

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTHS' PARTICIPATION IN THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION IN CALABAR  
METROPOLIS**

*By*

**Eric Ogri,**

**Omari Eric-Ogri,**

**Arunchi Peter-Wagbara,**

**Henry Alegu**

**&**

**Odey Blessing Imani**

Department of Mass Communications

University of Calabar

**Abstract**

This study examines the influence of social media in promoting youths' participation in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study was guided by Technological Determinism Theory and the Uses and Gratification Theory, which stress the place of technology in recent Nigeria's electoral process. The study utilised the mixed method of data collection, comprising survey research design and content analysis of social media posts and comments during the 2023 general elections. Interview and questionnaire served as instruments of data collection. Using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size calculation, the researcher drew up a sample size of 300 respondents, who participated in the survey. Data obtained by means of questionnaire were tabulated and analysed using simple percentage technique; while data collected via the use of interview guide were analysed using explanation building technique to arrive at key findings. Findings revealed that the use of social media by youths during the 2023 electioneering significantly impacted the entire process because it enabled young people to actively participate in the process and significantly minimised the issues of election violence and rigging. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that INEC and other relevant stakeholders in election matters should organise periodic sensitization campaigns to educate the youths on the proper use and dangers of misuse of social media for elections. Nigerian youths should also be encouraged to use social media platforms to air their honest political views without fear of intimidation or harassment in line with the laws of the land.

**Keywords:** *Electioneering, General Election, Political activities, Social media, Youths' participation*

**Introduction**

The present age, known as the digital age, has brought about a mixture of prospects and challenges with new technologies that have caused a great change globally. This can be seen in the rapid change from what technology used to be in the past. Technology is evolving everyday due to increase in knowledge impacted through the boom in digital revolution and new media, especially the social media. Social media, can be described as computer-mediated technologies that aid the creation and dissemination of news, ideas, aid political participation and other forms of social activities through virtual communities and networks. Some of the applications include: Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Google, Skype, Messenger, Telegram, among others.

The emergence of social media has brought about a change in economic, political, intellectual, and socio-cultural interaction in the world today. Obadare and Akintola (2017, p. 2) noted that "social media has had a profound impact on the way Nigerians interact with one another and engage with their culture, especially when it has to do with the norms of a particular political system of a society." In the context of the above stated view, social media has played a significant role in shaping the way Nigerians view themselves and their identity.

The social media offer lots of benefits for youths' participation in political activities. The social media aid social interaction, especially among youths and promote their participation in political activities by enabling them to create and exchange political views in one way or the other via online platforms. Ukpai and Nwankwo (2020) note that: "social media is not only the simplest way for youths to share and exchange political views and opinions with their peers, but also the most accessible one" (p. 2). This means that compared to the conventional mass media (radio, television, newspaper and magazine), access to social media platforms is less restricted. Given this advantage, the youths find it very handy to exchange their political views and opinions.

In spite of all these, the use of social media in politics raises some worrisome red flags and questions as to whether they truly enhance political participation or completely impede its growth. Some political pundits have

contended that the shortcomings associated with the deployment of the social media for political purposes seems to outweigh the gains thereof. They cited the misuse of social media platforms for negative purposes to support their claims. According to Oгри, Adomi and Mboѕo (2016), the social media platforms have been used to attack and blackmail of political opponents, indiscriminate use of unguarded utterances, mediated politically motivated protests and attacks against dissenting voices.

Nevertheless, Nigerian youths actively used the social media for political activities in the 2023 general elections either to support political parties or the candidates of their choice. There were different trending hash tags in the internet in support of different candidates and political interests during the 2023 general election in Nigeria. For instance, the three leading presidential candidates featured prominently in the social media space. The *'Obidient'* movement trended for Peter Obi, the *'Atikulated'* group campaigned vigorously for Atiku Abubakar on social media; while the *'BATified'* movement campaigned in support of Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

In Cross River State also, the frontline candidates in the 2023 General Election also garnered huge supports from social media users and influencers. The *'Season of Sweetness'* mantra was used to campaign for the All Progressive Congress (APC) gubernatorial candidate, Senator Bassey Edet Otu; while the *'Caterpillar Movement'* aggressively canvassed support for Senator Sandy Onor, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) flagbearer. These clear examples of how the social media platforms have given the youths the voice to express themselves when it comes to political discourse. Igbuor and Ogbaji (2017) described the Nigerian youths as one of the most enthusiastic users of social media to express their views and show their creative ingenuity.

