The Impact of Social Media on Political Awareness and Voter Turnout in Delta State

Ayewumi Tamarasere Ejiroghene[1], Okolie Ugo Chuks[2]
[1]Delta State Polytechnic, Department of Mass Communication, Ogwashi-Uku, Nigeria
[2]Delta State University, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Abraka, Nigeria

Contributor email : ugookolie3@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of social media on political awareness, voter turnout, and voter participation among residents of Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined how social media usage influences individuals' knowledge of political processes, their motivation to vote, and their attitudes toward political engagement. Data were collected from 341 respondents using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the relationship between social media and three key political variables. Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong and statistically significant positive relationships between social media use and political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation. These findings indicate that social media plays a vital role in enhancing political consciousness, encouraging electoral participation, and shaping voter behavior in the digital age. The study concludes that leveraging social media platforms can serve as an effective strategy for promoting civic engagement and strengthening democratic participation in the region. Recommendations were offered for policymakers, electoral bodies, and civic organizations to maximize the positive influence of social media while addressing potential limitations.

Keywords : social media; political awareness; voter turnout; civic participation

INTRODUCTION

The research The rapid advancements in digital communication have significantly reshaped the landscape of political participation and electoral engagement worldwide. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have emerged as pivotal tools for political discourse, civic mobilization, and public education. These platforms have not only revolutionized the way information is shared but have also enabled new forms of political interaction and engagement among citizens. In Nigeria, and more specifically in Delta State, the influence of social media on political awareness and voter turnout has become increasingly pronounced. Political actors, including parties, candidates, and the electorate, actively leverage these platforms to share ideas, disseminate campaign materials, exchange opinions, and mobilize support. Through real-time updates, interactive forums, and the ability to directly connect political leaders with voters, social media has evolved into a crucial component of modern democratic processes.

A growing body of scholarly work has explored the multifaceted impact of social media on political dynamics. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) contend that social media has revolutionized political communication, offering a dynamic, user-driven alternative to traditional mass media. They emphasize the role of these digital tools in enhancing direct engagement between voters and leaders. Similarly, Olorunmola (2017) underscores the capacity of social media to elevate political consciousness, particularly among youthful, technologically savvy demographics. Nonetheless, scholars like Ajibade (2020) draw attention to persistent challenges such as misinformation, political polarization, and uneven access to digital technologies, which can undermine the potential benefits of social media as a democratic tool.

Delta State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, presents a nuanced setting for examining the relationship between social media use and political awareness. The state features a socio-culturally diverse population with varying levels of digital literacy and access to internet infrastructure. Urban centers like Asaba and Warri are markedly more connected and digitally active, while many rural communities continue to face challenges such as limited network coverage and inadequate digital resources. Assessing the role of social media in influencing political behavior within this context can provide key insights for policymakers, political strategists, and civil society organizations seeking to enhance participatory democracy.

The growing reliance on social media as a key source of political information has sparked significant debate regarding its true influence on voter awareness and participation. On one hand, scholars like Effing, van Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) argue that social media removes barriers to political engagement by providing citizens with convenient access to political content, discussions, and interactions. These platforms enable users to participate in political debates, follow campaign updates, and form opinions in real time. However, contrasting viewpoints, such as those advanced by Boulianne (2019), warn that social media can also facilitate the spread of misinformation, create ideological echo chambers, and ultimately skew public perceptions. In regions like Delta State, where political orientations are often shaped by complex socio-economic, ethnic, and historical factors, it becomes crucial to determine whether social media genuinely enhances voter participation or merely reaffirms existing political loyalties.

Despite the increasing incorporation of social media into political campaign strategies across Nigeria, voter apathy remains a persistent challenge. Reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reveal a decline in voter turnout in recent election cycles, highlighting concerns about the actual effectiveness of online political engagement in translating into active electoral participation (INEC 2023). This apparent contradiction suggests that while political involvement may appear vibrant in the virtual space, it does not necessarily translate into real-world voting behaviors, a phenomenon that requires closer scrutiny to understand the underlying causes.

Moreover, while social media promotes open political discussions, the widespread dissemination of false or misleading information poses a serious threat to democratic credibility. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) emphasize that the proliferation of fake news can distort voter understanding, fuel political polarization, and erode trust in democratic institutions. In Delta State, where political competition is often intense and emotionally charged, the potential of social media to either strengthen democratic practices or deepen instability is an issue that warrants rigorous investigation. Another obstacle to the democratizing potential of social media is the persistent digital divide. While urban populations typically enjoy greater access to internet services and are thus more likely to participate in online political dialogue, rural communities with inadequate digital infrastructure may be left out of these conversations. This exclusion raises critical concerns about the equity and

inclusivity of social media-driven political engagement and its broader implications for representative democracy in Delta State.

