

POLITICAL CYBER-ACTIVISM AND YOUTHS INTENTION TO VOTE IN THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION OF NGERIA

MOFOLUKE IBIDUNNI AKOJA

(Ph.D) Lecture, Mass Communication Department, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogin State, Nigeria.
Corresponding Author Email: akojam@babcock.edu.ng

KUDIRAT OMOLOLA OLAYIGBADE

Student, Mass Communication Department, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogin State, Nigeria.

Abstract

Political Cyber-Activism has become an important tool for the actualisation of Nigerian youths' agitation for better and participatory governance. In the build-up of the 2023 general elections, the number of activism and conversations were quite high on social media hence, it was assumed that many Nigerians especially youth will vote in the 2023 elections. Statistics from INEC however showed a decline in the 2023 registration of voters from the 2019 general election. Given the fact that the youth constituted a majority in the number of registered voters and whereas, previous studies have affirmed the influence of political cyber activism in political participation, the study examined how political cyber-activism on Twitter and Facebook affected the intention of youths to vote during the 2023 general election. The uses and gratification theory and agenda-setting theory provided theoretical justifications. From a population of 50,765 University of Lagos undergraduates, a sample size of 422 was calculated while the multi-stage sampling technique was used to get the final respondents. Questionnaire was the survey instrument and administration was online through departmental WhatsApp platforms. Findings revealed that youths involvement in political issues on social media will not positively influence their intention to vote ($\beta = -0.070$, $t = -1.364$, $p > 0.05$). In other words, youths' involvement in political issues on social media possibly cannot be used to determine their intention to vote. It is therefore recommended that political organizers and activists who seek to engage and mobilize youths for political engagement through the social media; understand the specific needs and motivations of individuals.

Keywords: Political Cyber-Activism, Youth, Intention to Vote, Social Media, Social Mobilization, Political Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian mass media has been used for political activism since her independence in 1960. This mass-mediated political activism culture was introduced during the nationalists' struggle for self-rule when Ernest Ikoli and Nnamdi Azikiwe used the mass media (newspaper) to engage in political discourse (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). Today, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media channels are available for effective social mobilization. Social media has developed into a viable instrument for influencing and educating the public on political issues according to numerous studies. The use of cyber activism otherwise known as digital activism has brought about important changes in the public spheres.

Oseni (2015) observed that right from the start of the campaign, through voting to the collation of results and the subsequent proclamation of winners by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), social media were formidable forces in getting the masses involved. This suggests a strong relationship between political participation and social media. In the 2015

general election in Nigeria, Facebook was employed due to its participatory nature as a platform for political campaign and a tool to help political aspirants to disseminate information easily as well as mobilize voters (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). It was however observed that the number of social media support groups used by influencers for elections doubled in 2023. TikTok emerged one of the most important platforms in the run-up to the 2023 elections given its ability to catch attention span of people (particularly youth) in just a few seconds. This is in addition to the huge roles still played by older social media like WhatsApp and Facebook (Daily Trust, 2023).

The EndSars campaign is one instance where Nigerian youths were spurred into action through activism efforts on social media. The protest led many Nigerian youths to resolve to be more politically conscious as the next 2023 election approached. Nonetheless, it is yet to be established if the level of cyber engagement overtime has affected the people's intention to vote. This is especially because INEC reported that although a large number of people registered to vote in the country, many of whom are youth, there is a huge gap in the number of registrations that have been completed and Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) collected (The Punch, 2022). This implies that while a lot of activism takes place on social media, the youths may not convert their online zeal to physical action of voting during the 2023 general election. This concern was affirmed by INEC's Deputy Director (voter education) who said: "it is votes and not social media that would determine the winners of the 2023 general elections" (The Punch, 2022).

The use of micro blogging service (Twitter & Facebook) by politicians in Nigeria is gradually increasing with such platforms serving as spaces for holding debates with the aim of gaining supporters. Although Twitter is effective for social protests as witnessed in the #EndSars campaign as a magnificent and functional tool for creating a strong tie and thick engagement during and after the protest, the effect of Twitter is temporal as the ties created may get weak daily (Akerele-Popoola, Azeez and Adeniyi, 2022).

There are concerns that while there are many politically engaged educated youths on social media, only a few of them translate their activism into actual participation or voting. Since the return of the civil rule, Nigeria has conducted five general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015) and they were all noted for the low levels of youth participation as candidates despite their determining role as voters and election administrators (Yiaga Africa, 2020). The 2019 general elections was different as INEC (2019) revealed that of the 84 million citizens that were registered voters, the youths within the age group of 18-35 constituted the highest population (51.11%) of Nigerians to vote (The Vanguard, 2023).

The 2023 voters registration statistics however showed a decline. Despite the constant cyber-activism on the upcoming 2023 general elections on different social media platforms, INEC's Public Affairs Officer, Adenike Oriowo told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that as of October 21, 2022, 37,832 of 60,370 newly printed permanent voters card for new registrants were still uncollected, six months after its release. It was also revealed that out of over 10 million registrants, the youths have the largest number with 6,081,456 which is about 58% of those registered in the country for the general elections (The Punch, 2022). INEC Chairman,

Mahmood Yakubu further disclosed that of the 93 million eligible voters, 37 million are youths, that is, 39.65% of the total population (The Cable, 2023).