Social media provide the right platform for young people to express their electoral views before, during and after elections and to also become politically active. Additionally, social media have also helped to increase political awareness and education among Nigerian youths. The researcher believes that social media can play a vital role in promoting positive political change in Nigeria as they have ways of stimulating political interest in the youths and enables them to freely lend their voices to political discourse.

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions: In what ways have the social media contributed to boost Nigerian's youths' interest in political activities? What types of political activities do Nigerian youths use social media for? And what factors influence the use of social media for political activities among Nigeria youths?

### **Statement of the Problem**

For a long time, due to many factors, including the hegemonic and elitist nature of mass media landscape in Nigeria, the youths had little or no opportunity to participate actively in the process of governance due to lack of access to public communication space. However, with advancement in communication technology that led to the advent of new media technology, the status quo appears to have changed. In Nigeria, youths, who have higher levels of affinity for the social media, are using the social media to achieve different ends. It holds lots of potential for news, information, entertainment, mobilization, interaction, and expression of political views.

Despite the recorded advantages of the social media in political mobilization and engagements, it remains uncertain if youths' participation on social media platforms translates to actual participation in offline political activities like obtaining of voters' cards, voting in an election, willingness to become a member of political parties, vying for elective posts or political appointments, among others. Similarly, there is the issue of misuse of the social media space by some young people, who have resorted to the abuse social media by sharing contents that may be fake or outrightly false against opposition candidates or parties, thereby igniting disunity, overheating the political landscape as well as causing all kinds of electoral violence. In fact, sharing of false information, misinformation, disinformation and weaponising information have become commonplace in the virtual environments. This study seeks to examine the significance of social media in enhancing youths' participation in political activities in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the role of the social media in promoting youths' participation in political activities in Calabar Metropolis.
- ii. Examine the key political activities often carried out on the social media by Youths in Calabar Metropolis.
- iii. Examine factors that influence the use of social media for political participation by Youths in Calabar Metropolis.

- iv. Find out the extent of youths' involvement in the 2023 general election via the use of social media.

### **Research Questions**

- i. In what ways have the social media contributed to boost the interest of youths to participate actively in political activities in Calabar Metropolis?
- ii. What are the major types of political activities often carried out in the social media space by youths Calabar Metropolis?
- iii. What factors influence the use of the social media for political participation by Nigerian Youths?
- iv. To what extent did youths' participation in the 2023 general election via the use the social media influence the outcome of the election?

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Concept of Social Media**

Gone were the days when newspaper editorial, radio and television news, columns and serious political debate on these channels served the purpose exclusive political discourse. Today, most news audience are migrating online to their preferred news web-sites to quench their taste for real-time news. They can easily get such news via the internet or from social media platforms. The internet has become a preferred alternative to legacy media source (Seema, 2013). The internet is the worldwide, publicly accessible network of interlinked computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using the standard internet protocol (IP). The Internet can now be accessed almost anywhere by all people through different means. Mobile phones, data cards and cellular routers enable users to link to the internet from wherever there is cellular network support for device's technology.

The advent of the social media was made possible due to the popularity of the internet and the World Wide Web (www). Social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Google+, Skype, Messenger, Telegram and blog are widely used today. McQuail (2010, p. 570) noted that "Social network sites often known as social media comprise a number of internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also to share messages and audiovisual materials often available to a wider public." Social networking sites provide users the opportunities to share ideas, share activities or events, put forth their positions on topical issues. Information shared on social media space usually go viral within a very short time as it can be viewed by thousands (if millions) of users simultaneously.

Similarly, Dominick (2013, p. 93) notes that "social media are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing collaboration and linkage." He further stated that social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. While some social media users visit the sites to get information, many others socialise with others as the social media have the ability to turn simple information dissemination into interactive dialogue. Bello and Bolanle (2017), put it that social media are web-based and mobile-based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Simply put, social media sites encourage easy two-way communication and interaction among different users.