In light of these complexities, this study offers empirical insights into the role of social media in shaping political awareness and influencing voter turnout in Delta State. It critically examines how social media usage impacts voter behavior, assesses the effectiveness of online political campaigns, and analyzes the risks associated with misinformation and unequal access to digital resources. Through this exploration, the study aspires to contribute valuable knowledge to the discourse on digital media's evolving role in political processes in Nigeria and inform strategies for fostering more effective and equitable political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Social Media

Social media has become a powerful catalyst in modern communication, transforming the ways people interact, share information, and engage with societal matters. Fundamentally, social media encompasses online platforms that enable users to create and exchange content through interactive digital networks. Unlike traditional media, which operates through a one-way flow of information from producers to consumers, social media encourages multidirectional communication, giving individuals the ability to both consume and generate content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok highlight the vast range of tools available for sharing text, images, videos, voice notes, and live streams. These platforms blend technology and social interaction, creating spaces where users not only connect personally but also influence cultural dynamics, public opinion, and social behaviors (Treem & Leonardi 2013). Beyond serving as channels for social interaction, social media's influence now extends to politics, education, business, and governance.

In political communication, social media has dramatically reshaped the relationship between the electorate and leaders. As Chadwick and Stromer-Galley (2016) explain, digital platforms allow ordinary citizens to engage directly in political discussions, often bypassing traditional media filters. Real-time communication, online communities, and open access to information have allowed social media to democratize political discourse, amplifying marginalized voices. This trend is particularly significant in developing democracies, where

access to credible political information may be limited by geography or socioeconomic constraints.

Moreover, social media plays a vital role in political mobilization. Research shows that platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter are instrumental in organizing protests, influencing election monitoring, rallying supporters, and spreading campaign messages (Effing, van Hillegersberg & Huibers 2011; Enli 2017). These tools give political actors a direct line to citizens, personalize their outreach, and gather immediate feedback, encouraging more engaged and interactive public participation. Its open and decentralized structure further empowers voters to influence narratives and political outcomes.

However, social media faces notable challenges. One major concern is misinformation, which spreads easily across digital platforms. According to Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018), the ease of content creation makes social media vulnerable to the rapid spread of false or misleading information, potentially skewing public perception and weakening democratic institutions. Additional issues such as cyberbullying, privacy violations, and political manipulation further complicate social media use (Hintz et.al. 2017).

Another critical issue is the digital divide, the disparity in access to technology caused by differences in income, education, geography, and other factors. Van Dijk (2020) notes that this divide prevents many people from accessing or benefiting from social media tools in meaningful ways. In areas like Nigeria, especially rural regions, this exclusion is more severe due to limited internet access and lower digital literacy levels (Udu & Edegbo 2022).

Thus, social media should be seen not just as a technological development but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon that shapes how people communicate and participate in society. Its influence on political behavior, public discourse, and social identity comes with both opportunities and challenges. To fully understand its impact, particularly in regions like Delta State, Nigeria, requires careful consideration of the social, political, and technological factors at play. Continued research is necessary to determine how these platforms can enhance democratic engagement and inclusivity without compromising privacy, accuracy, or security.

Concept of Political Awareness

Political awareness is a vital component of civic engagement, reflecting the extent to which individuals are knowledgeable about political systems, processes, issues, policies, and key actors within society. It involves understanding government structures, electoral

frameworks, political ideologies, citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as current events that shape public policy and governance (Nwankwo 2021). Being politically aware equips citizens to make informed choices, actively participate in governance, and hold leaders accountable, thereby reinforcing democratic principles.

At its essence, political awareness combines both cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Cognitively, it entails grasping the fundamentals of governance, recognizing the functions of political institutions, and critically evaluating political information. Behaviorally, it is reflected through actions such as engaging in political discussions, participating in elections, advocacy efforts, or expressing opinions through digital platforms (Eze 2020). Individuals with higher political awareness are more likely to vote knowledgeably, take part in civic initiatives, and contribute meaningfully to community decision-making.

Media, particularly social media, plays an increasingly important role in shaping political awareness. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp provide avenues for citizens to access political information, interact with political actors, and discuss societal issues (Bode 2016). Unlike traditional media, which often delivers information in a one-way format, social media encourages interactive engagement, fostering a participatory approach to political learning. This is particularly relevant in countries like Nigeria, where conventional media may have limited reach or exhibit biases. Research indicates that exposure to political content via social media enhances knowledge about elections, party policies, and governance, thereby improving political literacy (Onwuegbuzie & Afolabi 2022).

Political awareness is also shaped by socio-demographic factors such as age, education, gender, and digital literacy. Studies show that younger, well-educated, and tech-savvy citizens tend to demonstrate higher levels of political awareness, especially when actively engaging with online platforms (Adebayo & Yusuf 2021). Conversely, individuals in rural areas or those with restricted access to information may exhibit lower levels of awareness, highlighting the need to address information inequities to ensure inclusive political participation.

