

# Instagram Role In Influencing Youth Opinion In 2015 Election Campaign In Bahrain

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## Abstract

This study can be considered a descriptive study portraying the effect of the exposure to Instagram campaign in Bahrain among Bahrainis. The research is mainly concerned with presenting this effect in relevance to their awareness, attitude, and behaviour. Its main question: Does the exposure of the studied sample to Instagram election campaigns; has an effect on their cognitive, affective and behavioural systems?

A self-administrated questionnaire was distributed to 200 Bahraini universities youth to know cognitive, affective and behavioural levels of awareness and changes.

The researcher main objective was to know the effect of Instagram in the latest election in Bahrain (2015) and whether it encouraged people to vote and feel the importance of their vote. In addition to understand the level of awareness of each candidate and the information they knew through Instagram.

The results proved the effectiveness of Instagram to get to the youth as the rate of seeing Instagram election post per week, 62.16% of the questionnaire takers answered that they see it more than 9 times a week, 8.10% see it 7 – 9 times a week, 16.21% see it 4 – 6 times a week, and 13.51% see it 1 – 3 times a week.

8.10% of the participants said that they “always” get information about the election candidates & their programs from the Instagram election posts, 21.62% said that they “frequently” do, 37.83% said “sometimes”, 21.62% said “rarely”, and 10.81% said they “never” do get information about the election candidates and their programs from Instagram election posts.

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**Keywords:** Instagram, youth opinion, influence

## Introduction

Mass media has long been perceived as a power tool that is always used by the different parties in a society in order to affect the public in a

certain way. Nevertheless politicians and election candidates are one of those parties that highly depend on the different media to convey their messages to the public in order to affect their cognitive, affective, and behavioural systems.

Instagram is a very important medium and is a relatively new form of communication where users can easily share their updates by taking photos and tweaking them using filters. It has seen rapid growth in the number of users as well as uploads since it was launched in October 2010. In spite of the fact that it is the most popular photo capturing and sharing application, it has attracted relatively less attention from the research community that is why the study will focus on Instagram role in influencing youth opinion in the latest election campaign in Bahrain.

### **Research Objective**

The researcher main objective was to measure the effect of Instagram in the latest election in Bahrain (2015) and whether it encouraged people to vote and feel the importance of their vote. In addition to understand the level of awareness of each candidate and the information they knew through Instagram.

### **Methodology**

This study can be considered a descriptive study portraying the effect of the exposure to outdoor elections campaign in Bahrain among Bahraini youth. The research will be mainly concerned with presenting this effect in relevance to their awareness, attitude, and behaviour.

### **Research Question**

Does the exposure of the studied sample to outdoor election campaign, has an effect on their cognitive, affective and behavioural systems?

### **Operational definitions of the variables of the study**

1) Instagram election campaign:

In this research Instagram election campaign refers to any ad posted on Instagram dealing with the elections, whether it is presenting the candidates and their programs, information about the election, or contents urging people to participate in the election process.

2) The level of exposure:

In this research the level of exposure refers to the number of times per week the participant is exposed to Instagram election ads.

3) Awareness about the elections:

In this research having awareness about the election is indicated by having information and knowledge regarding the election process. For instance, information about the candidates and their programs, the places where voters are supposed to go, the elections system in Bahrain, etc

4) A positive attitude towards the elections:

This variable refers to the likeness or the positive feelings toward the election process, and the intention and the willingness of the studied sample to participate in the elections.

5) A positive behaviour towards the elections:

This variable refers to the positive action of the participant towards the election or taking the action and the step of participating and voting in the elections.

### **Methods of data collection**

Data for this research is collected through Self-Administered Questionnaire.