Apart from their interactive feature, social media also enable the formation of virtual communities. This is a large community of people who share something in common. This could be sharing of similar ideology or goals. Unlike the conventional physical community where kindreds live together, the virtual community is an online community or social networking group. One of the unusual things about virtual community, which is made possible by social networking sites, is that it brings together people of different race, ethnic groups and nationalities, who share similar ideology and orientation. One of such ideologies could be political. Thus, the social media are global networking site that enable the formation of transcultural and global virtual communities.

#### **Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria**

Social media technologies have engaged many internet-compliant individuals to fashion their lives around it. However, studies have shown that the proliferation of social media use is more among the young people, who are considered to be more technologically savvy than older generation. Olayemi (2022) noted that "the use of social media has significantly changed the means of communication and reshaped individual habits, especially the younger generation. These changes have vital implications on youth" (p. 41). Majorly, youths adopt social networking media for communication with friends, family members and the general public. It is assumed that the more the youths are at ease with using social media to communicate and socialise, the higher the likelihood for them to use the media to participate in politics.

Social media use and penetration level have risen astronomically in Nigeria, especially among the young people. Globally, more than half of the population of the world is connected to the social media. According to the report by Kemp (2023) on Internet and social media penetration, out of the 8.03 billion people in the world, 5.18 billion people (64.6 per cent) are linked to the internet and 4.80 billion people, representing 59.9% penetration rate are active social media users.

The report noted that 122.5 million Nigerians are connected to the internet (representing 55.4 percent penetration rate). This makes Nigerians the largest internet users in Africa. Out the number of Internet users, 31.6 million people are social media users. This represents 14.3 percent penetration rate. Majority of the social media users across the globe are the youths. Nigeria is not an exception. Compared to the current estimated population of Nigerians, which is put at over 2.2 million people, internet penetration rate may appear to be very low. Nevertheless, the impact of social media proliferation, especially among Nigerian youths, is very high.

Thus, how have the use of social media influence political participation among Nigerian youths? The first thing to consider in answering this question is to understand the circumstances surrounding media access and use in Nigeria before the proliferation of the social media networks. It is a common knowledge that the mainstream media radio, television, magazine and newspaper – are elitist in nature. Only the few well to do individuals that can afford the mass media space and airtime can gain unrestricted access. Consequently, the Nigerian youths, who are always grappling with issues of unemployment, underemployment, deprivation, lack and poverty due to bad leadership, are often left out in the scheme of things; and therefore, cannot voice their opinion on issues of public interest.

It is pathetic to note that sometimes when young people are not engaged in meaningful endeavours, they tend to involve themselves in negative acts and vices to try to make ends meet. Shola (2021, p. 2) observed that “having a growing youth population may translate into a large and active work force, yet, it may also result in a disaster with an upsurge in the crime rate, an increased dependency ratio and worryingly, widespread poverty.” Most Nigerian leaders have been accused of weaponising poverty against the youths. This accusation finds relevance in the formulation of draconic policies that put Nigerian perpetually in sorry state. These political critics explicate further that by making the youths poor and hungry, make them vulnerable and willing tools in the hands of politicians to perpetrate their heinous acts. Most of these youths serve as thugs to politicians, secret bodyguard, snipers and page boys. All these attributes of bad leaders have kept the Nigeria youths away from actively engaging themselves in meaningful political activities or in electoral processes.

However, the trend seems to have changed significantly given youths’ unremitting access to the social media platform. Unlike the traditional mass media platforms, social media have given them the opportunity to voice their opinion and grievances. Writing on social media and youth participation in the 2019 general election in Nigeria, Obisesan (2022) observe that “social media provided an avenue towards the democratisation of information which helped youth to make informed decisions on those vying. This became important as it enabled them to bypass mass media which often constitutes part of the ruling establishment” (p. 110). Alodat, et al (2023) also observed that “young people may now share their thoughts, discuss politics, and rally around causes that are important to them because of social media platforms. Also, social media have facilitated building groups of young people around similar interests and problems...” (p. 3). This means that social media have helped to raise the level of political awareness among young people, especially in Nigeria.