The #EndSars protest may have started an online conversation canvassing youths to come out enmasse to vote during the 2023 general election, but there is a drastic drop of 11.46% from the number of registered voters in 2019 compared with 2023. Although the electoral body, INEC noted an increase in registration for PVC particularly from the youth but there has been a significant decrease in the completion of registration and collection of the PVCs (The Punch, 2022). This begs the question: was the political activism of youths on social media prior to the 2023 Nigeria's general election just a social media movement or was there an intention to vote? It is therefore crucial to understand and determine how political cyber activism on Twitter & Facebook influenced the intention of youths in Nigeria to vote.

Youth and political participation in West Africa

The role of youth in the democratisation process of politics has been a subject of debate among West African scholars. Many studies revealed the marginalisation of youths in party system democracy even when they constitute a larger percentage of the populace. While examining the place of youth in the political participation and developmental process in Nigeria from official documents of Nigerian government, Sunday and Ekhosuehi (2013) emphasized the need for Nigeria to consolidate democracy and attain political maturity through youth-government collaboration in the political participation and sustainable process. Taiwo (2014) observed that the marginalization of West African youths has been a trend from the past which has unfortunately been worsened in recent times given the current practice of deploying youths as agents of social disorder in the absence of positive engagement.

Exploring further the need for youth engagement in political process of African nations, Akpan (2015), revealed that youths are the central theme of political violence due to the fact that they are not given proper and enough attention in the Nigerian project. Among other reasons, he noted that the youths are unemployed and underemployed, lack access to basic amenities such as food, medical facilities, good education; they are not always consulted in the decision-making that affects the nation. Hence, they contribute to the insecurity challenges of the nation because they themselves are insecure and helpless. This is why they become willing tools for thuggery and violence in the hand of "money bag" politicians during elections. The theoretical linkage between the negative behavioural tendencies and roles currently played by contemporary Nigeria youths in grassroots politics explored by Akinrinde and Omitola (2020), showed that the present overarching political culture in the Nigerian system is a major determinant of the type of behaviour that are being exhibited by contemporary Nigerian youths at the grassroots level. The scholars advocate for the need to put in place the right political culture and indoctrinating the Nigerian youths with the process of socialization for positive engagements in grassroots politics.

Philosophising the youth inclusion in Nigerian politics by analysing trends, challenges and prospects of youth participation in the political discourses in Nigeria, Ibezim (2019) noted that despite the fact that youth account for high proportion (70% and more) of the Nigerian

population, they are extremely excluded from socio-economic and political spheres. He added that even though some legal protections and advocacies have been attempted by the Nigerian youth, most of these youth-related policies and programs are paper values.

Ahead of the 2023 general elections, Mukhtar (2020) noted that low level participation by the citizens has been the trend from 1999 to 2019 elections because of some impediments such as insufficient education among citizens, wide spread poverty, elite manipulation of the political process, monetisation of the electioneering process, corrupt and inexperienced officials, marginalisation, political violence and insecurity in the process that affect the legitimacy of the political class.

Social Media as a tool for Political Participation among Nigerian youths

According to Ayesha and Ayesha (2016), social media is a contemporary innovation that has been adopted by people all over the world as a crucial tool for political activism. Social media and democratic principles are increasingly and persistently linked as social media platforms have become important channel for political communication. Gilardi (2021) noted that social media and democracy now included political mobilization, campaign strategies, public opinion polarization, and governance tools and channels began to shift in his most recent research on digital democracy.

According to Park (2013), the opinion leadership on social media specifically on Twitter has a great role to play in mobilizing and motivating the social or political expressions of people. In both developed and developing nations, including Nigeria, Youth Activists frequently utilize social media, particularly Twitter, as a platform to gather supporters and mobilize participation in effort to affect societal events, notably politics. Social media has gained so much popularity amongst individuals due to its accessible nature of self-expression and communication especially with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Oginni and Moitui, 2015). Today, social media continue to play an important role in communicating and sharing information, exchange ideas, and develop movements that lead to social change.

Several studies have revealed a high usage of social media among Nigerian youths. Omotola and Aiyedogbon (2012) noted that youths majorly used social media to participate in political advocacy, political campaigns, communicating with politicians, political discussions, monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices, public consultations, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, blogging about political issues, and writing letters to public officials respectively. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and computer self-efficacy significantly influence the use of social media for political participation.

Additionally, Dagona et al (2013) explored the connection between youth's political attitudes on Facebook and their online political participation. The study concluded that Facebook usage allows people with diverse viewpoints to get together and have political conversations. In the same vein, Uzoma and Anthony investigated the influence of social media on voting patterns of Enugu state youths in the 2015 general election in Nigeria. The study revealed that social media enhanced the conduct of the election as it offered the avenue for youths' engagement in political mobilization, electoral campaigns, involvement in political discussion and

participation. In addition, exposure to electoral manifestoes and political candidates' interaction with voters as well as monitoring of election results, were believed to have contributed to the acceptance of the outcome of the process. However, it was observed that a number of traditional political culture and means of political socialization still exert great influence on the political behaviour of youths despite the popularity of the social media.

