on social media influence one's political involvement. This is in line with the finding of Okereke et al. (2024a) which showed that young people are more likely to participate in politics when they perceive that their peers and significant others value and support such participation. This could be the reason for high level of misconducts in school politics as candidates would love to win for the admiration and praise of significant others or peers hence engaging in misconducts in for votes. The study also found out that the quality of information disseminated through social media influences political participation. This corresponds with the finding of Okereke *et al* (2024:b) which showed that the quality of information impacts on political participation and that people are more likely to participate when they trust the information available to them in the social media. It was also revealed that social media promotes communication regardless of age but can lead to impoliteness of young people on others especially the opponents. This corroborates the finding of Prasanti (2023) which revealed that social media has an effect on young people's politeness in language

which could be caused by divergent cultures and opinions people present in social media. The study also showed that the information people get through social media improves political efficacy and in turn promotes political participation. This is in line with the submission of Borhan-Eddine *et al* (2020) which revealed that use of social media promotes awareness of political issues and this leads to significant impacts on political efficacy and political participation. The study further revealed that activities of peers have impacts on political participation both offline and online. The finding is in line with the assertion of Matthes (2022) which held that society and peers influence people's political participation.

### **Conclusion**

Social media promotes active participation of young persons in politics. It makes information available and improves political efficacy which promotes political participation. Social media also have influenced the way students handle politics even at their level as some model violence, hate speech and bribery which they see on social media. This calls for proper guidance and intervention to avoid raising a crop of graduates who have mastered violence and electoral misconducts starting from their university days.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that social media use by university students should be properly guided and monitored to curtail the rate of being negatively influenced by the political happenings in the society; politics at the school level should be strictly monitored and defaulters penalized if found engaging in electoral misconducts at the school level and there is need for more emphases on values which has the potential to tackle value issues arising from social media use.

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