

# **Evaluation of Social Media and Students Participation in Politics: A Study of Students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka**

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## **Abstract**

The emergence of social media has made it quite easy for students to participate in political matters. However, it has been observed that most youths use social media to participate in politics in ways that promote political violence and tension in the country. It is on this basis that this work set out to examine, amongst others, the extent of usage of social media by the undergraduate students of UNN in politics. The Uses and Gratification theory was the theoretical framework of this study. The survey research design was adopted for the study and a total of 375 respondents served as the sample size of the study. Among other findings, the research discovered that the respondents are highly exposed to social media and that they use social media to a high extent to participate in politics. Hence, some of the following recommendations were proffered. Tertiary institutions must make it their responsibility to train and produce students that are conscious of their activities and actions in ways that promote peace and unity in the nation. This could be achieved by conducting periodic seminars before, during, and after elections to educate and enlighten the students on the dangers associated with the dysfunctional use of the social media in participating in politics. Students and the general public should self-regulate their use of social media in participating in politics. This can be achieved by asking themselves if the ways they use social media are ethical and for the general good of all.

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**Keywords:** Evaluation, Social Media, Student, Participation, Politics

## **Introduction**

The emergence of the internet brought about a whole new level of change to the media environment. Its existence has brought a paradigm shift

in the packaging and dissemination of information. It ushered in an era of technological information and created advanced socialization mechanisms with a higher desire for news and information. With the advent of the internet came the introduction of social media, which essentially are platforms for interaction, information dissemination, and information gathering.

The development of social media has, therefore, brought a revolution in the field and method of communication. It has aided the way individuals perform their civic and political responsibilities, especially for the youths who are the first to accept and make use of social media. Without doubt, it has paved the way for advanced communication, freedom of speech, social interaction, and enhanced socialization among its users, thereby, culminating in an increased rate of political activities. The general beliefs are that social media play a significant role in politics by facilitating access to political information and by providing tools and avenues for political expression. Social media have created new possibilities for youths, students, and political participation.

The use of social media in politics has seen a tremendous increase over the past few years. In the 2008 United States general election, the internet and social networking sites, in particular, played a more significant role. They went from being unknown to a budding platform for increased political participation and communication. The 2008 presidential campaign was the first to play out in the world of YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, and political blogging which were the major internet-based social media. These forms of social media provide a new channel for mediated communication, which enables the audience to procure contents on demands and also share, discuss, and argue with others (UK Essays).

In the Nigeria experience, the 2011 general elections marked the incorporation of social media to politics. According to Udejinta (2011) in Okoro and Nwafor (2013), one remarkable thing about the 2011 general elections was the adoption of social media, especially Facebook, by the politicians, the political parties, and the electorates as a platform for political participation. In the 2015 Nigeria general election, social media use increased a notch and dominated other media as political parties, and their candidates made great use of them in their campaign. Social media became a more potent tool and a lethal weapon for propagating beliefs, opinions, ideologies, propaganda, etc. There were releases in the form of videos, voice notes, headlines, and broadcasts that made and marred many political parties and individuals. For example, according to Oyenuga (2015), a publication on Senator Buruji Kashmu almost damaged his political ambition and eventually his swearing-in. Also, a hate video was disseminated on Gen. Muhammadu Buhari and Sen. Bola Tinubu during the election period. In addition, social media played a central role as a watchdog in keeping the integrity of the voting

process. Within minutes of votes being counted at a polling unit, the results were all over social media. Election observers with Excel sheets were doing tallies and eventually when the results were announced officially, the results matched. Hence, social media played a crucial role, as it made news readily available. Social media was a useful tool in the hands of so many citizens who were involved and interested in the whole process. In a way, social media seized the day from the legacy media, in the sense that almost everyone depended on them for the breaking news. Social media came alive for Nigerians during this time (Udoka, 2015).

The recent rise in the use of social media may also be because there are 11.8 million registered Nigerians on Facebook, 1.8 million Twitter users and, in 2013, LinkedIn announced it had reached a million registered accounts in the country (Udoka, 2015). Almost every institution involved in Nigeria's election conducted an aggressive social network outreach including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, candidates, media houses, civil society groups, and even the police (Adibe, Odoemelam, & Chibue, 2011; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). The use of social media was not restricted to presidential candidates alone. Other political office holders have made aggressive use of social media, especially Facebook, to campaign, persuade, and convince the electorates. Hence, this study will evaluate students' use of social media to participate in politics in Nigeria.