In modern democracies, political awareness goes beyond merely acquiring knowledge; it involves critical engagement. Politically aware citizens are capable of evaluating policies, scrutinizing government actions, and mobilizing collective initiatives when necessary. This level of engagement is crucial for consolidating democracy, particularly in emerging democratic contexts where challenges such as misinformation, voter apathy, and political manipulation are prevalent (Okonkwo & Chukwuemeka 2022).

Therefore, political awareness is a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, comprehension, and active involvement in political life. It is essential for informed decision-making, accountability, and active citizen participation. The rise of digital media, particularly social media, has expanded opportunities to enhance political awareness; however, challenges such as misinformation, unequal digital access, and socio-cultural barriers must be addressed to optimize its effectiveness. Understanding political awareness within specific contexts, like Delta State, Nigeria, is critical for developing strategies that promote informed civic participation and strengthen democratic governance.

Voter Turnout and Attitudes

Voter turnout is a fundamental measure of democratic participation, indicating the proportion of eligible citizens who exercise their right to vote in elections. It serves as a critical gauge of the strength and legitimacy of a democracy, with high turnout reflecting active civic engagement, trust in governance, and political accountability (Stockemer & Amengay, 2020). In contrast, low voter turnout often points to political apathy, disenchantment with the political system, or structural and social barriers that prevent citizens from participating fully. Understanding voter turnout involves examining both systemic elements, such as electoral rules, voting processes, and accessibility, as well as individual-level factors, including political interest, perceived efficacy, and social influences.

Voter attitudes refer to the beliefs, perceptions, and psychological predispositions that shape an individual's likelihood of participating in elections. These attitudes are informed by a combination of political knowledge, personal values, party affiliation, societal norms, and perceptions of government responsiveness (Liu 2019). Citizens who hold positive attitudes toward politics, believing that their vote matters and that the electoral system functions effectively, are more likely to engage in elections. Conversely, negative attitudes, such as political cynicism, distrust of leaders, or feelings that one's vote is inconsequential, tend to reduce participation and increase voter apathy.

The relationship between voter turnout and voter attitudes is intricate. Research shows that individuals who are politically informed, socially engaged, and aware of governance processes are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward voting, which, in turn, boosts participation rates (Karp & Banducci 2008). Socialization factors, including family influence, peer networks, and media exposure, further shape voter attitudes. For instance, repeated

7

involvement in political discussions and civic education initiatives fosters a sense of civic responsibility, motivating higher electoral engagement (Blais & Achen 2019).

In recent times, digital media has become a significant influence on voter attitudes and behavior. Social media platforms provide avenues for political campaigning, public debates, and voter education, delivering information and persuasive content that can shape perceptions of elections (Larsson & Moe 2020). Interaction with political content online has been shown to increase political interest, reinforce existing beliefs, and, in some cases, mobilize citizens to vote. However, these platforms can also facilitate the dissemination of misinformation, political polarization, and selective exposure, which may negatively affect voter attitudes and suppress participation (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017).

In Nigeria, and particularly in Delta State, voter turnout remains a challenge despite extensive political campaigns. Factors such as socio-economic status, education, trust in political institutions, and accessibility to polling stations significantly influence both voter attitudes and participation levels (Ojo 2021). Analyzing the interplay between voter attitudes and turnout in such contexts is crucial for understanding the motivations and barriers affecting citizen engagement and for developing interventions to strengthen democratic participation.

Thus, voter turnout and voter attitudes are closely linked and essential for the functioning of democratic systems. While voter turnout provides a measurable indicator of participation, voter attitudes offer insight into the social and psychological drivers of electoral behavior. Understanding these dynamics, particularly in contexts shaped by digital media, is critical for fostering informed, inclusive, and active citizen participation in the democratic process.

Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally developed by Blumler and Katz (1974), which provides an appropriate framework for examining the connection between social media, political awareness, and voter turnout. The theory asserts that individuals actively choose and use media to satisfy particular needs or objectives, rather than passively consuming content. According to UGT, media users are goal-driven, seeking content that fulfills their informational, social, entertainment, or personal

identity requirements. In this context, social media functions as a tool for meeting citizens' informational and participatory needs, especially within political communication.

In the realm of political engagement, UGT posits that individuals utilize social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, to access information about political candidates, government policies, electoral processes, and civic matters. This active interaction can enhance political knowledge, shape public opinion, and influence voter attitudes and behavior. By following political pages, engaging in online discussions, or sharing election-related content, citizens are purposefully using media to satisfy their needs for political awareness, civic participation, and social interaction (Ruggiero 2000).

The theory also sheds light on differences in voter turnout. Individuals who gain satisfaction and perceive value from interacting with political content on social media are more likely to participate in elections, as they feel informed and empowered. Conversely, those with limited access to social media or who perceive it as unreliable may remain politically uninformed and are less likely to vote. UGT emphasizes the importance of users' motivations, suggesting that social media influences political awareness and electoral participation primarily when individuals intentionally engage with relevant content.