Rufai (2019) noted in his study on the impact of social media on youths' political participation in the 2019 Nigeria general election that social media did have a positive influence on youths' participation in the political and electoral process. It was revealed that social media influenced their choice of candidates although there is no guarantee that the youths voted for any political candidate because of their social media presence.

Morah and Uzochukwu (2019) investigated how young people in three states of Enugu, Anambra and Ogun states were politically stimulated to participate during the 2015 Presidential Elections due to their social media presence through mobile technologies. It was concluded that numerous mobile text messages and social media updates sent by politicians during the campaign influenced voting decisions, though with a minimal effect. In another study, Izogo et al (2020) examined how millennials' real-world political participation is influenced by the many values encoded in social media, political word-of-mouth (WOM) and citizen involvement. The study proved that millennials support activism and are more likely to critique the quality of governance. Millennials are more inclined to participate in voluntary efforts to establish effective democratic governance during elections. Additionally, millennials are less swayed by partisan brand loyalty and are more concerned with what is effective, regardless of party affiliation. However, millennials' political engagement on social media does not closely correlate with their actual political engagement or voting behaviour.

In another study, Uzoma and Anthony (2015) observed that social media offered the avenue for youths' engagement in political mobilization, electoral campaigns, involvement in political discussion, exposure to electoral manifestoes and interactions between politicians and the voters. Akinyetun (2021), reports that despite the youths being at about 28% of the total population (52.2 million), they are still largely marginalized from governance, leaving them helpless to counter their continued exclusion. According to one of the prominent activists of the #EndSARS and the #GetYourPvc campaign, Rinu Oduala, online spaces have become democratized and participatory politics through social media has helped to create a political climate in which the agenda-setting voices of young people (Youths) are at the fore front (ThePunch, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

The uses and gratification theory and the agenda setting theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. The uses and gratification theory established the framework for understanding the connection between the media and the audience(s) postulating that the audience is seen as an active participant in the mass communication process, taking effort to link media preferences with personal fulfilment. In other words, media audience who in this context are electorates use the media to source for relevant political information for active

participation in the election process. The second theory - Agenda-Setting, describes how the media influence the importance attached to a topic is on the public agenda by suggesting a significant association between what is believed to be the most crucial election topic and what the local media had reported to be the problem. Therefore, this study affirms the argument by scholars that the media highlights the topic which the public perceive as significant. Many social media platforms now serve as outlets for political advancement and discussions among political figures, agencies, aspirants and their followers. Thus, the theory illustrates how political agendas such as the importance of getting the permanent voter's card and also the need to vote, can be set as social media agenda during elections.

METHODS

This study adopted the quantitative survey research method. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire from University of Lagos part-time and full-time undergraduates with a population size of 50,765 (University of Lagos, Nigeria 2019/2020 pocket statistics). Using the Slovin's formula, a sample size of 400 was determined. Multi stage sampling technique was used to determine the final respondents through a gradual step-by-step approach by first selecting 3 of the 12 faculties using the fish bowl method of the simple random sampling technique. The 3 faculties selected are Law, Clinical sciences and Management science. One department each was selected using the simple random sampling technique at the second stage and these include Law, Physiology and Accounting. Through proportional sampling, 98 students were selected from the Law department, 92 from Physiology and 227 from accounting. Final respondents were purposively determined based on the criteria that they are 300, 400 and 500 level students of the selected departments who are between the ages of 18-35 years. Since they are within the voting age and educated, they are perceived to be more politically aware. The instrument was administered online with links sent to the official student WhatsApp group platforms for each department.

A face and content validity tests were performed to gauge the effectiveness of the instrument. In addition, construct validity was used to evaluate the extent to which the research instrument measured accurately the things the study sought to find. The reliability of the instrument was tested through a pilot study among 41 students of another public university - Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. The Cronbach's alpha reliability result suggested that all the constructs of the study had good internal consistency with a least score of 0.718.

RESULTS

The study investigated Political Cyber Activism and Intention to vote during the 2023 Presidential Election. Out of the four hundred and seventeen copies of the questionnaire, three hundred and eighty were returned and validated for analysis. Five research questions and one hypothesis guided this study. Results are presented and discussed in this section. Most of the respondents (57.4%) make use of social media every day.