### **Statement of Problem**

Based on the ease of accessibility, the participatory, interactive, flexible, and affordable nature of the internet, it has made it easy for students to express their views on political matters freely. With an estimate of over 52 million youths, the Nigerian youth holds a strong influence on the electoral matters of the nation. The youths are, however, missing in the political space as active players. That is, being candidates seeking political offices, coming out in their number to vote during an election period, etc. Though many are active participants online as indicated by the high level of their activities on social media, they are, however, passive in performing their legal franchise to vote and be voted for.

In addition, it has been observed over the years that during election period, the students use social media platform to disseminate false rumors, gossips, false election results, malign, intimidate and discredit political opponents, and exchange hate speeches among political opponents. Several insulting and inciting messages flourish on social media. These were in line with the violence and tension witnessed before, during, and after the elections in many parts of the country, with some state ordering 'non-indigenes' to leave the state (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

The issue, therefore, arises in evaluating student's use of social media to participate in politics.

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study is meant to achieve the following;

1. Ascertain the level of exposure to social media by undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. To examine the extent of usage of social media by the undergraduate students of the UNN to participate in politics.
3. Ascertain the influence social media have on UNN students' participation in politics.
4. Discover the challenges in the use of social media for political participation among UNN students.

## **Significance of the Study**

Nigerian students engage in a lot of social media activities in a bid to participate in the politics governing the nation. Their activities go a long way to influence how members of society react to political parties and political messages. The reaction of members of the society may directly or indirectly play a role in the kind of policies made, bordering on the polity of the nation. On this basis, this work will be of great significance to the students, political parties, the government, the general public, and academia.

Students, a subset of the youths, fall under the category of the major users of social media who participate in political activities in the nation. This work will, therefore, serve as a guide to students on the best use of social media as an instrument for active participation in politics.

Political parties play a significant role in influencing how political candidates conduct themselves during elections. Political parties also go a long way to determine the general conduct of elections (free and fair) in the country. Hence, this work will be of significance to them because it plays up the need and potentials of social media to engage in politics that would be favorable to their party and be accepted by the general public. Therefore, political parties should not neglect the potentials of social media.

Government, being at the helm of affairs in a nation, makes policies that affect the lives of the people and determine the chain of activities that would go on in the country. It is on this note that this would serve as a pointer to the government on how best to disseminate credible information that would contribute to nation building and promote peace among the citizens and social media users.

The general public is the individuals that make the existence of the nation possible. Their actions and inactions affect the government of the country. Therefore, this work will be of significance to them. It will educate

them on the need to be active users of social media to create an atmosphere that is peaceful, enhance nation advancement, and not incite groups against groups

Finally, for the academia, the lot of issues treated in this work will serve as a reference point and information source for future researchers researching on students, youths, social media and politics in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Meaning and Nature of Social Media**

Social media, as a concept, has been explained in various ways by different social media scholars. According to Dewing (2012), social media is a term that refers to a wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allows users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join an online community. Social media users are no longer passive media consumers but are now very active. This is largely because they have gone from being consumers to actual producers as they have become generators, creators, and disseminators of information. According to Suomen (2012), social media are new information network and information technology using a form of interactive communication skills, where users produce the content of information and interpersonal relationships are established and maintained in the process. In the same vein, social media belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

### **Meaning of Political Participation**

According to Verba et al. (1995), political participation refers to "behavior that could affect government action – either directly by influencing the public policies that are implemented or indirectly by influencing the elections of political actors creating those policies" as cited by Rahmawati (2014). In the same vein, Kenski and Stroud (2006) defined political participation as the involvement in activities related to politics, such as donating to a campaign or influencing others to vote. Political participation can be seen in several political activities, including work on a political campaign, seeking party funding, being part of political campaign team, a member of political party, a volunteer of political party, seeking support for a candidate, trying to persuade others, contacting politicians, donating money, joining political discussions, signing a petition, attending a political rally, and casting a vote at the election (Rahmawati, 2014). Simply put, political participation deals with citizen involvement in issues of public concern that would eventually lead to producing a leader for the nation.