Similarly, Abdu, Mohammed, Musa & Halilu (2018) emphasis that “the use of social media has grown in recent elections, particularly among youth. Of significance for this age group is the rise in the use of social media and mobile devices for obtaining political information, creating user-generated content, and expressing political views” (p. 108). In the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria, this scenario played out prominently. The supporters of the three leading candidates in the election – Peter Obi, Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar – set the social media agog with their campaign messages and debates for their candidates or against the opposition candidates. The #tagObi-Dati Movement, the #tagBAT Support groups and the #tagArticulated Movements were viral on social media and the influences translated to real life political participation by youths across Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study anchored on two theoretical underpinnings: the Technological Determinism Theory by Marshall McLuhan and the Uses and Gratification Theory by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch (1974). The Technological Determination Theory explains how technological advancement and innovations, especially in the mass media landscape, have utterly changed the way mass media audience receive their messages. Through the help of

technological innovations like mobile phones, the internet and the World Wide Web, as well as the social media, media users cannot only receive messages in different forms and gadgets, but can also share information with others. This means that advancements in communication technology have open up the media space for wider participation, even by the once called voiceless groups.

According to Ogrı, et al (2016, p. 11), “Technological determinism as applied to the communication media was popularized by the Canadian scholar, Marshal McLuhan in his theorizing on ‘the Medium is the Message’ and his work on ‘Understanding Media: The Extension of Man’ published in 1964.” The theory regards technology as the major determinant of how modern society evolve; and it is the key vehicle that drive social and political transformation. Citing Griffin (2000), Ogrı, et al (2016, p. 11) state that “McLuhan divided the human history into four distinct eras: a tribal age, a literate age, a print age and an electronic age. Griffin further states that the invention of technology in each of these eras determines the cultural change of the time.”

From the foregoing, the current age which is the electronic era, is said to be driven by the internet and the World Wide Web (www) and the impact has been very tremendous. The social media is a product of this age and their advent is technologically driven and their application in all facets of life, including politics, has been incredible.

The Uses and Gratification theory was popularised by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). The theory is majorly concerned with ‘what people do with media rather than what media do to people.’ The theory assumes that play active role in choosing media channels to use and the media content they consume. Asemah (2011) notes that, “the theory emphasises motives and the self-perceived needs of audience members.” The uses and gratification theory places emphasis on media consumption rather than media production and transmission functions. The theory assumes that individuals or the audience are active in making choices about selecting media and messages.

The core question is: why do people use media, and for what purpose do they use them? The simply answer is that people use the mass media to satisfy information need, entertainment and relaxation, escapism, among other needs. Therefore, they will usually choose the media form and content that will meet their basic information needs. This theory is very relevant to explain the popularity of social media sites among young people. Social media are multimedia in nature and possess certain features like the ability to provide immediate or instantaneous feedback and the enablement of interactivity. Thus, the theory is useful in explaining why social media sites attract so much traffic of users, especially among young people – they meet their information and communication needs.

### Research Methodology

The study adopted mixed research methodology, comprising of survey research design and content analysis of social media posts to obtain data for the study. The interview and questionnaire were used as instruments of data collection. The major participants in the survey were youths of Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. The population of Calabar Metropolis was 204, 364.00 as at the 2006 National Census. However, the current estimated population of Calabar Metropolis, according to Worldometre (an online source), is 461, 796. The study utilised the mixed method of data collection, comprising survey research design and content analysis of social media posts and comments during the 2023 general elections. Interview and questionnaire served as instruments of data collection. Using the Taro Yamane’s formula for sample size calculation, the researcher drew up a sample size of 300 respondents from the population of Calabar Metropolis. Data obtained by means of questionnaire were tabulated and analysed using simple percentage technique; while data collected via the use of interview guide were analysed using explanation building technique to arrive at key findings.

### Discussion and Findings

This section deals with presentation of data generated through the use of questionnaire. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of this number, 276 (92 percent) copies were completed and returned for the purpose of data analysis and discussion of findings.