Level of involvement of respondents in political issues on social media

Table 1: Level of involvement in political issues on social media

Items	VH level F (%)	H level F (%)	L level F (%)	VL level F (%)	N level F (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
Twitter (mean=2.79, SD=1.34)							
I access political issues on Twitter	57 (15.0%)	53 (13.9%)	103 (27.1%)	100 (14.5%)	63 (26.3%)	3.18	1.30
I contribute to political issues on Twitter	88 (22.3%)	81 (21.3%)	104 (27.4%)	62 (16.3%)	45 (11.8%)	2.72	1.31
I engage with politicians on Twitter	86 (22.6%)	77 (20.3%)	99 (26.1%)	75 (19.7%)	43 (11.3%)	2.77	1.31
I contribute to security discussions on Twitter	93 (24.5%)	78 (20.5%)	100 (26.3%)	60 (18.8%)	49 (12.9%)	2.72	1.34
I discuss the problems of the cashless society on Twitter	93 (24.5%)	73 (19.2%)	90 (23.7%)	66 (17.4%)	58 (15.3%)	2.80	1.39
I debate on ways to influence the lack of job erections with political candidates on Twitter	101 (26.6%)	76 (20.0%)	99 (26.1%)	56 (14.7%)	48 (12.6%)	2.67	1.35
I discuss inflation of prices on Twitter	104 (27.4%)	71 (18.7%)	92 (24.2%)	63 (16.6%)	50 (13.2%)	2.69	1.38
Facebook(mean=2.33, SD=1.42)							
I access political issues on Facebook	156 (41.1%)	62 (16.3%)	64 (16.8%)	57 (15.0%)	41 (10.8%)	2.38	1.42
I contribute to political issues on Facebook	151 (39.7%)	72 (18.9%)	65 (17.1%)	52 (13.7%)	40 (10.5%)	2.36	1.39
I engage with politicians on Facebook	162 (42.6%)	65 (17.1%)	52 (13.7%)	59 (15.5%)	42 (11.1%)	2.35	1.44
I contribute to security discussions on Facebook	162 (42.6%)	81 (21.3%)	62 (16.3%)	36 (9.5%)	39 (10.3%)	2.23	1.36
I discuss the problems of the cashless society on Facebook	159 (41.8%)	65 (17.1%)	60 (15.8%)	53 (13.9%)	43 (11.3%)	2.36	1.43
I debate on ways to influence the lack of job erections with political candidates on Facebook	166 (43.7%)	69 (18.2%)	56 (14.7%)	48 (12.6%)	41 (10.8%)	2.29	1.41
I discuss inflation of prices on Facebook	161 (42.4%)	66 (17.4%)	55 (14.5%)	47 (12.4%)	51 (13.4%)	2.37	1.46
Average Mean						2.36	1.38

Key: VHL=Very high level, HL= High level, LL= Low level, VLL= Very low level; NL=No level. Decision rule if mean is: 1-1.49= NL; 1.5-2.49= VLL; 2.5-3.49= LL; 3.5-4.49= HL 4.5-5.0= VHL

Respondents to a low level, accessed political issues on Twitter (mean=3.18, SD=1.30), contributed to political issues (mean=2.72, SD=1.31), engaged with politicians (mean=2.77, SD=1.31), contributed to security issues (mean=2.72, SD=1.31) and discussed the problems of cashless society (mean=2.80, SD=1.39). In addition, respondents to a low level debated on

ways to influence the lack of jobs erections with the political candidates on Twitter (mean=2.67, SD=1.35), they to a low level discussed inflation of prices (mean=2.69, SD=1.38). On Facebook, respondents to a very low level accessed political issues (mean=2.38, SD=1.42), contributed to political issues (mean=2.36, SD=1.39), engaged with politicians on Facebook (mean=2.35, SD=1.44), contributed to security discussions (mean=2.23, SD=1.36), discussed the problems of the cashless society (mean=2.36, SD=1.43), debated on ways to influence the lack of job erections with political candidates (mean=2.29, SD=1.41) and discussed the inflation of prices on Facebook (mean=2.37, SD=1.46). With the average mean of 2.36, it may be inferred that there is a low level of involvement in political issues on social media.

Extent of participation in political issues in real life

Table 2: Extent of participation in political issues in real life

Items	VH Extent F (%)	H Extent F (%)	Low Extent F (%)	VL Extent F (%)	No Extent F (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
I discuss politics with my friends physically	44 (11.6%)	58 (15.3%)	89 (23.2%)	112 (29.5%)	77 (20.3%)	3.32	1.28
I engage in political campaigns and debates in real life	75 (19.7%)	67 (17.6%)	95 (25.0%)	90 (23.7%)	53 (13.9%)	2.94	1.33
I joined a political party in order to be involved in politics	158 (41.6%)	57 (15.0%)	77 (20.3%)	45 (11.8%)	43 (11.3%)	2.36	1.41
I organize educative political programmes	165 (43.4%)	62 (16.3%)	67 (17.6%)	37 (9.7%)	49 (12.9%)	2.32	1.44
I organize political retreat	171 (45.0%)	55 (14.5%)	63 (16.6%)	42 (11.1%)	49 (12.9%)	2.32	1.44
I organize voters' training	180 (47.2%)	62 (16.3%)	48 (12.6%)	49 (12.9%)	41 (10.8%)	2.23	1.43
Average mean						2.58	1.38

Key: VHE= Very high extent; HE=High extent; LE=Low extent; VLE=Very low extent; NE=No extent

Decision rule if mean is: 1-1.49= NE; 1.5-2.49= VLE; 2.5-3.49= LE; 3.5-4.49= HE; 4.5-5.0= VHE

The analysis shows the responses of the respondents their level of participation in political activities in real life. Respondents discussed politics with friends physically to a low extent (mean=3.32,SD=1.28), they engaged in political campaigns and debates in real life to a low extent (mean=2.94, SD=1.33), they however to a very low extent joined a political party in order to be involved in politics (mean=2.36, SD=1.41), they also to a very low extent organized educative political programs(mean=2.32, SD=1.44), they to very low extent organized a political retreat (mean=2.32, SD=1.44), they to a very low extent organized voters training(mean=2.23, SD=1.43). The average mean of 2.58 showed that respondents to a low extent participated in political activities in real life.