## Social Media and Politics

The emergence of social media has opened up new and enhanced ways of communication. In a changing world, it is difficult to advance democratic change and development with old tools only. Today, leaders need to understand the role of changing communication technology for politics and society. This is the use of the new media (social media) in the field of governance and political development to increase citizens' participation in the political process. In recent times, social media have evolved new forms of democracy, government, and have become a clear and more effective voice of many. It has become a potent tool for disseminating information and a more accessible tool for information gathering. Information management through the new media (social media) is gaining more ground on our political landscape. Even political advertising is now done online. For instance, the election campaign that saw Barack Obama become the President of the United States of America in 2008 was characterized by effective and efficient information management ability. This process interfaced excellently with the deployment of the new media technologies due to his ability to use social media platforms to attract the electorate commonly known as Friends of Obama with the slogan 'change is possible'. Following the same trend, President Goodluck Jonathan also adopted online information management skills in his 2011 presidential election campaigns and became the first Nigerian to use such strategy that has increasingly made inroad into our electoral process and in the overall political environment (Ezebuenyi & Ejezieh, 2012).

Okoro and Nwafor (2013) noted that Nigerian politicians and organizations actively utilized social media to participate in politics. Organizations like Enough is Enough Nigeria, ReclaimNaija, WangoNet, and IamLagos established platforms enabling citizens to report election-related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail. At the same time, traditional media houses such as Channels Television, 234Next, and Punch newspaper used the new media to disseminate information and gather feedback from viewers. Adibe, Odoemelam, and Orji (2012) in Okoro and Nwafor (2013), observed that during the 2011 elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. One of such Nigerians was Gbenga, a 33-year old IT consultant and an activist. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their database. Also, a daily summary was sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website. This allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details, and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube. There was another group,

“Reclaim Naija”, who used text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. There were also “Twitter activists” whose job was to look out for rigging and spread warning about bombings at polling stations. Omenuga (2011) in Okoro and Nwafor (2013) observed that this massive use of social media culminated in the success of the 2011 election acclaimed the freest and fairest in the history of the country.

### **Influence of Social Media on Youths Participation in Politics in Nigeria**

Social media political participation is basically the political participation that takes place on social media platforms via the Internet. They are digital modes of participation, which are categorized as a non-conventional form of political participation. These non-conventional (also known as non-electoral or non-institutional) forms of engagement have been on the increase since the last decade (Shore, 2014). This has led to the emergence of a variety of activities now referred to as political participation, thus making the democratic experience more diverse. Today, several features of social media can be used for various forms of online political participation both in direct (instant messaging, messages, and wall postings) and indirect ways (posting notes, status update). Specifically, some political activities that exist through standard Facebook features are; posting political messages on a personal or friends' wall, sharing political opinion, joining political groups, becoming a fan of political candidates by liking their pages, and posting comment on friends post about politics (Vitak et al., 2011).

Youths, being the dominant users of social media, engage in a lot of online political participation. Youth engagement in politics via social media has a lot of positive impacts. Social media have made access to information easier for youths. It exposes the youths to a variety of political information, hence providing a tool for participation. Additionally, it offers a variety of options for political engagement and also lowers the cost of participation significantly both in terms of time and effort. Furthermore, they provide an opportunity for interactivity between political elites and the youths, while at the same time making the political system seem more accessible to citizens (Bah, 2004; Engesser & Franzetti, 2011; Odunlami, 2014; Teng, 2012; Wojcieszak, 2012) cited in (Abdulrauf, Hamid & Ishak, 2015).

On the contrary, when the youths are disappointed with the kind of information they get on social media, it may not even propel them to participate in politics actively. In fact, Olabamiji (2014) believes abundant amount of political information on social media may even make youths apathetic to politics. However, Rahmawati (2014) argued that there is lack of empirical evidence to back this negative insight. It is noteworthy, however, that despite the fact that youths rely on social media for political information, the lack of professional monitoring system needed to validate the content of

information online has made it difficult to trust the accuracy of such information (Bae, 2014). Similarly, in a study on the degree to which youths trust political information on social media, Johnson and Kaye (2014) found out that social media was ranked the least credible among nine other sources of political news examined. Perhaps, due to the ease and convenience of posting political information and news on social media, it is often not filtered through professional gatekeepers. This puts the burden of determining credibility more on the users.

Another positive impact of social media on the youth's online political participation is that it has increased the political knowledge of youths. Political knowledge is a lineup of political information that are stored in the long term memory of the youths and which can be retrieved at any point in time. The implications of the youth's political knowledge, according to Charles (2010), are that political knowledge is a strong predictor of a youth's political participation. Hence, a decline in the political knowledge of youths is partly to blame for the decline in youths' participation in politics (O'Neil, 2006) in (Abdulrauf, Hamid & Ishak, 2015). In other words, youths who are more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to participate.

