

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of social media on political education and activism among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Three research questions guided the study. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 25, 000 undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A sample size of 400 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka was selected for the study using simple random and non-proportionate sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Influence of Social Media on Political Education and Activism among undergraduates Questionnaire (ISMPEUQ)". The instrument was validated by one expert in the Department of Educational Foundations and two experts in the Department of Political Science in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability index of 0.82, 0.80 and 0.81 with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.81. The collected data were analyzed using mean scores. The findings of the study revealed that social media is highly used by undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and they also utilize it for political activism. The study also revealed that social media influences political education among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka by creating a platform where students follow political organizations/activists, engaging in political discussions among others. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the University should develop workshops or structured programs that guide students on effectively utilizing social media for political education among others.

Keywords: *Social Media, Political Education, Activism, Technology.*

Introduction

Modern technology in communication has no doubt helped to serve as a means of connecting people and as a medium of interaction in the social world and educational arena.

Consequently, tertiary education has been exploring the exciting opportunities that technology has brought to institutions, educators and students. As a result, there has been rapid growth in the availability and uptake of online teaching and learning by many colleges and universities. Technology has changed the way people interact and has brought about the emergence of an open social platform called social media. This allows people to easily connect with each other, thereby making the world a global village.

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, transforming the way we communicate, share information, and engage with the world around us. Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) defined social media as the application that allows users to converse and interact with each other. It is an online space that is used by people to connect, share, communicate, establish or maintain connection with others for various purposes. It enables people to build social networks of like minds. It is a platform that gives individuals the opportunity to interact, using two way communication, such that it allows anyone who has an online account to share their opinions, views ideas and engage in discussions with other social media users. However, social media relies on many electronic devices like tablets, ipads, laptops, phones and other internet-based technologies for connecting people. Through these technologies, people open social media accounts and interact with other individuals. In the context of this study, social media can be described as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make collaboration possible, enabling deliberation and discussions among people.

Prominent among social media platforms includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, among others. In contemporary society, these social media platforms have become prominent communication tools, particularly in the school community. Supporting the above, Paul, Baker and Cochran (2012) stated that tertiary institutions are increasingly using social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to connect with current and potential students and to deliver instructional content (Paul et al, 2012). Also, social media platforms allow students to interact with one another, their teachers and communities that share in their education related activities. Besides, several University students now maintain personal profile on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp where they can interact, share resources, engage in varying discussions and express their ideas. Apart from helping students interact with their teachers, fellow students, build a social circle and school related activities, social media also play a significant role in political education among University undergraduates.

Political education according to Garcia, (2020) refers to the process of learning about politics, governance, and how decisions are made in the society. It involves teaching individuals about their rights and responsibilities as citizen, as well as helping them understand how to participate in the political process through voting, advocacy, and activism. This can happen in formal institutions like schools, social media or membership of groups and organizations. By educating people about politics, they can become more informed and engaged members of the society who are better able to make decisions that impact their society and the world. Political education teaches the people the new programme and procedure of the government in power. Political education seeks to cultivate a sense of social responsibility and civic duty among citizens, with the goal of creating a more informed and participatory electorate (Garcia, 2020).

In the words of Ekuri, Andong and Betiang, (2018), political education in the Nigerian context is the process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of vast majority of Nigerians and empowers them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the

process of nation building (Ekuri et al, 2018). It also includes teaching the people to know their right and obligations in the society, encouraging effective participation by the people in political activities in their society .Political education principally performs the function of engendering political awareness within a society through the preparation of the people for the socio-political world in which they live. This should enable them become useful to themselves and contribute significantly to the growth and development of their country. This infers the creation of a new national political culture that facilitates the establishment and consolidation of an integrated and viable democratic order in the Nigerian society. Similarly, Azeez and Ebenezer, (2017) added that political education aims at getting the people to take part in their government, to assume their responsibilities of contributing to the development of the society, to make them aware of their rights and defend them without fear, to harness and tap the latent forces in the people, to make them see politics as an essential aspect of the entire social fabric and to make them less vulnerable to induce influences in the political process (Azeez & Ebenezer, 2017). The manifestation of political education can be seen in the behavioural characteristics such as activism.