Extent to which respondents were influenced to register to vote via social media sensitisation

Table 3: Extent to which social media sensitisation influenced students to register to vote

Items	VH Extent F (%)	H Extent F (%)	Low Extent F (%)	VL Extent F (%)	No extent F (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Media sensitization prompted me to register to vote	76 (20.8%)	58 (26.4%)	69 (18.4%)	97 (15.0%)	80 (19.4%)	3.12	1.43
Social media discussions encouraged me to register for PVC	75 (19.7%)	71 (18.7%)	47 (12.4%)	105 (27.6%)	82 (21.6%)	3.13	1.45
Political issues on social media prompted me to collect my PVC	68 (17.9%)	65 (17.1%)	70 (18.4%)	96 (25.3%)	81 (21.3%)	3.15	1.41
Average Mean						1.88	1.43

Key: VHE= Very high extent; HE=High extent; LE=Low extent; VLE=Very low extent; NE=No extent

Decision rule if mean is: 1-1.49= NE; 1.5-2.49= VLE; 2.5-3.49= LE; 3.5-4.49= HE; 4.5-5.0= VHE

Respondents stated to a low extent that the social media sensitization prompted them to register to vote (mean=3.12, SD=1.43), social media discussion encouraged them to register for PVC (mean=3.13, SD=1.45), social media prompted them to collect their PVC (mean=3.13, SD=1.41). The average mean 1.88 and SD=1.43 show that there was low level of influence to register to vote via social media.

Extent to which exposure to political activism on social media influenced decision to vote

Table 4: Level of exposure to political activism on social media

Variable	VH level F (%)	H level F (%)	L level F (%)	VL level F (%)	N level F (%)	Mean	S.D
Political activism contents on Twitter influenced my intention/decision to vote	88 (23.2%)	66 (17.4%)	64 (16.8%)	86 (22.6%)	76 (22.0%)	2.99	1.46
Political activism contents on Twitter influenced my choice of candidate	69 (18.2%)	72 (18.9%)	88 (23.2%)	94 (24.7%)	57 (15.0%)	2.99	1.33
Political activism contents on Twitter impacted my involvement in political activities	82 (22.9%)	63 (16.6%)	69 (18.2%)	102 (26.8%)	59 (15.5%)	2.96	1.41
Political activism contents on Facebook influenced my intention/decision to vote	142 (37.9%)	78 (15.5%)	62 (17.4%)	59 (16.8%)	39 (12.4%)	2.41	1.39

Political activism contents on Facebook influenced my choice of candidate	144 (12.1%)	59 (17.1%)	66 (18.1%)	64 (14.1%)	47 (38.6%)	2.50	1.45
Political activism contents on Facebook impacted my involvement in political activities	144 (37.9%)	75 (19.7%)	67 (17.6%)	60 (15.8%)	34 (8.9%)	2.38	1.36
Average Mean						2.71	1.40

Key: VHL=Very high level, HL= High level, LL= Low level, VLL= Very low level; NL=No level. Decision rule if mean is: 1-1.49= NL; 1.5-2.49= VLL; 2.5-3.49= LL; 3.5-4.49= HL 4.5-5.0= VHL

From the analysis of results, respondents stated that political activism on Twitter influenced their intention/decision to vote to a low level (mean=2.99, SD=1.46), political activism on Twitter influenced their choice of candidate to a low level (mean=2.99, SD=1.33), political activism on Twitter impacted their involvement in political activities to a low level, (mean=2.96, SD=1.41). To a very low level, political activism on Facebook influenced their intention/decision to vote (mean=2.41, SD=1.39), to a low level political activism on Facebook influenced their choice of candidate (mean=2.50, SD=1.45) and to a very low level political activism on Facebook impacted their involvement in political activities (mean=2.38, SD=1.36). The average mean of 2.71 and SD=1.40 shows that to a low level the respondents' decision to vote were influenced through political activism on social media.

Involvement of respondents in political issues on social media and intention to vote

From the analysis of results, it is evident that respondents affirmed that they intended to vote during the 2023 elections (mean=1.39, SD=.49), they affirmed that Twitter campaigns for the 2023 elections will influence their intention to vote (mean=1.47, SD=.50) and disagreed that Facebook campaigns for 2023 general elections will influence their intention to vote.