**Table 1: Demographic Information about the Respondents**

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local Government of Origin	Calabar south	159	57.6
	Calabar municipality	117	42.3

	Total	276	100
Sex	Male	152	55
	Female	124	45
	Total	276	100
Educational Qualification	SSCE	54	19.6
	Diploma	49	17.7
	Degree	138	50.0
	Post graduate	35	12.7
	Total	276	100

Source: Field Research, 2025

In Table 1, the data show that majority of the respondents reside in Calabar South, which is 159 (representing 57.6 percent); while 117 respondents (42.3%) were residence of Calabar Municipality. Also, male respondents were topmost in the table, numbering 152 (55%); while the female were 124, representing 45 per cent of the participants. Also, the table shows that majority of the respondents were degree holders, numbering 138 persons (50%). This is followed by SSCE holders, which is 19.6 per cent of the respondents.

**Table 2: Respondents Level of Participation in the 2023 Election**

Questions	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did you participate in the 2023 general election?	Yes	232	84.0
	No	44	16.0
	Total	276	100
Did you vote during the elections?	Yes	225	81.5
	No	51	18.5
	Total	276	100
Apart from being a voter, what other activities were you involved during the election?	Party Agents	69	25.0
	Social media canvassers	110	39.9
	Social media commentators	86	31.1
	Others	11	3.9
	Total	276	100
Was the widespread use of social media a game changer in the election?	Yes	234	84.8
	No	17	6.2
	Undecided	25	9.0
	Total	276	100
What was the predominant social media platform you used during the election?	Facebook	123	44.6
	WhatsApp	88	31.9
	Instagram	25	9.1
	X (Twitter)	22	7.9
	None	18	6.5
	Total	276	100

Source: Field Research, 2025

Table 2 shows that 232 respondents (84.0%) actively participated in the 2023 general election as against 44 participants (16.0%), who said they did not participate in the election. Out of the 232 that said they participated in the election, 225 said they voted during the elections. Apart from voting in the election, majority of the youths said they acted as social media commentators and canvassers. Also in the table, majority respondents, numbering 234 (84.8 percent) were of the opinion that the use of social media was a major determining element in terms of active youths' participation in the 2023 general election. Finally, the prominent social media platform used for political activities, according to the respondents was the Facebook as 123 respondents (44.6%) ticked against it. This is followed by WhatsApp with 88 respondents (31.9%).

**Table 3: Respondents' perception about the use of social media by Nigerian youths for political activities**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Social media has highly influenced my active participation in political activities	189 (67.7%)	82 (29.7%)	5 (1.8%)	0 (0%)

2	I get useful information and updates about election and other political activities on the social media than any other platform	198 (71.7%)	56 (20.3%)	16 (5.8%)	6 (2.8%)
3	I find the social media a useful platform to air my political views and canvas for my candidate	141 (51.1%)	113 (40.9%)	22 (8.0%)	0 (0%)
4	In spite of the usefulness of the social media in Nigerian's political landscape, they have also been used to spread fake information disinformation and even cause violence.	202 (73.2%)	65 (23.6%)	9 (3.3%)	0 (0%)

Source: Field Research, 2024

The responses expressed in Table 4.11 represent the participants' view about the use of social media for political activities by Nigerian youths. In the first row, 189 respondents (67.7%) stated that they actively participated in the 2023 election via the use of social media. Similarly, majority of them noted that they use the social media to get regularly political updates, as well as, voicing their political views. However, they also observed that in spite of the usefulness of the social media for political activities, the platforms have also been used for negative activities like spread of fake information, disinformation and to incite violent activities. Nearly all the respondents (over 96%) alluded to this assertion.

### Discussion of Findings

Discussion of findings was carried out by using the contributions of the interviewees, together with the responses of youths in Calabar Metropolis about the influence of social media on their participation in the 2023 general election, to answer the research questions.

### How Social Media Contributed to active Youths' Participation in Political Activities during the 2023 General Elections?