Political activism refers to the active engagement of individuals or groups in efforts to influence or bring about social or political change .It encompasses a wide range of activities that aims to influence political decisions, promote specific policies or legislations or raise awareness about social and political issues. This can take various forms, such as protests, demonstrations, rallies, lobbying, advocacy and social media campaigns. In furtherance, Tufekci, (2017), political activism can be defined as the pursuit of political and social change through collective action, such as protests, boycotts, strikes, and other forms of public engagement and mobilization. Tufekci opined that social media lowered the barriers to collective action, making it easier for people to organize, coordinate, and participate in protests and other forms of activism. Similarly, Castells (2015) also posits that social media has empowered citizens to challenge the monopoly of traditional media and to create their own channels of communication, thus enhancing their capacity for political mobilization and collective action.

In line with the foregoing, the impact of social media on political education and activism in Nigeria has been significant. This is because, social media platforms have become powerful tools for disseminating information about political issues, facilitating political discussions, and enabling political mobilization among the populace. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, have become popular spaces for sharing news and updates about political developments in Nigeria (Akpojivi, 2018). This widespread dissemination of information allows Nigerians to stay informed about current events and engage in political discourse more easily than before. Social media provides a space for Nigerians to express their opinions, engage in debates, and exchange ideas about various political topics. Through the usage of social media, individuals engage in various discussions and debates about the political structure, processes and institutions. These discussions and debates are significant in educating the citizen about the political structure, rights, responsibilities and party ideologies.

The EndSARS protest in 2020, which was sparked by allegations of police brutality, saw widespread use of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok to organize demonstrations, share information, and engage in discussions about the issues at hand. This open dialogue on social media helped to raise awareness and foster a more engaged citizenry in Nigeria .The widespread use of social media was instrumental in the success of the protest. Similarly, students, particularly University students, are active users of social media

platforms, and they are an integral part of society as the future leaders. The EndSARS protest highlighted the transformative power of social media in facilitating civic engagement, political education, political activism, and social change. As students continue to leverage these platforms, they can play a vital role in shaping the future of Nigeria and contributing to the country's democratic development. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the influence of social media on political education and activism among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, with a significant impact on how individuals access information, engage in political discourse, and participate in political activism. While existing research has explored the general influence of social media on political education and activism, there is a need to specifically examine the influence on undergraduate students, who are at a formative stage in their understanding of politics and social issues.

Undergraduates are at a crucial stage of their personal and intellectual development, where they are actively forming their political beliefs and exploring avenues for civic engagement. The ubiquity of social media in the lives of undergraduate students raises important questions about how these platforms are shaping their political education and activism. This study, therefore, aims to examine the influence of social media on the political education and activism among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social media on political education and activism among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

4. The extent to which social media usage influence the political knowledge of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.
5. The extent to which social media facilitate the civic engagement among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
6. The extent to which undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University organize protests for political activism.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does social media usage influence the political knowledge of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. How does social media facilitate critical or civic engagement among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?
3. To what extent do undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University use social media to organize protests political activism?

Methodology

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design.. The population of the study comprised of 25, 000 undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka for the 2023/2024 academic session. The sample size for the study comprises 400 undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka using simple random and non-proportionate

sampling techniques. Simple random sampling technique of writing on paper, folding and picking was used to select 8 Faculties out of the 15 Faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. On the other hand, non-proportionate sampling was used to select 50 students from each sampled Faculty ($50 \times 8 = 400$). The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Influence of Social Media on Political Education and Activism among Undergraduates Questionnaire (ISMPEUQ)." . The instrument was validated by two experts in the Department of Educational Foundations and one expert in the Department of Political Science in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability index of 0.82, 0.80 and 0.81 with an overall reliability coefficient of. 0.81. The instrument was structured on a four point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE) , Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) (where 4 stands for VHE, 3 for HE, 2 for LE and 1 for VLE) for research questions one and three while research question two was structured on a four rating scale of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed. Mean was used to analyze the data collected.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent does social media usage influence the political knowledge of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 1: Mean Score of Respondents on the Extent of Social Media Usage among Undergraduate Students

S/N	Extent of f Social Media Usage	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	XX	Decision
1.	I have a personal profile on various social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Tiktok and Twitter	240	140	16	4	400	3.54	VHE
2.	I stay on social media approximately one hour per day	168	108	96	28	400	3.04	VHE
3.	I use social media to connect with my friends and course mates	256	128	4	12	400	3.57	VHE
4.	I check my social media accounts multiple times a day	212	136	32	20	400	3.35	VHE
5.	Social media is my primary source of information and news	224	152	16	8	400	3.48	VHE
6.	Social media is an important part of my daily routine	120	200	52	28	400	3.03	VHE
7.	I often check my social media accounts during classes or study sessions	76	188	84	52	400	2.70	HE
Grand Mean							3.24	VHE