### **Sample of the study**

This study is based on a non-probability purposive sample of Bahraini universities youth, with the criteria of being exposed to Instagram election posts.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Political Communication**

Political scientists have long recognized the dependence of politics on communications. Karl W. Deutsch showed how modernization and nationalism can be measured from patterns and flow of mail, telephone calls, and newspapers. The political system and the communication system precisely parallel one another, and it is doubtful that one could exist without the other. (Roskin, et.al, 2008)

All political action is a reaction to communication of one kind or another. There are, however, different levels and types of communication. Face-to-face communication is the most basic and most effective for altering or reinforcing political opinions because it allows for dialogue where mass media cannot. Mass media generally reinforce existing political opinions but rarely convert anyone. (Roskin, et.al, 2008)

On the other hand, the persuasion process is sometimes seen from another angle, as proposed by the cognitive response theory. “This theory proposes that persuasion induced by a communication is actually self-persuasion produced by the thoughts that the person generates while reading, listening to or even just anticipating the communication.” (Atkinson, et.al, 2000, P.662)

## **Media and Outdoor Advertising Effects**

The perception for the effects of the mass media has been seen from different perspectives, throughout a number of stages. Earliest studies described the great power of the mass media in influencing its audience. According to Serevin and Tankard (2001) this kind of conceptualization for the mass media effects is sometimes known as the bullet theory or the hypodermic needle theory. Later on these theories were perceived as “not accurate” and were replaced by models that describe a less powerful mass media.

“This new conceptualization grew primarily out of election studies during the 1940s reported in the books *The People’s Choice*. The new view attributed much less power to mass communication message. A major statement of this view, often called limited-effects of model, was presented in Joseph Klapper’s book *The Effects of Mass Communication*.” (Serevin and Tankard, 2001, p.13)

More recent research were conducted and viewed mass communication messages as powerful, yet, not as much as they were under the bullet theory. As Serevin and Tankard (2001) stated this new attribute might be called moderate effect. (Serevin and Tankard, 2001)

Measuring media effects can be related to its influence on the awareness, the attitude and the behaviour of the recipients. The relation between these three components has been a matter of concern and study for social scientists, especially mass communication experts and practitioners. Greenwald (1968) presented a model which states that attitude change is related to the thoughts that occur in the receiver’s mind. He adds that “retention of a message and acceptance of a message are two different things- an individual can learn the material in a message without undergoing attitude change.” (As cited in Serevin and Tankard, 2001, p.173)

Advertising is a media content where effect is essential and targeted, as advertisers are usually aiming to influence and persuade the recipients. Arens and his colleagues (2009) define advertising as “The structured and composed non- personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services, and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media.” (Arens et. al, 2009, p.4)

“Out-of-Home Media” is one of these various media that advertisers use to present their advertisings. It is the type of the media that reaches the audience out-side their home, and it includes the outdoor advertising.

According to Arens and his colleagues (2009) outdoor advertising was probably the first advertising tool used ever, and even today it is used globally to communicate certain message or image to large audiences frequently and quickly at the lowest cost per thousand of any major medium. (Arens et. al, 2009)

The authors add that using outdoor advertising is increasing and more growth is expected as advertisers are searching for alternatives to the declining audiences and advertising clutter of the other types of mass media. Unlike other media, outdoor advertising can carry advertisers' messages all the time without any interruption. "It is never turned off, zipped, zapped, put aside, or left unopened. And it's big." (Arens et. al, 2009, p. 384)

One of the prominent advantages of outdoor advertising is its frequency, as people reaching these advertisements are continuously exposed to it. As mentioned by Arens and his colleagues (2009) "Most people reached with outdoor advertising see it daily." (Arens et. al, 2009, p. 386)

Parallel to this, Moriart, Mitchell and Wells (2009) mention that outdoor advertising is an integral part of a multiplatform advertising campaign as it is used to build an image to the proposed candidates for the election; image needs frequent exposure and this is a primary benefit of outdoor ads. (Moriart, et. al., 2009)

Determining the effective number of exposures to advertising is one of the issues that have been concerning advertising people.

As Clow and Baack stated "One continuing issue facing advertisers is deciding how many times a person must be exposed to an ad before it has an impact. Most agree that a single exposure is not enough. Discovering the actual number has inspired a great deal of debate. Some agree it takes three exposures. Others say as many as 10. The basic rule, developed by Herbert Krugman, states it takes a minimum of three exposures for an advertisement to be effective. This is the Three-exposure hypothesis. Most media planners have assumed it for many years". (Clow and Baack, 2007, P.240)

On the same line, Moriart and his colleagues believe that, because of the very short time consumers are normally exposed to a traditional billboard message, typically, three to five seconds, the message must be short and the visual must have stopping power. (Moriart, Mitchell and Wells, 2009)