Table 5: Political issues involvement on social media and intention to vote

Variable	Yes F (%)	No F (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
I intend to vote during the 2023 General elections	233 (53.4%)	147 (46.6%)	1.39	.49
Twitter campaigns for the 2023 General election influenced my intention to vote	203 (53.4%)	177 (46.6%)	1.47	.50
Facebook campaigns for the 2023 General election influenced my intention to vote	124 (32.6%)	256 (67.4%)	1.67	.47
Average Mean			1.51	.49

Decision rule if mean is: 1-1.51 = Negative = 0-3 and Positive = 3.1 - 6

Test of hypothesis

The involvement of youths in political issues on social media will positively influence their intention to vote.

Table 6: Involvement of youths in political issues on social media will positively influence their intention to vote

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	R ²
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.701	.134			
	Involvement	-.070	.071			
a. Dependent Variable: Intention to vote						

Table 6 shows that involvement of youths in political issues on social media will not positively influence their intention to vote ($\beta = -0.070$, $t = -1.364$, $p > 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Involvement of youths in political issues on social media was found to have a strong positive relationship with no intention to vote ($r = .173$, $p > 0.05$). Additionally, the regression model shows that involvement of youths in political issues on social media predicts 0.5% variance in the intention to vote ($R^2 = 0.005$). This indicates that their involvement in political issues on social media possibly cannot be used to determine their intention to vote.

DISCUSSION

Level of involvement in political issues on social media

The result shows that respondents had low level of involvement in political issues on social media. This finding is consistent with the findings of Mukhtar (2020) who noted that low level participation by the citizens has been the trend from 1999 to 2019 general elections due to flaws of insufficient education among citizens, wide spread poverty, elite manipulation of the political process, monetisation of the electioneering process, corrupt and inexperienced officials, marginalisation, political violence and insecurity in the process that affect the legitimacy of the political class. This finding is also in keeping with the finding of Ibezim (2019) who asserted that despite the fact that youth account for high proportion (70% and more) of the Nigerian population are extremely excluded from socio-economic and political spheres although some legal protections and advocacies have been attempted by the Nigerian youth, most of these youth-related policies and programs are paper values. Also, Akinyetun (2021) reports that despite the youths being at about 28% of the total population (52.2 million), they are still largely marginalized from governance and helpless to counter their continued exclusion. This is backed up with evidence of the lower percentage of youth that hold political and leadership positions in the country.

Taiwo (2014) corroborates this result by observing that the marginalization of West African youths has been part and parcel of history only that their situation has further raised their stake as agent of social disorder in the absence of positive engagement in recent times. Umar and Isa (2021) assert that short-sighted policymaking fails to properly integrate the youth's needs.

Youths are not involved in political and economic structures; hence they indulge in series of agitations and violent acts of political thuggery, armed robbery and other negative vices.

Extent of participation in political issues in real life

The study found that respondents to a low extent participated in political activities in real life. Teng and Joo (2016) established that political participation in real life can take many different forms, ranging from voting and attending political rallies to volunteering for a political campaign or running for office. Affirming this stand, Sajid (2015) confirmed that political participation in real life include attending political rallies or protests, contacting elected officials, and volunteering for political campaigns. While the level of political participation can vary depending on factors such as age, income, education, and political affiliation, research suggests that these forms of political participation are less common than voting, particularly among young people. Uwalaka (2020) noted that voter turnout in the United States has historically been lower among young people and minorities. A study by Nwabunze and Okoye (2019) affirmed that while young people are more likely than older generations to use social media for political purposes, they are less likely to engage in traditional forms of political participation such as attending rallies or contacting elected officials.

Extent to which social media discussions influenced students to register to vote

The findings show that social media discussions to a low extent influenced respondents to register to vote. Although several studies have shown that social media has a significant impact on young people's political engagement and participation, including their decision to register to vote, the findings of this study negate the Ibrahim's (2019) position that students who were exposed to political content on social media were more likely to register to vote than those who were not exposed to such content. It equally contradicts Zepeda-Millán and Karnig's (2017) conclusion that young people who were exposed to political content on social media were more likely to register to vote than those who were not exposed to such content. The implication of this finding is that social media discussions may just be one of many factors that influence political engagement and participation. Hence, other factors such as political interest and education may be equally influential.

Level of exposure of political cyber-activism on social media

The study shows that the respondents to a low level were exposed to cyber activism on social media. A study by the Pew Research Centre found that political content on social media is often highly polarized and tends to be shared among like-minded individuals, rather than reaching a broad audience. The study found that political content on social media is often dominated by a small group of highly active users, who are more likely to share content that aligns with their political views. In line with this study, Dagona et al. (2013) found that political cyber activism content on social media tends to be more effective when it is shared by trusted sources, such as friends and family members. In other words, social media users are more likely to engage with political content when it is shared by someone they know and trust. In addition, Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg (2019) found that the reach of political cyber activism content on social media can be limited by algorithms and platform policies. The study found that social media

platforms such as Facebook and Twitter tend to limit the reach of political content, particularly content that is deemed to be controversial or divisive. Adeleke (2016) suggest that the reach and impact of political cyber activism content on social media can be limited by a range of factors, including the platform used, the reach of the content, and the target audience. The low level of exposure to political cyber activism content may also be explained theoretically based on the principle of the uses and gratification theory which suggests that individuals actively seek out and use media to fulfil specific needs or gratifications, rather than being passive recipients of media messages. This implies that individuals will only seek out political activism contents on social media if contents will help them fulfil their needs for social interaction or strengthen their sense of personal identity. Hence, they will only use the media to seek for political information to better understand the issues and policies that affect their lives and the lives of others (Matseshe-Crawford & Foster, 2019).