Irrespective of the positive impact social media have on the participation of youths in politics, there are also negative ways in which it has impacted youths and some negative ways youths use social media. Udende (2011) in Olabamiji (2014) holds that, in a world where everybody is connected, everybody is at risk. This statement is an indication of the disadvantages and negative influence of social media. Nimmo and Combs (1990) report that social media devote more coverage to horse race than to the substance of political issues; to the personae of the election than to the issues that divide; to outcome than to the campaign; to day-by-day events of the campaign than to enduring trends in (Olabamiji, 2014). Thus, indicating that social media pay more attention to issues that are less significant than to those with more significance. Some youths use social media to express ethnic and religious sentiments. This has led to a number of inter-ethnic, intra-religious, and inter-religious conflicts in some part of Nigeria. (Olabamij, 2014).

### **Empirical Review of Related Studies**

Oyenuga, A. S. (2015), conducted a study titled 'Social media participation and pollution of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.' The paper examined the influence of social media on the 2015 general election through the opinion polls and eventually, the broadcasting of the results, before the final release by INEC. The study used quantitative research that adopted secondary data analysis. It is a comparative analysis of the social media opinion polls results released via social media before the final release of

results, and the final result from INEC using product moment multiple correlations.

The findings of this study revealed that social media results were sourced from wards and participating youth corps members in the electoral procedures. The release of the results via social media increased political participation as most people had firsthand results before the final release. The results were not just transmitted from social media blogs, but were also recirculated via social networking sites and applications. As a result, the process added value to the Nigerian political culture and facilitated other issues that might have ensued from the electoral process. However, this paper used opinion polls and quantitative research for gathering its data. This research, on the other hand, made use of questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. It also focused on students' use of social media to participate in politics, while Oyenuga, in his study, focused on the general use of social media during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Therefore, these two pieces of research are related in the sense that they are both concerned with how individuals used social media platforms to participate in politics, and their results/findings will be related.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study aims to provide a good analytical study on social media and students' participation in politics in Nigeria, especially on how the students make use of social media to participate in politics. Therefore, it would be necessary to review the theory that relates to how and why users make use of certain media, in this case, social media. As a result, this study will examine the Uses and Gratification Theory.

## **Uses and Gratification Theory**

Framed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, Uses and Gratification Theory turned attention away from media sources and message effects to audience uses of media content. The uses (exposure to the media) and, gratification (benefits or gains) are determined by the needs of members of the audience. Therefore, according to Anaeto, Onabanjo, and Osifeso (2008), Uses and Gratification is concerned with what people do with media instead of what media do to people. The practical use of the media is what the Uses and Gratification Theory explains. This theory emphasizes on the reason(s) people have for engaging one medium over another as well as the gratifications they aim to derive.

Thus, youths, as the audience, are active in the following sense. Firstly, with regards to their needs, they select the social media platform that appeals to them. Secondly, they selectively consume the political contents that meet their needs. Thirdly, the political content may or may not affect them. Even if

it does, it will result in increased participation of youths in politics. This goes to show that the youths, as the audience, are not passive. In the same vein, political candidates are also able to select and use the social media platform of their choice to disseminate the messages of their choice during electoral campaigns and other electioneering activities. The theory is relevant to this study as this research looks into why and how youths use social media to participate in politics.

## **Methodology**

This study is built around students' use of social media to participate in politics. Based on this, the survey research design was employed, and the use of a well-structured questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The population of this study comprises of all undergraduate students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, of the 2014/2015 academic session which, according to the Academic Planning Unit, UNN, is 15,439. The sample size calculator developed by the National Statistical Service of Australia (<http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/pages/Sample+size+calculator>, 2016), was used to determine the sample size for this study. Thus, the sample size of this study was 375.

The sampling technique used in this study is the multistage sampling. Multistage sampling refers to sampling plans where the sampling is carried out in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage. In the first stage, a simple random sampling using balloting (pick without replacement) was used to select five faculties in UNN, and they are faculties of Biological sciences, Social sciences, Arts, Pharmaceutical sciences, and Education. In the second stage, a simple random sampling was used to pick two departments from each of the five faculties except faculty of Pharmaceutical sciences which had only one department, making a total of 9 departments for this study. The Bowley's technique of 1926 was used in allotting the copies of the questionnaire to different departments in each faculty. The technique holds that the allocation of the questionnaire to different strata is based on the sizes of samples in each stratum.