According to them, "The 30-day posting period is long enough so that these exposures can be seen as repositories of long-term brand image leading to favourable consumer attitude accumulation. It's like making a deposit in a bank and watching your wealth grow." (Moriart, et. al., 2009, P.291)

In addition to this, outdoor advertising is characterized by its geographic flexibility, as advertisers can place their messages in the areas they want. Demographic flexibility is also an advantage for outdoor advertising, as "messages can be concentrated in areas frequented or traversed by young people, upper-income people, or people of specific ethnic background." (Arens et. al, 2009, p. 386)

Instagram is one of countless contributors to what is now appropriately dubbed "the like generation"; "When you're socializing and

self-expressing and your sense of personal worth is based on how many likes you have, it's kind of important, I think for people to understand not that this is bad, but for people to understand that they're living their lives in a marketplace". What is unmistakably recognizable now is the fact today's users are presenting themselves as brands, and with that, the amounts of likes they secure aides as a sort of gratification that has now formed, to a certain degree, a difficult-to-break addiction.

### **Youth and politics**

In the field of social sciences, age is one of the demographic variables that should be emphasised, as it usually has it influential and effects in the studies conducted in this field.

Researchers have related age is to the way people think, feel and act, especially when it comes to political and societal issues.

Roskin and his colleagues (2008) believe that two theories can explain the way age impacts political opinions, the life cycle and generation theories. According to them "The first, widely accepted, holds that people change as they age. Thus young people are naturally radical and older people moderate or even conservative. With few responsibilities, young people can be idealistic and rebellious, but with the burdens of home, job, and children of their own, people tend to become conservative." (Roskin, et.al, 2008, P. 141)

### **The Attentive Public**

The attentive public, although fewer in number, has more political impact because they have ideas and articulate them, demonstrating political competence. Sometimes they can rouse the general public. (Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones, 2008)

### **New Media Effects**

Instagram is seemingly the most well-known application globally. Generally speaking Instagram is a simple way to capture, customize and share photos and videos with a number of people known as "followers". As a user, you are free to choose whom you allow access to view what you share. Statistically, 55 million pictures are shared daily and as of February 2015 Instagram has accumulated a whopping 150 million active users. Due to such a colossal popularity, a number of users have taken it upon themselves to market and brand their businesses -or themselves- by publicly displaying photos and videos of what they would like their fellow users to be aware of. Consequently, Instagram has become the most prominent social media platform for advertising and marketing, and a very successful one at that.

Social marketers may also choose to adopt an evidently successful strategy: advertising via a "famous Instagram figure". In the Arab world specifically, followers of such prominent Instagram personalities tend to favor anything from said user's recommendations, to choice of food to clothing, and marketers have taken this into quite a consideration. A well known Instagram notability is typically one with over ten thousand followers, their photos reach a wide range of audiences which is an excellent window for advertising. There are a number of Arabian users who are known to advertise a substantial amount of merchandise, and brands have noticed a large increase in their sales after manipulating this sort of marketing strategy. For example, a well recognized Instagram figure known by the handle @bb\_alabduhmohsen (Bibi Al Abdulmohsen) has acquired quite a fan-base.

Recently Bibi has been raving about certain brand of tea she enjoys, after noticing her preference to their brand the company sent Al Abdulmohsen boxes of tea to which she did not waive the opportunity to share with her gargantuan following. Less than a week later, the tea brand sold out in nearly every Kuwaiti supermarket and grocery store. Moreover, Bibi has been invited to countless clothing store openings, public events and restaurant launches across the Gulf, and due to her massive following, a large amount of people will gather at such events strictly due to the fact that Bibi will be appearing. This is objectively a win win situation for both parties: Bibi will get a chance to socialize by interacting with her "fans" and generating more likability in her favor. Subsequently, the restaurant or store will now be recognized and gain a generous amount of customers which will promote sales and provoke general popularity whilst lessening all around competition.