For many youths, the social media does not only serve the purpose of entertainment, but they are also information and educational channels. This includes information about political events like electioneering and elections. That is why almost all the participants in the study survey (youths in Calabar Metropolis) said they actively engaged in social media campaign during the 2023 elections as seen in Table 2. From the Table, the youths said they predominantly deployed Facebook (44.6%) and WhatsApp (31.9%) for the campaign. In Table 3, over 98 percent of the respondents expressed the view that social media really influenced their active participation in political activities during the 2023 elections. Their reasons were that they get useful information and updates about election and other political activities from social media than any other platforms and that the social media were useful platform to voice their political views and canvass for their candidates.

The interviewees also lend their voices to the discussion about the contributions of social media in boosting the interest of Nigerians youths in political activities. According to them, the social media had been defining factors in the Nigerian electoral process, especially beginning from 2015, when Presidential candidates and other political players took to their social media handles to campaign for votes. Particularly, the first respondent observed that the use of social media has boosted the interest of young Nigerians in politics because they can comment on or contribute to political activities from their comfort zones without any form of molestation or eminent threat. He further noted that the social media enable youths to "engage in political discourse, participate in election situation room by monitoring election live, as well as report situations first hand and share election results from different parts of the county or locations.

This result agrees with the findings of Abdu, Mohammed, Musa and Halilu (2018), who made enquiry into whether Facebook has boosted the interest of Nigerian youths in the democratic process. They found out that Facebook use, interactions with politicians, quality information sharing and creation of political awareness play important roles in influencing youth political participation in real life. In their conclusion, Abdu, et al (2018) expressed the expectation that most Nigerian youths will continue to depend on online forms of social engagement and political interaction in order to engage in profitable offline commitment and active participation. In other words, there is a strong correlation between online political participation with offline (real life) participation in political activities by young people in Nigeria; thereby, reducing the problem of young voters' apathy, which is one the major challenges in the Nigerian electoral process.

### **Major Political Activities Carried out by Nigerian Youths in the Social Media Space**

In Tables 2, majority of the respondents said that they participated in the election not just as registered voters, but also as social media canvassers and commentators. A total of 110 respondents (39.9%) said that they played the role of social media canvassers: while 86 respondents (representing 31.1 percent) played the role of social media commentators. As canvassers and commentators during the election, many young people actively campaigned for their candidates of choice, while others engaged in general discourse about the political process. While some of the youths used their posts and comments to canvass for support for their candidates, others used the comment section to campaign against candidates of opposition parties.

Another significant political activity that took place on social media during the 2023 general elections was the campaign by social media influencers, who used the influence of their massive followership to drum support for their candidates. Influencers were involved in different kinds of activities like canvassing and content creation. According to the third respondent:

Using my social media handles as a content creator, I persuaded the youths to go and register and get their PVCs. I have thousands of active followers in my social media handles. I talked to them and try to convince them to exercise their franchise. We tried to convince some people who were not even interested in politics because they believed that their votes will not count; and they went and registered and cast their vote on election day.

In summary, Nigerian youths in Calabar Metropolis used the social media for different political activities in the 2023 general election, including sharing and commenting on political posts, actual campaign for their candidates, education and awareness creation and performing the functions of influencers.

### **Factors Promoting the use of the Social media for Political Participation by Nigerian Youths**

The researcher posed this question to the interviewees to elicit their responses. The respondents stated the social media have become ready political platforms in the hands of young people due to factors like easy access, their interactive nature and their ability to support the formation of virtual community. From the information displayed in Table 4.11, majority of the respondents (over 98 percent) expressed the view that find the social media as useful platform to voice their political views and campaign for their candidates of choice. This talks about ease of access.

Corroborating this view, the second respondent noted that: “Unlike the conventional mass media where access is restricted to the privileged class, anybody with the right gadget can access the social media and share his or her opinion with others with little or no restriction.” This response is in line with the findings of Obisesan (2022), who did a study entitled: The ‘#tag Generation’: Social media and youth participation in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. According to him, “social media provided the opportunity for information democratisation which helped young to make informed decisions about those vying for different elective positions. He further observed that social media also became very significant in the whole process because “it enabled the youths to bypass the mass media which often constitutes part of the ruling establishment” (p. 110).