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Description of the Sample**

The researcher distributed 375 copies of the questionnaire, but only 340 were validly filled and returned. This showed there was a 90.7% retrieval of the questionnaire from the respondents. Hence, the data analyzed in this chapter was based on the 340 questionnaires retrieved. In analyzing these data, responses were converted into raw scores and then to percentages. The data were tabulated, summarized, and adequately explained.

**Research Question One: What is the level of exposure to social media by undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka?**

**Table 1.** Level of exposure to social media

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Rarely	65	19
Often	170	50
Everyday	103	30
Not at all	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2016

From the table above on how often respondents access the social media accounts, 19% of the respondents say they rarely access their social media accounts, 50% say they often access their social media accounts, 30% say their social media accounts every day, while 1% say they do not access their social media accounts. The result shows that majority of the respondents access their social media accounts often, followed by those who access their social media accounts every day.

**Research Question Two: What is the extent of usage of social media by the undergraduate students of UNN to participate in politics?**

**Table 2.** Usage of social media to participate in politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	181	53
No	159	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2016

The table above shows response on whether respondents use social media to participate in politics. The response indicates that 53% of the respondents use social media to participate in politics, while 47% said they do not use social media to participate in politics. This shows that majority of the respondents use social media to participate in politics. Henceforth, data analyzed will be based on the 181 respondents that said they use social media to participate in politics.

**Table 3.** Extent of usage of social media to participate in politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very high	19	11
High	42	23
Average	94	52
Low	15	8
Very low	11	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2016

Before this analysis, only 181 of the respondents said they use social media to participate in politics. This is the reason behind the 181 figure. Table 3 shows respondents extent of usage of social media to participate in politics. The response indicates that 11% of the respondents rated their usage of social media to participate in politics very high, 23% rated high, 52% rated average, 8% rated low, while 6% rated very low. This shows that majority of the respondents use social media averagely to participate in politics.

### **Research Question Three: How do social media influence UNN student's participation in politics?**

**Table 4.** Social media influence on respondents participation in politics

S/ N	Items	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
1	Social media have helped increase my participation in politics	161 (89%)	20 (11%)	0 (0%)
2	Social media play a significant role in sharpening my political opinion and setting political agenda for students.	139 (77%)	27 (15%)	15 (8%)
3	Accessing social media stopped me from casting my votes during elections.	15 (8%)	140 (78%)	26 (14%)
4	Information on social media influences my choice of political candidate.	95 (53%)	60 (33%)	26 (14%)
5	Social media have helped increase my interest in politics.	129 (71%)	29 (16%)	13 (23%)
6	Information on social media causes me to be violent towards my political opponents.	29 (16%)	124 (69%)	28 (15%)
7	Information on social media discourages me from participating in politics	20 (11%)	133 (74%)	28 (15%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2016

On Table 4, all items except 3, 6, and 7 showed the various ways social media influenced students' participation in politics. To this end, the majority of the respondents accepted the other items as the ways social media influence them to participate in politics.

### **Research Question Four: What are the challenges in the use of social media for political participation among UNN student?**

**Table 5.** Challenges facing UNN students use of social media to participate in politics?

S/ N	Items	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
1	Poor wireless network challenges my use of social media to participate in politics.	128 (71%)	43 (24%)	10 (5%)
2	Lack of finance to subscribe challenges my use of social media to participate in politics.	134 (74%)	27 (15%)	20 (11%)
3	Unavailability of device to use in accessing the internet challenges my use of social media to participate in politics.	15 (8%)	161 (89%)	5 (3%)

4	Poor internet connection challenges my usage of social media to participate in politics.	118 (65%)	50 (28%)	13 (7%)
5	Insufficient time challenges my usage of social media to participate in politics.	69 (38%)	98 (54%)	14 (8%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2016

The above table shows that 128 of the respondents representing 71% said that low wireless network challenged their usage of social media to participate in politics, 134 respondents representing 74% said lack of finance to subscribe to the internet challenged their usage of social media to participate in politics , 118 representing 65% of the respondents said poor internet connection challenged their usage of social media to participate in politics. While the remaining items ( 3 and 5) were declined by the respondents. This means that for the majority of the respondents, the items listed in 1, 2, and 4 above are the challenges they face in using social media to participate in politics.

## Findings

The data generated in this study provide insight into the evaluation of students' use of social media to participate in politics, using the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a case study. The research found out that the respondents are highly exposed to social media, and they use social media to a great extent to participate in politics. This is to say that social media provide a forum for students to participate in politics. Just like McKeague (2011) revealed in Eke-Okpala, Omekwu, and Odoh (2014), students use Facebook and other channels to develop their identities, beliefs, and stance on various issues such as politics, economy etc. Junco (2012) also stated that Facebook is one of the most commonly used social media networks, with approximately 85% - 99% of undergraduate students utilizing it. This finding also confirms Sofela's (2012) observation that student's knowledge of social media has grown expediently.