In Bahrain, (due to cultural constraints and restrictions) users are typically private, sharing considerably mundane photos of meals and vacation scenery. However, nearly all businesses ranging from home based to internationally recognized franchises have a public Instagram account. Additionally, certain events held annually, monthly or otherwise will create an account in order to remain relevant to their existing audience/customers. Recently the country has undergone a parliamentary and municipal election which is done every

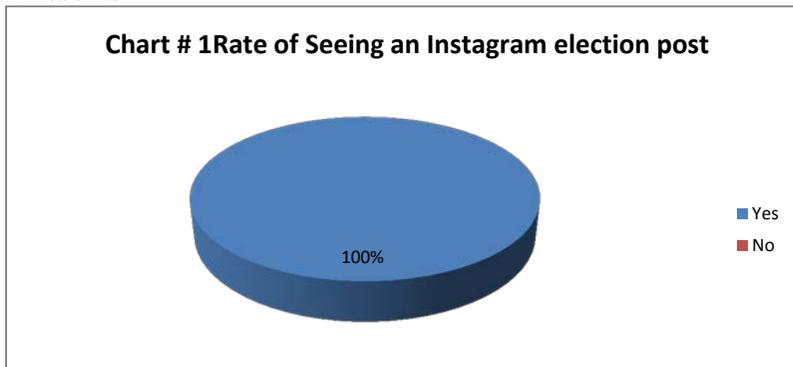


four years regularly. This year's election however, included a key factor to which Bahraini candidates have not been previously able to utilize: Instagram. Candidates presented their Instagram handles on their election billboards that were displayed in and around the areas to which they hope to represent. This further exhibits just how influential social media has become in self-promotion, which was in fact the most prominent platform used by candidates pre-election and aided greatly in each of their respective campaigning processes. Voters may now employ the popular social networking application to gain immediate access into their potential representatives' profiles. Posts by the candidates generally included an invitation into their campaign tents where they spoke of their goals concerning the Bahraini society and what they wish to accomplish if elected. Candidates additionally utilized the "hashtag" feature, creating further awareness and helped in exposing themselves to a wider set of audiences.

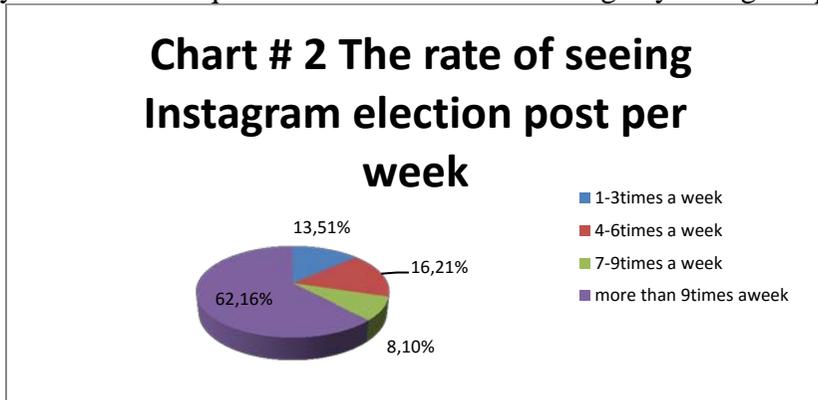
Being that Bahrain is a significantly small country, it's society has always felt like a tight knit family. Instagram has allowed Bahraini "family members" to connect more personally via the act of sharing and liking photos and videos. Previously, the elections have considerably been a way in which members of society commune whilst sharing their thoughts, likes and opinions, the availability of Instagram has now only further increased such networking and collected it in a rather intimate virtual hub.

In conclusion, Instagram has become a gateway for self-promotion, instant gratification and an effective marketplace for users and brands alike. With its ever growing following, and it's continuing domination in the area of engagement when compared with all other social media and social networking platforms, it is safe to assume that Instagram and "the like generation" will only continue to cultivate and expand in its ability to attract a wide range of audiences and accumulate more and more devotees in a seemingly harmless Internet based marketplace.