Talking about interactivity and formation of virtual community, the first respondent stated that: “One of the advantages of social media that endears it to youths is their interactive nature. It is easy to interact with people from all walks of life as well as create virtual communities like Facebook or WhatsApp group that serve as online communities.” He also observed that these inherent characteristics of the social media have given rise to social media influencers with large followership. According to him, these inherent qualities make the social media suitable for sharing of political messages to a large audience.

Speaking on a different note, the third respondent noted that young Nigerian massively took to the social media during the 2023 general election to register their grievances with the government in power. According to him, the youths were tired of the general hardship in the land and so they were canvassing for change of government through the ballot. Putting it in his words: “There is hunger, unemployment and hardship in the land. Many young people are not happy with this development. So, social media serves as a platform to air their views, including criticizing the government in power and campaigning for candidates of their choice.”

### **How Youths' Participation in the 2023 General Election Via the use the Social media Influenced the Outcome of the Election**

The respondents were unanimous concerning the fact that youths' active involvement in the 2023 via the social media was a game changer in entire electoral process. In Table 2, 234 (84.4%) said that the use of social media boosted active participation of youth in the electoral process. Also, over 73 percent of the respondents expressed the view that widespread deployment of the social media in the 2023 general election significantly shaped the nation's electoral process.

The interviewees also affirmed the influence of social media in the outcome of the 2023 election. They observed that although the final outcome of the presidential election may have not reflected the intentions of the teeming youths that took to the social media to change the status quo, however, the after-effects of the whole process will have a lasting impact on the electoral process going forward. According to them, some of the remarkable outcomes of the 2023 general election was that it witnessed increase in the participation of young people and boosted their interests in the whole process; all thanks to the power of the social media.

Another significant contribution of the deployment of the social media in the 2023 general election, as observed by the interviewees, was drastic reduction in cases of elections rigging. In the words of the third respondent: "youths' active involvement, coupled with the deployment of other technological devices by INEC, reduced rigging during the 2023 general election to the barest minimum. Young people were able to achieve this through live participate in election situation room, where they partook in on-the-ground monitoring election of the election right from the polling units and share live pictures, videos and even election results as they are being announced from different locations.

Furthermore, the second respondent sums it up by saying that: "youths' active participation in the 2023 elections actually changed the narrative. It is an eye opener to everyone that the Nigerian youths are ready to take their destinies into their own hands." This finding is in agreement with the summation of Obisesan (2022) who concluded that social media played a significant role in Nigeria's 2019 General Election by empowering youths to engage in meaningful debates and set agenda for the ruling class about the electorates' democratic expectations.

### **Conclusion**

Social media and youths' participation in politics in Nigeria has become a subject of scholarly investigation in recent time, especially beginning from heat of the 2015 general election. Of particular relevance to this study is the rate at which young Nigerians have embraced social media platforms for political purposes, thereby boosting their participation in political activities and reducing young voters' apathy in our electoral process. This study focuses on the extent to which the deployment of social media for political purposes by Nigerian youths may have boosted their level of political participation, especially in the 2023 general election.

The Technological Determinism theory and the Uses and Gratification theories were used as theoretical framework. The two theories stress the place of technology in the emergence of modern society and its influence in all human endeavours, including elections. In fact, the social media is a product of technological innovation. The researcher utilised the survey research design to obtain data for the study; and questionnaire and interview were used as instruments of data collection. Copies of questionnaire were deployed to obtain data from young people in Calabar Metropolis to get their views about how the social media influenced their participation in the 2023 elections. Also, the researcher interviewed three persons: a blogger, a social media influencer and a young politician to seek their opinion about the subject matter.

Findings revealed that the use of social media by young Nigerian during the 2023 electioneering significantly impacted the entire process as it boosted the interest of youths in the election, as well as aided them to actively participate in the process. Based on these findings, it was concluded that the social media has become a major deciding force in Nigeria's electoral system and its proper deployment can positively impact the electoral process.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the aforementioned findings and conclusion drawn, the researcher recommends that:

1. Given the importance of the social media to youths' participation in political activities and elections in Nigerian, young Nigerians should be allowed to use the platform to hold and air their honest political views

without fear of intimidation or harassment as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution and the Freedom of Information Act (FOI).