Application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to This Study

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is particularly relevant to this study on the impact of social media on political awareness and voter turnout in Delta State because it highlights the proactive role of individuals in choosing and interacting with media to meet specific needs. In this research context, UGT helps explain the reasons behind citizens' use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, for accessing political information, engaging with political actors, and participating in civic discussions.

Through the lens of UGT, social media users are seen as goal-driven individuals who actively seek content to satisfy their informational and participatory needs related to politics. For example, eligible voters in Delta State may follow political pages, engage in online debates, or share election-related content to learn about candidates, policies, and electoral processes. These actions not only enhance their political knowledge but also shape their voting decisions and overall involvement in elections.

The theory also offers insights into differences in voter turnout. Individuals who gain satisfaction and perceive value from political content on social media are more likely to feel

informed, empowered, and motivated to vote. On the other hand, those who lack access to these platforms or distrust online information may remain uninformed and disengaged, reflecting UGT's central principle that media influence is largely determined by users' motivations and active participation.

Additionally, UGT is useful for understanding the impact of social media in contexts with unequal information access, such as Delta State. Urban residents with stable internet connectivity are more likely to benefit from digital political engagement compared to rural populations with limited access or low digital literacy. By applying UGT, this study can explore how different motivations for using social media, such as seeking political knowledge, joining political communities, or engaging in civic debates, affect political awareness and voter behavior among diverse groups.

Thus, applying UGT allows this study to view social media not merely as a technological tool but as a medium shaped by users' needs, goals, and behaviors. It provides a framework for understanding how active engagement with political content online can enhance political awareness and potentially increase voter turnout in Delta State.

Social Media and Voter Attitudes and Participation

Social media has increasingly become a dominant influence in contemporary politics, affecting not only citizens' political knowledge but also their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors during elections. It shapes voter attitudes by presenting individuals with a wide range of political content, opinions, and campaign messages, often in ways that are interactive and personalized. Through posts, videos, memes, and live discussions, users are able to develop or reinforce their views about candidates, party policies, and broader political issues, thereby influencing their overall political outlook (Kushin & Yamamoto 2010).

Beyond shaping attitudes, social media plays a critical role in promoting voter participation. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide timely updates on political candidates, party manifestos, voter registration, and election procedures, reducing informational barriers and encouraging citizens to participate in elections (Boulianne 2015). Social media also leverages peer influence to boost engagement; seeing friends, family members, or peers express political opinions or urge participation often motivates individuals to become active voters themselves, which can lead to increased turnout (Bond et al. 2012).

Furthermore, social media facilitates targeted and strategic political campaigns. Political parties and civic organizations can design messages that address the specific needs, concerns, and interests of certain demographic groups, such as young voters, first-time voters, or historically marginalized communities. This approach helps stimulate engagement among populations that may otherwise be less likely to vote (Enli 2017).

However, the influence of social media is not entirely positive. While it has the capacity to inform and mobilize, it can also contribute to political polarization, reinforce echo chambers, and increase exposure to misinformation. Users may primarily encounter content that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, limiting exposure to opposing perspectives and potentially affecting informed decision-making and overall civic engagement (Weeks 2015).

Therefore, social media exerts a substantial impact on voter attitudes and participation by providing access to political information, encouraging peer-driven mobilization, and enabling targeted campaigning. The extent and effectiveness of this influence, however, are largely shaped by the reliability of content, the diversity of user engagement, and individuals' critical evaluation skills.

Empirical Studies

Studies in Nigeria has increasingly explored the impact of social media on political behavior, particularly during the 2023 elections. Suemo, Kusugh, and Okonkwo (2023), for example, conducted a mixed-methods study investigating how ideological content in social media political campaigns, especially on Facebook, influenced voter education and participation. Their findings indicated that much of the messaging was negative, containing insults, hate speech, and misinformation, which in turn contributed to political disengagement among many voters.

Similarly, Arowolo and Ogande (2024) examined social media's role in mobilizing voters during the 2023 Nigerian presidential campaign. Through a survey of approximately 400 participants, they found that frequent interaction with political content, primarily on Facebook, had a notable effect on voting behavior. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as misinformation and difficulties in verifying online political content.

Focusing on a local context, Ikponmwosa and Oshorbughe (2025) studied Etsako West Local Government Area using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Their results

suggested that social media significantly influenced voter decisions in the area, underscoring the importance of responsible political messaging online.

From the perspective of voter perceptions, Israel and Akase (2024) surveyed voting-age individuals in Abuja during the 2023 elections to assess their trust in social-media-based election reporting. They found a divide: while some participants trusted social media information, a significant portion (56%) were skeptical, particularly regarding misinformation.