Influence of involvement in political issues on social media on intention to vote

The findings revealed that most of the respondents had intentions to vote. While Twitter campaigns influenced their intention to vote, Facebook campaigns did not influence their intention to vote. Although Bond et al. (2012) found that social media use was positively associated with political participation, including intention to vote, Izogo et al. (2020) found that the effect was stronger for those who were not already politically engaged. Matseshe-Crawford and Foster (2019) added that social media users were more likely to say that they planned to vote than those who did not use social media implying that respondents intention to vote may be due to their social media.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

At the conclusion of the 2023 Nigeria's general election, it was declared the election with the worst turnout in Africa. The study was motivated by the concern that political cyber activism may not always translate to participation in political activities in real life. Findings revealed that this position to a large extent reflects the reality that youths (with a higher number of voter registration) who are within the voting age and are educated (undergraduates in one of the leading public Universities in Nigeria, University of Lagos), had low level of involvement in political issues on social media and to a low extent participated in political activities in real life. In addition, social media discussions to a low extent influenced respondents to register to vote and to a low level exposed them to cyber activism. Hence, it is concluded that respondents did not have any intention to vote based on their political involvement on social media or political cyber activism. Impliedly, although cyber or digital activism has emerged as an important tool for political and social change allowing individuals and groups to promote their goals and causes using digital technologies, the impact of social media and digital activism on politics can be complex and multifaceted depending on a range of factors, including the specific content and platform used. Therefore, it is valuable for political organizers and activists who seek to engage and mobilize individuals for political reasons to understand the specific needs and motivations of individuals. This understanding will help them tailor their messaging and activities to better resonate with their target audience and ultimately achieve the desired goals.

References

- 1) Adeleke, G. F. (2016). Influence of dimensional incentives on voters' turnout in 2014 and 2015 gubernatorial elections in Southwestern, Nigeria. *International Journal of Community Research*, 5(3), 95–105.
- 2) Akerele-Popoola, O. E., Azeez, A. and Adeniyi, A. (2022). Twitter, civil activisms and EndSARS protest in Nigeria as a developing democracy. *Cogent Social Sciences* 8(1). DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2022.2095744
- 3) Akinrinde, O.O. & Omitola, B. (2020). The Nigerian political culture and youths' participation in grassroots politics: a theoretical discourse. In Oni, M.A., Yacob-Haliso, O. and Nwogwugwu, N. ed. *Local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria: critical perspectives*. Babcock University Press.
- 4) Akinyetun, T. (2021). Youth political participation, good governance and social inclusion in Nigeria: evidence from nairaland. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, Vol. 13(2), pp.1-13.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.29173/cjfy29648>
- 5) Akpan, D.A. (2015) Appraisal of the role of political violence: the development of youths in Nigeria in the 21st century. *African Research Review*, vol. 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v9i3.13>.
- 6) Apuke, O.D. & Tunca, E.A. (2018). Understanding the implications of social media usage in the electoral processes and campaigns in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*. <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/understanding-the-implications-of-social-media-usage-in-the-electoral-processes-and-campaigns-in-nigeria.php?aid=87285>
- 7) Ayesha, K. and Ayesha, F. (2023). Emerging role of social media in political activism: perceptions and practices. *South Asian Studies*, vol. 31(1), pp381-396.
http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/csas/PDF/25%20Ayesha%20Karamat_v31_no1_jan-jun2016.pdf
- 8) Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2019). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555>
- 9) Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization. *Nature*, 489(7415), 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11421>
- 10) Dagona, Z. K., Karick, H., & Abubakar, F. M. (2013). Youth Participation in Social media and Political Attitudes in Nigeria. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice*, Vol. 5(1).
https://icidr.org/Jspap_Vol5_No1_April2013/Youth%20Participation%20in%20Social%20Media%20and%20Political%20Attitudes%20in%20Nigeria.pdf
- 11) Daily Trust (2023). How influencers, politicians mislead Nigerians ahead of elections. <https://dailytrust.com/how-influencers-politicians-mislead-nigerians-ahead-of-elections/>
- 12) Gilardi, F. (2021). Digital technology, politics and policy making. A publication in the “Elements in public policy” series, Cambridge University Press. <https://www.fabriziogilardi.org/resources/papers/Digital-Technology-Politics-Policy-Making.pdf>
- 13) Ibezim, E. A. C. (2019). The Philosophy of Youth Inclusion in Nigerian Politics: Trend, Challenges and Prospect. *UNIZIK Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Vol. 11 No. 1 (2019). <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/view/190041>
- 14) Izogo, E. E., Uduma, N. E., Ituma, E., Ogba, F. N., & Binuomote, M. O. (2020). Social media political word-of-mouth and citizens' involvement: a potent mix for enhancing real-world political participation amongst millennials. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.22654.41282>
- 15) Morah, D.S. & Uzochukwu, C.E. (2019). Nigeria's social media culture: exploring civic participation of youths in the 2015 presidential election. *International Journal of Advance Study and Research Work*, vol.