2. INEC, political parties, the National Orientation Agencies and other critical stakeholders in election matters in Nigeria should mount up awareness campaign to sensitise and educate Nigerian youths on the proper use and dangers of misuse of social media for elections and other political activities. Such sensitization campaign can come in form of mass media advertorial, paid advert or train-the-trainers' workshop, where selected young people from different parts of the country will be trained to sensitize other youths in their locality.
3. It is encouraging to observe that the open, free and interactive nature of the social media provided young people the opportunity to actively participate in the 2023 general election in Nigerian. However, the youths must not take this for granted by infringing on the rights of others or incite violent acts during elections. They must take responsibility for all their comments and posts.
4. The Nigerian Government, through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should encourage the effective deployment of technological devices/platforms like the card reader and IREV (INEC Result Viewing portal) in all elections. This will promote election transparency and accountability, as well as boost public confidence in the entire process.

### References

- Abdu, S. D., Mohammed, M., Musa, A. A., & Halilu, B. I. (2018). Social media and political participation: Is Facebook democratizing our youth in Nigeria? *International Journal of Operational Research in Management, Social Sciences & Education*, 4 (1), 108 – 126. Retrieved from <https://internationalpolicybrief.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ARTICLE10-42.pdf>
- Alodat, A. M., Lamis F. A. & Hamoud, M. A. (2023). Social Media Platforms and Political Participation: A Study of Jordanian Youth Engagement. *Social Sciences*, 12 (402). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070402>
- Anaeto, S, Onabanjo, O., & Osofiso, J., (2008). *Model and theories of communication*. Maryland: African Renaissance Books Inc.
- Asemah, E. S., Nwammuo, A. N., & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. (2017). *Theories and models of mass communication*. Jos: Jos University Press
- Bello S. & Bolanle K. (2017). Social media and political participation in Nigeria: A theoretical perspective. *Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication*, 4 (1), 149 – 146. Retrieved from [http://www.ebsujmc.com/uploads/631442\\_1527709385.pdf](http://www.ebsujmc.com/uploads/631442_1527709385.pdf)
- Dominic, J. R. (2013). *The dynamics of Mass Communication* (12th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill
- Igbuzor, O. O. & Ogbaji, R. (2017). Social media, civic engagement, and social change in Nigeria. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 6 (2), 234–254. Retrieved from [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/303425466\\_Introduction\\_Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Civic\\_Engagement&sa=U&sqi=2&ved](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/303425466_Introduction_Social_Media_and_Civic_Engagement&sa=U&sqi=2&ved)
- Kemp, S. (2023). Digital 2024: Global overview report. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-global-overview-report>
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.) California, Sage Publication Inc.
- Obadare, E. & Akintola, K.O. (2017). The digital age and socio-cultural change in Nigeria: A case study of the impact of new media technologies on Nigerian cultures. 9 (4), 1 – 5.
- Obisesan, F. (2022). The '#tag Generation': Social media and youth participation in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. *Africa Development*, 47 (2), 107-145. Retrieved from <https://discovery.researcher.life/article/6-the-tag-generation-social-media-and-youth-participation-in-the-2019-general-election-in-nigeria/b650f977d349334ea52ffef9c3c75ca>
- Ogri, E. U., Mbozo, A. G. & Adomi, K. O. (2016). Social media and participatory democracy in Africa: A study of democratic transitions in Nigeria and Uganda. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication (IJOLAC)*, 3 (2), 24-41

- Olayemi, M. O. (2022). Perceived influence of social media usage among youth: A survey. *Open Journal for Information Technology*, 5(2), 41-54. <https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojit.0502.010410>
- Seema, H. (2013), *Mass Communication: Principles and Concept*. New Delhi: CBS Publishers & Distributors pvt Ltd.
- Shola, A. T. (2021). Youth political participation, good governance and social inclusion in Nigeria: Evidence from Nairaland. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 13 (2), 1 – 13. Retrieved from <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/cjfy/index.php/cjfy/article/view/29648>
- Ukpai, C.O., & Nwankwo, K.E. (2020). Effect of social media on youth political participation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 10 (5), 1 – 5.