The analysis in Table 1 shows that all the items have mean scores of 2.50 and above. This indicates that social media is highly used to a very great extent by the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Research Question Two: How does social media facilitate critical thinking or civic engagement among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 2: Mean score of Respondents on the influence of social media usage on political education among Undergraduates

S/N	Influence of Social Medium on Political Education	SA	A	D	SD	N	XX	Decision
8.	I follow political organizations and activists on social media to stay informed about political issues	204	120	48	28	400	3.25	Agree
9.	I engage in discussions and debates about politics on social media to understand different political perspectives and ideologies	108	156	88	48	400	2.81	Agree
10.	I have changed my political beliefs or opinions based on information encountered on social media	128	136	80	56	400	2.84	Agree
11.	I use social media to research trending political topics	160	160	52	28	400	3.13	Agree
12.	I learn about political events and developments on social media	164	192	32	12	400	3.27	Agree
13.	I have participated in online political education webinars/campaign on social media	108	120	104	68	400	2.67	Agree
14.	Social media plays an important role in educating me about the political landscape in Nigeria	232	136	28	4	400	3.49	Agree
Grand Mean							3.06	Agree

Table 2 analysis shows that all the items have mean scores of 2.50 and above, showing agreement. This implies that items 8- 14 are how social media usage influence Political education among undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question Three: To what extent do undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka utilize social media to organize protests for political activism?

Table 3: Mean Score of Respondents on the Extent Undergraduate Students Utilize Social Media for Political Activism

S/N	Extent of Utilization of Social Media For Political Activism	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	XX	Decision
15.	Political contents shared on social media raise awareness and actions	228	152	8	12	400	3.49	VHE
16.	Social media have been used to organize or promote political events or protests among undergraduates	176	180	32	12	400	3.30	VHE
17.	I have signed online petitions and engaged in political campaigns on social media	76	80	156	88	400	2.36	LE
18.	I have attended offline political events or protests that I first learned about on social media	56	96	124	124	400	2.21	LE
19.	I have shared political petitions or calls to action on social media	68	88	152	92	400	2.33	LE
20.	Social media has influenced my decision to participate in political protests or demonstration	124	124	72	80	400	2.73	HE
21.	I agree that social media is a powerful platform for raising awareness about social and political injustices	212	176	4	8	400	3.48	VHE

Analysis in table 3 shows that item 15, 16, 20 and 21 have a mean score above 2.50 showing agreement, while item 17, 18 and 19 have a mean score below 2.50. This indicates that social media is highly utilized by undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for political activism, such as organizing protests, sharing information about political events, and raising awareness about political issues.

Discussion of Findings

Finding of the study revealed that social media is used to a very great extent by undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The finding of this study is in line with the findings of Isaac and Azubuike (2019) which revealed that the respondents were highly exposed to social media and they used social media to a high extent to participate in politics. The finding of this study is also in line with the finding of Badaru and Adu (2020) which revealed that out of the 372 participants, 243 (65.3%) reported the use of the social media.

Finding of the study revealed that social media usage influences political education among undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka by creating a platform where students follow political organizations/activists, engaging in political discussions and debates, research trending political topics, learn about political events and development, participating in online political education webinars/campaign and educating them about the political landscape in Nigeria. The finding of this study is in consonance with the finding of Apuke and Tunca (2018) which shows that social media was employed due to its participatory nature and that social media was applied to influence the thoughts of many young people, increasing their political awareness. The finding is also in line with the finding of Efebeh, Orishede and Ikenga (2024) who opined that social media significantly influences the political literacy of first time and eligible voters living in rural neighborhoods in Nigeria.

Finding of the study revealed that social media is utilized to a great extent by undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for political activism, such as organizing protests, sharing information about political events, and raising awareness about political issues. The finding of this study is in consonance with the finding of Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) which shows that social media played a major role in mobilizing people, creating awareness, as well as participation and circulation of information about candidates. The finding is also in line with the finding of Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) who opined that the youths used social media to participate in political advocacy, political campaigns, communicating with politicians, political discussions, monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices, for public consultations, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, blogging about political issues, and writing letters to public officials respectively.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore concluded that social media is highly used by undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and they utilize social media to a high extent for political activism. Also, the use of social media influences undergraduate student's political education and activism.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made

1. The University should integrate social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter now X, or Whatsapp into their teaching and communication strategies to harness high level of social media usage and overall improvement of students' experience and academic performance.
2. The University should develop workshops or structured programs especially on current political events to train and guide students on effective utilization of social media for political education.
3. The university should consider collaborating with developers of social media to provide training and resources on responsible digital activism for the undergraduate students.

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