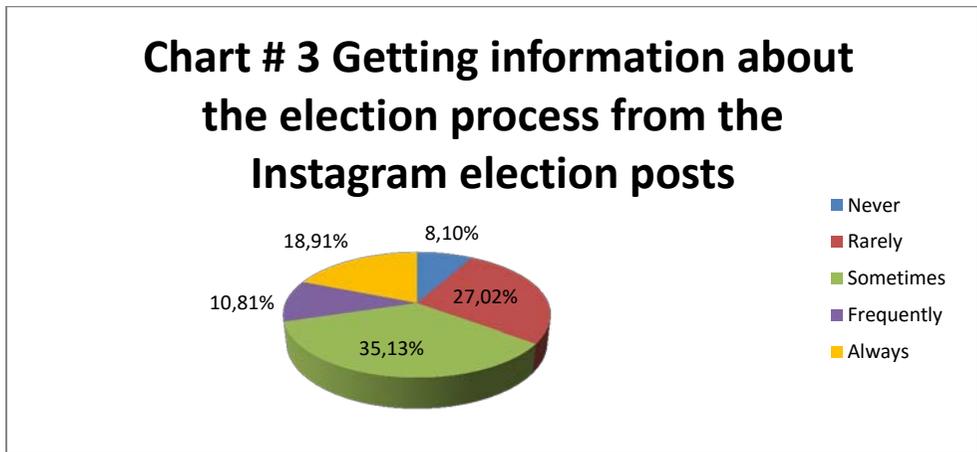
## Research Results



As the survey was handed out, 100% of the survey takers answered with a “yes” to the first question about the rate of seeing any Instagram post.

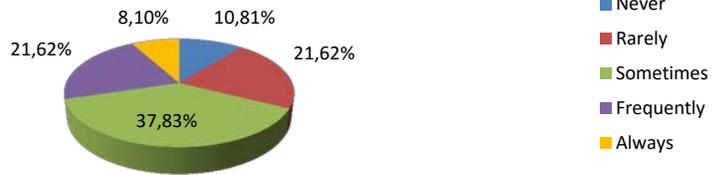


The second question was about the rate of seeing Instagram election post per week, 62.16% of the questionnaire takers answered that they see it more than 9 times a week, 8.10% see it 7 – 9 times a week, 16.21% see it 4 – 6 times a week, and 13.51% see it 1 – 3 times a week.



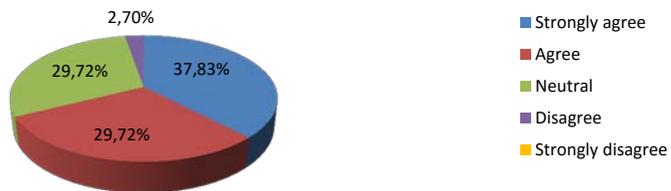
The third question was about the Instagram election posts and if they were informative enough for the participants to get information about the election process from. 18.91% answered “always”, 10.81% answered “frequently”, the majority, which were 35.13% answered “sometimes”, 27.02% answered “rarely”, and only 8.10% answered “never”.

### Chart # 4 Getting information about the candidates & their programs from Instagram election posts

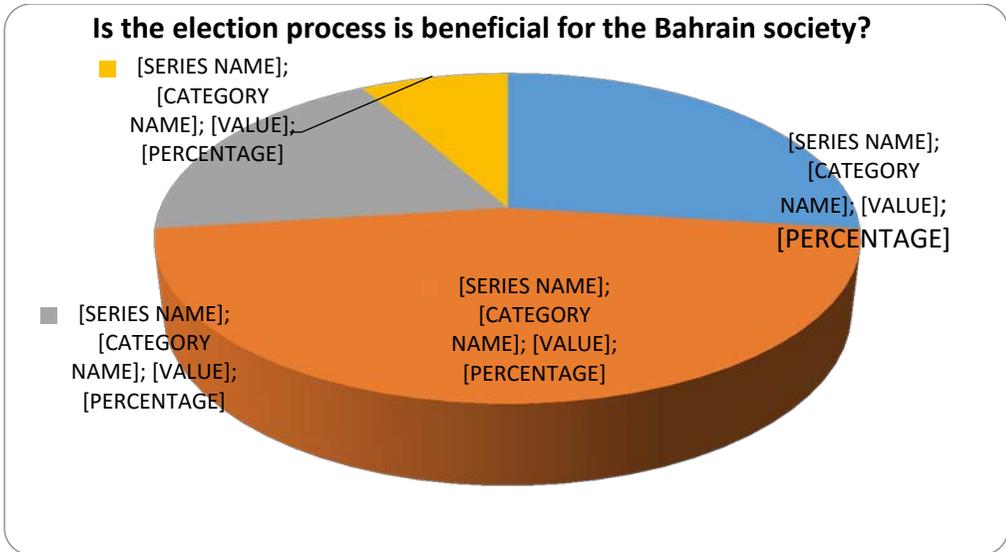


8.10% of the participants said that they “always” get information about the election candidates & their programs from the Instagram election posts, 21.62% said that they “frequently” do, 37.83% said “sometimes”, 21.62% said “rarely”, and 10.81% said they “never” do get information about the election candidates and their programs from Instagram election posts.