- 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2536135>.
- 16) Mukhongo, L.L. (2015) Online political activism among young people in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Encyclopaedia of Information Science and Technology* (3rd ed.) DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5888-2.CH630.
 - 17) Nwabunze, U.O. & Okoye, A.C. (2019). Influence of social media on voting patterns of enugu state youths in 2015 general elections in Nigeria. *Ntatvc Journal of Communication*, 3(2), 49–67. <https://journal.ntatvc.edu.ng/index.php/ntatvcjc/article/view/25>
 - 18) Oginni, O.S. & Moitui, J.N. (2015). Social Media and Public Policy in Africa: Towards Enhanced Policy Process in Digital Age. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, vol. 14(2), pp. 158-172. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283328407_Social_Media_and_Public_Policy_in_Africa_Towards_Enhanced_Policy_Process_in_Digital_Age
 - 19) Olaiya, T. A. (2014). Youth and Ethnic Movements and Their Impacts on Party Politics in ECOWAS Member States. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), 215824401452207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522072>
 - 20) Omotola, S. & Aiyedogbon, G. (2012). Political participation and voter turnout in Nigeria's 2011 elections. Doi:10.20940/jae/2012/v11i1a4.
 - 21) Oseni, A.L. Social media revolutionises Nigerian election. *Pambazuka News*. <https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/social-media-revolutionizes-nigerian-election>
 - 22) Park, C.S. (2013). Does Twitter motivate involvement in politics? Tweeting, opinion leadership, and political engagement? *Computers in Human Behaviour*, vol. 29(4), pp. 1641-1648. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.01.044>.
 - 23) Rufai, I.K. (2019). The impact of social media on University of Ilorin undergraduates' level of political participation in the 2019 Nigeria general elections. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14400.07686>.
 - 24) Sajid, R. (2015). (Pdf) impact of social media on political efficacy and vote intention: a case of educated youth. *Researchgate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312582662_impact_of_social_media_on_political_efficacy_and_vote_intention_a_case_of_educated_youth
 - 25) Sunday, O.U. & Ekhosuchi, O. (2019). Youth in political participation and development: relevance, challenges and expectations in the 21st century. *Journal of sustainable development in Africa*, vol. 15(4). <https://jsd-africa.com/Jsda/Vol15No4-Summer2013B/PDF/Youth%20in%20Political%20Participation%20and%20Development.Sunday%20Okungbowa%20Uhunmwuango.pdf>
 - 26) Taiwo, A.O. (2014) Youth and ethnic movements and their impacts on party politics in ECOWAS member states. *Sage Open*, vol. 4(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522072>
 - 27) Teng, C.E. & Joo, T.M. (2016). Social media: the major trigger of online and offline political activism. *International journal of humanities and social sciences*, 10(4), 1299–1309. <https://publications.waset.org/10004381/social-media-the-major-trigger-of-online-and-offline-political-activism>
 - 28) The Cable (2023). INEC: 93.4m persons eligible to vote – including 37m youths. <https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-93-4m-persons-eligible-to-vote-says-inec>
 - 29) The Punch (2022) INEC laments low turnout, 20million PVCs unclaimed. <https://punchng.com/inec-laments-low-turnout-says-20-million-pvcs-unclaimed/>
 - 30) Umar, L.Y. & Isa, S.B. (2021). Youth movement: an examination of end special anti-robbery squad (EndSARS) protests and challenges facing Nigerian youths. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, vol. 11(2), 379-386. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.11.02.2021.p11046>

- 31) Uhlaner, C.J. (2015). Politics and participation. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (2nd ed.). ScienceDirect.
- 32) Uwalaka, T., & Watkins, J. (2018). Social Media as the Fifth Estate in Nigeria: An Analysis of the 2012 Occupy Nigeria Protest. *African Journalism Studies*, *African Journalism Studies Volume 39*, 2018(4), 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1473274>
- 33) Uwalaka, T. (2020). Clicktivism and Political Engagement in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC)*, Vol. 17, No. 1. <https://tnjc.org.ng/wp-content/uploads/Vol17N1Full/Clicktivism-and-Political-Engagement-in-Nigeria.pdf>
- 34) Yiaga Africa (2019). How youth fared in the 2019 election. <https://yiaga.org/publications/how-youth-fared-in-the-2019/>
- 35) Zepeda-millán.c., & Karnig. a. (2017). Si se puede! Latino vote buying and the election of the first: Latina Mayor of Santana, California". *Social science quarterly*, 98(5). doi:10.1111/ssqu.12395