Research among young Nigerians also highlights social media's influence on political engagement. Sanusi, Kuye-Aremu, Lukman, and Adeyemo (2024) examined how students' perceptions of media influence, including social media, relate to their participation both online (sharing and posting political content) and offline (rallies and petitions). The study revealed that students who believed media strongly influenced others, the "third-person perception", were more likely to engage politically themselves.

In terms of campaign communication, Okon, Ojedor, and Owolabi (2025) explored how various social media platforms were utilized during the 2023 election. Their survey indicated that platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were widely used for political campaigning and proved effective in persuading voters. Expanding beyond Nigeria, Inobemhe, Ja'afaru, and Garba (2024) investigated the role of multimedia, including social media, in the 2023 Nigerian elections. They found that digital content, including videos, images, and posts, influenced voter attitudes, campaign strategies, and political behavior. Collectively, these studies illustrate both the empowering and challenging aspects of social media in political contexts. While social media can enhance awareness, engagement, and mobilization, it also poses risks related to misinformation, negative campaign framing, and unequal access or trust among voters

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive and explanatory survey design, which is well-suited for investigating the influence of social media on political awareness and voter turnout in Delta State. The descriptive component of the design allows the researcher to systematically observe and document the current state of political awareness and voter engagement among the target population. Meanwhile, the explanatory aspect helps identify and analyze the relationships between social media usage and political behaviors, providing insight into possible causal or influencing factors.

The survey method is particularly appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a large and diverse population, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon across different local government areas in Delta State. This design ensures that the findings are representative and can be generalized to a wider student population, offering valuable evidence for policy formulation and initiatives aimed at enhancing political participation through social media platforms.

The total population of eligible voters in Ethiope West was (277,800), the total population in Ethiop East was (275,400), and the total population in Oshimili South was (205,600) (National Population Commission, 2022); making a total of 758,800 people eligible for this study. The determination of the sample size of 400 was attained using the sample size determination of Yamane's formula:

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

Where N = Population size,

$\qquad$ n = Sample sized,

$\qquad$ e = Sampling error

Given the population size and with a sampling error of 5 percent, the required sample size is computed as:

n $\qquad$ $= N/ (1 +Ne^2)$

n $\qquad$ $= 758,800/ (1 +758,800 (0.05)^2) = 400$ Approximately

Consequently, a sample size of four hundred (400) was used.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire that were distributed to respondents across the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, a total of 341 completed questionnaire were successfully retrieved. This resulted in a response rate of 85.25%, indicating a high level of participation and cooperation from the respondents. The strong response rate enhances the reliability of the data collected, ensuring that the findings of the study accurately reflect the perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of the target population regarding social media usage, political awareness, and voter participation. For this study, primary data were collected directly from respondents in order to obtain firsthand information on the influence of social media on political awareness and voter turnout among students in Delta State tertiary institutions.

Primary data is crucial in this context as it provides real-time insights into respondents' social media usage patterns, political knowledge, perceptions, and participation behaviors, which cannot be accurately captured through secondary sources.

The data collected for this study were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to summarize and present the demographic characteristics of respondents and the overall patterns of social media usage, political awareness, and voter participation. In addition, inferential statistics, specifically correlation analysis, were conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships between social media engagement and key dependent variables, including political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which facilitated efficient data management, accurate computation, and clear presentation of results. This approach enabled the study to draw meaningful conclusions about the influence of social media on political behavior while ensuring statistical rigor and reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1 presents the relationship between social media and political awareness among residents of Delta State. The strength and direction of the relationships are determined by Pearson correlation coefficients, and their significance is assessed using a 2-tailed test at the 0.01 significance level.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient Matrix

Variables		Social Media
Political awareness	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.726** .000 341
Voter turnout	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.695** .000 341
Voter attitudes and participation	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.781** . .000 341

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels (2-tailed).*

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The entity of Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between social media and three key political variables: political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation among residents of Delta State.

Relationship between Social Media and Political Awareness (H_{01}): The correlation coefficient between social media and political awareness is r = 0.726, with a significance value of p = 0.000. This indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that there is no significant relationship between social media and political awareness, is rejected. This suggests that increased social media usage is associated with higher levels of political awareness among residents.

Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Voter Turnout (H_{02}): The correlation between social media engagement and voter turnout is r = 0.695 (p = 0.000), significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates a strong positive relationship: higher social media engagement is associated with greater voter turnout. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, implying that social media plays a substantial role in motivating electoral participation.

Relationship between social media and Voter Attitudes and Participation (H_{03}): The correlation coefficient between social media and voter attitudes and participation is r = 0.781 (p = 0.000), which is significant at the 0.01 level. This demonstrates a strong positive relationship, suggesting that social media has a considerable influence on shaping voter attitudes and encouraging electoral participation. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is rejected.

Overall, these results indicate that social media is a significant and positive predictor of political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation among residents of Delta State. The findings support the view that social media can be an effective tool for enhancing civic engagement and political participation in the contemporary digital environment.