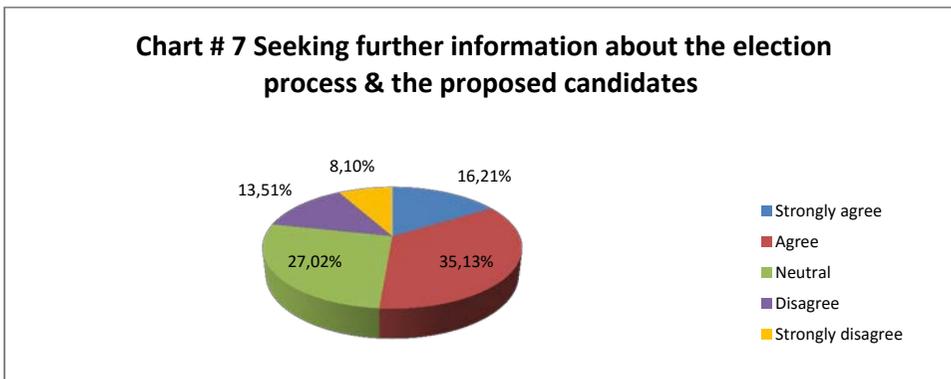
### Chart # 5 The importance for youth to participate and vote in the election



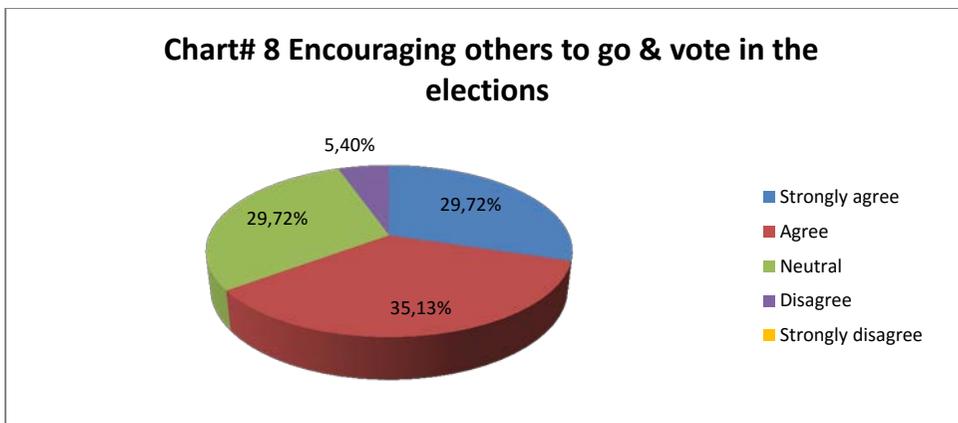
37.83% of the participants “strongly agree” that it is important for youth to participate and vote in elections, 29.72% of the participants “agree”, 29.72% of the participants are “neutral”, and 2.70% of the participants “disagree”.



27.02% of the survey takers “strongly agree” that the election process is beneficial for the Bahraini society, 45.94% “agree”, 18.91% are “neutral”, and 8.10% of the survey takers think that the election process is not beneficial for the Bahraini society.



16.21% of the survey takers “strongly agree” that they are seeking further information about the election process & the proposed candidates, 35.13% “agree”, 27.02% are “neutral”, 13.51% “disagree”, and 8.10% “strongly disagree”.



The majority, 35.13% of the participants “agree” about encouraging others to go & vote in the elections, 29.72% of the participants “strongly agree” while the other 29.72% of the participants are “neutral”, and lastly 5.40% “disagree” about encouraging other to go & vote.

### **Qualitative analysis for the survey**

1. Many respondents are not seeking information about the candidates yet they are willing to go to vote based on their parents’ opinions or trusted figures.
2. Voting was more of feeling patriotic and sense of belonging more than understanding the election campaign for each candidate.

### **Recommendation**

1. More awareness through all forms of Media to the youth emphasizing the election process and how it will affect the society in general.
2. More researches to be done on Instagram as it is a very powerful tool in shaping Public Opinion especially for the youth.

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