The study also revealed that students use social media for various reasons, which include discussing critical national issues like politics, economy, etc., thereby educating themselves on such matters. This finding is similar to McQuail's (2010) assertion that students use social media for various reasons, which includes discussing on serious national issues like politics, economy, etc., thereby educating themselves on such issues. This finding further justifies the application of Uses and Gratification Theory for this study that students use social media for their purposes to derive satisfaction in (Eke-Okpala, Omekwu, & Odoh, 2014). This is also in line with the assertion made by Konetes and McKeague (2011) on the uses of the social networking sites especially Facebook. The researchers reported that students are using Facebook, and other channels, to develop their identities, beliefs, and

stances on various issues such as politics, religion, economy, and work, as well as to pioneer and develop intimate relationships. Additionally, Gross (2004) noted that students use social networking sites not only for leisure and personal socialization, but also as a platform for more meaningful and serious deliberations, and students are using social networking for making friends, sharing links, online learning, finding jobs to accomplish their economic, educational, political, and social being.

The study found out that social media have helped increased 89% of the respondents' participation in politics and 77% attested to the fact that social media play a significant role in sharpening their political opinion and setting political agenda for them. Starndberg (2013) supported this observation when he noted that the use of Facebook and Twitter generates great effect to engage in politics. Social media users, who lack interest and motivation to participate in politics, would be more feasible to access political contents consciously through social media. He added that in general elections, social media use for political activities is one of the predictors of political participation mainly for turnout and voting. On the other hand, Vitak et al. (2011) noted that Facebook enables youths to collect greater political knowledge and to improve political participation. The study found out that the following factors challenged students usage of social media to participate in politics; low wireless network, lack of finance to subscribe to internet services, poor internet connection, insufficient time and unavailability of a device to use in accessing the internet.

## **Recommendations**

1. As the overall guardian of the nation, it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that social media are used in ways that promotes nation building. Hence, the federal government must champion a sensitization campaign, especially for students as youths, on how they ought to use social media to promote the nation's development. To do this, it must collaborate with the Ministry of Communication and Technology, the Nigeria Communications Commissions, National Orientation Agency, Independent Electoral Commission, and even Traditional Media to help spread the message.
2. Students, youths, and the general public should always be conscious and careful with the kind of comments and posts they upload on social media in order to avoid comments that are inciting and hateful.
3. Political parties should instill the philosophy of 'one Nigeria' into their party faithfuls and discourage them from using social media to propagate inciting political message that are capable of disintegrating the nation. To achieve this, they must conduct periodic sensitization campaigns for party members before, during, and after elections on

- how to conduct themselves in ways that would enhance national integration.
4. Tertiary institutions, as citadels of learning, must make it their responsibility to train and produce students that are conscious of their activities and act in ways that promote peace and unity in the nation. Therefore, university authorities must conduct periodic seminars before, during, and after elections to educate and enlighten their students on the dangers associated with the dysfunctional use of the social media in participating in politics. Additionally, they should be taught the benefits of using social media wisely to participate in politics.

## **Conclusion**

Social media is boosting political involvement, activities, and participation amongst students in Nigeria especially during election period, though post-election use of social media for political purposes is still minimal. However, social media has promoted political communication and participation among its users. Various studies have been conducted in an attempt to better understand the existing relationship between the student's online political participation and social media. This work has, therefore, helped to provide a better understanding of such relationship as social media play a huge role in increasing students' participation in politics. This is due to the fact that students can easily access social media platforms to make unrestricted political comments and also freely source for political information that would help shape their political opinion and set agenda for them.

However, with the advantages of social media also come some disadvantages. This is why Okoro and Nwafor (2013) noted that whereas many use the technology wisely to campaign for their various candidates, interact with candidates, and electorates one-on-one during election and electioneering periods; others used them to attack opponents, spread false rumors, hate and inciting messages, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos, hack into people's accounts to commit all manner of frauds resulting in several data and identity thefts.

Based on this, it is instructive to note that the relevant government authorities, educational institutions, and other sponsors of the students have to take good measures to ensure that they are aware of how and why they need to use social media to participate in politics in a manner that is devoid of tension, hatred, rancor, and that will enhance modesty and civility.

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