Discussion

The present study sought to examine the influence of social media on political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation among residents of Delta State.

The findings indicate a strong and positive relationship between social media engagement and each of the political variables under consideration, demonstrating the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping political behavior in contemporary Nigeria.

Social Media and Political Awareness

The results reveal a significant and positive association between social media usage and political awareness. This finding supports the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which posited that there is no significant relationship between social media and political awareness. In practical terms, the data suggest that individuals who actively engage with social media platforms are more likely to be informed about political issues, government policies, electoral processes, and civic responsibilities. This outcome is consistent with the assertions of Chadwick and Dennis (2019), who noted that social media has transformed political communication by providing real-time information and fostering interaction between political actors and citizens.

The finding also aligns with the work of Loader et al. (2014), who argued that social media serves as a critical tool for political education, particularly among younger populations who may not actively follow traditional media channels. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, allow users to access news updates, follow political campaigns, and participate in discussions about governance. These platforms not only disseminate information but also encourage citizens to critically evaluate policies and political decisions. Consequently, residents of Delta State who engage with social media are better equipped to understand political developments and make informed decisions regarding their participation in democratic processes.

Moreover, the strong positive correlation indicates that social media may reduce barriers to political knowledge, particularly in areas where access to traditional sources of information is limited. By providing widespread access to political content, social media empowers citizens to become more aware of societal issues, thereby enhancing civic literacy and promoting informed engagement with governance structures (Boulianne, 2015). This suggests that social media is not merely a communication tool but also a mechanism for cultivating political consciousness among the populace.

16

Social Media Engagement and Voter Turnout

The study also identified a significant and positive relationship between social media engagement and voter turnout, supporting the rejection of H_{02}. This finding highlights the role of social media as a mobilizing agent that encourages citizens to participate in elections. The influence of social media on voter turnout can be explained through its ability to disseminate election-related information, such as registration deadlines, polling locations, and candidate profiles. By reducing informational gaps, social media enables citizens to make timely decisions regarding electoral participation, which ultimately increases turnout.

This result corroborates the findings of Bond et al. (2012), who demonstrated that peer-to-peer interactions on social media significantly influence political participation. Observing friends, family, or community members expressing support for candidates or encouraging others to vote can enhance individual motivation to participate in elections. In this way, social media functions not only as a source of information but also as a platform for social influence and collective action, reinforcing the connection between online engagement and offline political behavior.

Additionally, the ability of social media to facilitate targeted political messaging contributes to its influence on voter turnout. Political campaigns can use social media analytics to identify specific demographic groups, such as young or first-time voters, and deliver messages tailored to their interests and concerns (Enli 2017). This targeted approach increases the likelihood that disengaged or marginalized citizens will participate in the electoral process, thus strengthening democratic inclusion and broadening civic participation.

Social Media and Voter Attitudes and Participation

The findings further indicate a very strong positive relationship between social media usage and voter attitudes and participation, leading to the rejection of H_{03}. This suggests that social media not only informs citizens but also shapes their political perspectives and behaviors. Exposure to diverse political messages, opinions, and campaign content allows users to form or reinforce their attitudes toward candidates, parties, and policies. Through interactive features such as comments, shares, and live discussions, social media platforms facilitate deliberation and reflection, which can influence voters' willingness to engage in political activities.

The result is consistent with previous research by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010), who found that social media significantly affects how individuals perceive political issues and motivates them to participate in civic activities. By providing a platform for political discourse and activism, social media encourages citizens to translate their attitudes into tangible actions, such as attending rallies, participating in campaigns, or voting during elections. This highlights the dual role of social media in shaping both the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of political participation.

However, it is important to note potential challenges associated with social media influence. While social media can positively shape voter attitudes, it can also create echo chambers, reinforce selective exposure, and facilitate the spread of misinformation (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Users may encounter content that confirms pre-existing beliefs, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and critical engagement. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that, when used responsibly, social media has a substantial and beneficial impact on political attitudes and participation.

Implications of the Findings

The overall findings underscore the significant role of social media as a catalyst for political engagement in Delta State. Social media platforms provide citizens with unprecedented access to information, opportunities for discussion, and avenues for mobilization. The strong positive relationships observed between social media usage and political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation highlight the capacity of digital platforms to enhance democratic engagement in contemporary Nigeria.

These findings have important implications for policymakers, electoral authorities, and civic organizations. First, the results suggest that leveraging social media for voter education and mobilization can increase political awareness and electoral participation. Second, the study highlights the need to promote digital literacy and critical engagement with online content to ensure that citizens can effectively evaluate information and mitigate the influence of misinformation. Finally, the findings support the use of social media as a strategic tool in fostering inclusive and participatory democracy, particularly among youth and other digitally connected populations.

This study, therefore, demonstrates that social media is a powerful determinant of political behavior in Delta State. It significantly enhances political awareness, encourages voter turnout, and shapes voter attitudes and participation. By providing immediate access to political content, fostering peer-to-peer mobilization, and enabling targeted messaging, social media serves as a critical instrument for democratic engagement. These results corroborate prior research that emphasizes the transformative potential of digital media in politics (Boulianne 2015; Chadwick and Dennis 2019; Loader et al. 2014). Therefore, it is evident that social media is not only a communication tool but also a facilitator of civic education and electoral participation, underscoring its importance in the contemporary political landscape of Nigeria.

Limitations of this paper

Although this study provided valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the research primarily relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which may be susceptible to response bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their social media use or political involvement. To reduce this risk, the study guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' responses, encouraging honest and accurate reporting. Secondly, the study was confined to selected tertiary institutions and local government areas in Delta State, which could limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. To mitigate this, the researchers employed stratified sampling to ensure a diverse representation of respondents based on age, gender, and educational background, thereby improving the reliability of the sample within the study context. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design of the study restricted observations to a single point in time, preventing the tracking of changes or trends in social media usage and political engagement over time. In light of the study's findings and limitations, the following suggestions are offered for further research. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to track changes in social media use and political engagement over time, yielding deeper insights into causal relationships and trends.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of social media on political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation among residents of Delta State. The findings indicate that social media plays a significant and positive role in shaping political behavior. Citizens who actively engage with social media platforms are more politically informed, more likely to

participate in elections, and more engaged in forming and expressing political opinions. The study further shows that social media not only serves as a tool for information dissemination but also acts as a platform for mobilization, discussion, and civic engagement. By providing immediate access to political content and facilitating peer-to-peer interaction, social media enhances awareness and motivates citizens to translate their knowledge into meaningful political action. Moreover, its capacity to reach diverse demographic groups, particularly youth and first-time voters, underscores its potential to strengthen democratic participation. However, while the influence of social media is largely positive, the study acknowledges potential challenges, such as exposure to misinformation, political polarization, and echo chambers. These challenges highlight the need for digital literacy and critical engagement with online content to maximize the benefits of social media in political participation.

In conclusion, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for democratic engagement in Delta State, capable of enhancing political awareness, promoting voter turnout, and shaping voter attitudes and participation. Policymakers, electoral bodies, and civic organizations should leverage these platforms strategically to foster informed, active, and inclusive citizen participation in the political process. Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that social media plays a significant role in enhancing political awareness, voter turnout, and voter attitudes and participation. To maximize the positive impact of social media and address potential challenges such as misinformation and selective exposure, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, electoral bodies, and civic organizations: 1) Policymakers should introduce digital literacy initiatives aimed at equipping citizens with the skills to critically assess political information on social media and curb the dissemination of false or misleading content; 2) Electoral bodies should utilize social media channels to deliver prompt, reliable, and easily accessible information about voter registration, election processes, and candidate platforms, thereby promoting greater electoral participation; 3) Civic organizations should actively harness social media to involve citizens, especially young people and marginalized communities, in political dialogues, campaigns, and awareness programs to foster inclusive and informed democratic engagement.

REFERENCES

Adebayo, S. (2020). "Social media and political activism in Nigeria". *Journal of African Political Studies, 15*(3), 45-67.

Adebayo, T., & Yusuf, M. (2021). "Social media and political literacy among Nigerian youth". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 15*(3), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2021.0987

Ajibade, O. (2020). "The role of social media in Nigerian politics: Challenges and prospects". *African Journal of Political Science, 14*(2), 112-130.

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election". *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 31*(2), 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Arowolo, S. A., & Ogande, A. (2024). "Evaluating social media influence on political mobilisation in the 2023 presidential campaign in Nigeria". *Lapai Journal of Humanities*, 15(2), 43 – 61.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Blais, A., & Achen, C. H. (2019). *The quality of democracy and voter turnout*. New York: Routledge.

Blumler, J. G., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research*. New York: Sage.

Bode, L. (2016). "Political news in the news feed: Learning politics from social media". *Mass Communication and Society, 19*(1), 24–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1045149

Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D., 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

Boulianne, S. (2015). "Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research". *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(5), 524–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542

Boulianne, S. (2019). "Social media use and engagement: A meta-analysis of research". *Political Communication, 36*(2), 172-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1622589

Chadwick, A., & Dennis, J. (2019). "Social media, professional media, and mobilization in contemporary Britain: Explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the citizen-led political engagement". *Political Communication, 36*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1508897

Chadwick, A., & Stromer-Galley, J. (2016). Digital media, power, and democracy in parties and election campaigns: Party decline or party renewal? *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 21*(3), 283–293. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216646731

Chiluwa, I., & Ifukor, P. (2021). Social Media and Political Protest: A Critical Discourse Analysis of #EndSARS Campaign in Nigeria. *African Journalism Studies, 42*(2), 188-206.

Effing, R., van Hillegersberg, J., & Huibers, T. (2011). "Social media and political participation: Are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube democratizing our political systems?" *Electronic Participation, 34*(2), 25-35. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-23333-3_3

Enli, G. (2017). *Mediated authenticity: How the media constructs reality.* New York: *Peter Lang Publishing.*

Eze, P. N. (2020). "Civic engagement and political awareness: A study of Nigerian youth". *Journal of Social and Political Studies, 8*(2), 67–84.

Hintz, A., Dencik, L., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2017). "Digital citizenship and surveillance society: Introduction". *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 731–739.

Ikponmwosa, M. E., & Oshorbughe, H. M. (2025). "Social media and the voting behaviour of electorates in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election: A study of Etsako West Local Government Area". *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science, 10*(2), 32–52.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2023). *Voter turnout analysis in Nigeria's general elections*. Abuja: INEC.

Inobemhe, K., Ja'afaru, S. G., & Garba, S. (2024). "Technology and the effect of multimedia usage in the 2023 election in Nigeria". *Asian Journal of Media and Communication, 6,* 23 – 37.

Israel, F. A., & Akase, T. M. (2024). "Audience perceptions of social media reports among voting-age individuals in Abuja during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections". *Lapai Journal of Humanities, 15*(2), 108 – 117.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media". *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Karp, J. A., & Banducci, S. A. (2008). "Political efficacy and participation in twenty-seven democracies: How electoral systems shape political behaviour". *British Journal of Political Science, 38*(2), 311–334. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000161

Kushin, M. J., & Yamamoto, M. (2010). "Did social media really matter? College students' use of online media and political decision making in the 2008 election". *Mass Communication and Society, 13*(5), 608–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2010.516863

Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2020). "Social media and political participation: The case of Twitter in the 2018 Swedish general election". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 17*(4), 345–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2020.1822304

Liu, J. (2019). "Political attitudes, civic engagement, and voter turnout in emerging democracies". *Electoral Studies, 60,* 12 - 42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102042

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). "The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation, and civic engagement". *Information, Communication & Society, 17*(2), 143–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.871571

Nwankwo, C. (2021). "Political awareness and democratic consolidation in Nigeria". *International Journal of Governance and Policy, 12*(4), 112–130.

Ojo, L. (2021). "Voter turnout and political participation in Nigeria: An assessment of recent elections". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 15*(1), 23–36. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2021.1021

Okon, E. A., Ojedor, D.-R. O., & Owolabi, B. O. (2025). "The role of social media in the 2023 Nigerian general elections: An analytical appraisal of selected platforms". *American Journal of Arts and Human Science, 4*(1), 32–42.

Okonkwo, E., & Chukwuemeka, A. (2022). "Political knowledge, social media, and electoral participation in Nigeria". *Journal of African Politics, 9*(1), 33–49.

Okoro, N., & Nwafor, K. (2013). "Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: The lapses and the lessons". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 7*(4), 174-185.

Olorunmola, A. (2017). "Youth participation in Nigeria's political processes: Challenges and prospects". *Journal of African Elections, 16*(2), 35-58.

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Afolabi, R. (2022). "Digital engagement and political awareness: Evidence from South-South Nigeria". *Nigerian Journal of Communication Research, 14*(1), 55–72.

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). "Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century". *Mass Communication & Society, 3*(1), 3–37. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02

Sanusi, B. O., Kuye-Aremu, O. K., Lukman, A., & Adeyemo, O. (2024). "Perceived media influence and political participation: A mixed-methods study of Nigerian students". *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 3*, 59 – 63.

Stockemer, D., & Amengay, C. (2020). "Determinants of voter turnout: A comparative perspective". *Electoral Studies, 66,* 21 - 40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102148

Suemo, J. S., Kusugh, T., & Okonkwo, B. (2023). "Influence of ideological themes in social media political campaigns on voters' education and participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections". *Journal of Basic and Applied Research International, 29*(2), 25–38.

Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). "Defining 'fake news': A typology of scholarly definitions". *Digital Journalism, 6*(2), 137-153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2013). "Social media use in organizations: Exploring the affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and association". *Communication Yearbook, 36*(1), 143–189.

Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. New York: Yale University Press.

Udu, A. A., & Edegbo, A. O. (2022). "Digital inequality and political participation in Nigeria: A study of Edo and Delta States". *Journal of Media Studies, 35*(2), 45–58.

Uwalaka, T., & Watkins, J. (2018). "The role of social media in electoral misinformation". *Media Studies Journal, 22*(1), 78-102.

Van Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. New York: *Polity Press*.

Weeks, B. E. (2015). "Emotions, partisanship, and misperceptions: How anger and anxiety moderate the effect of partisan bias on susceptibility to political misinformation". *Journal of Communication, 65*(4), 699–719. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12164