



Social Media and Political Participation among Youth in Nigeria: A Study of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), 2020-2025

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Abstract

This study titled “The influence of Social Media on Political Awareness and Participation among Youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), 2020–2025” investigated the impact of social media platforms on political awareness, engagement, and participation among youth in Nigeria’s Federal Capital Territory. The study examined how digital technologies, particularly platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and WhatsApp, have transformed political communication and civic engagement. Three specific objectives guided the research: To assess the extent to which social media influences political awareness among youth in the federal capital territory (FCT); to examine the relationship between social media engagement and actual political participation of youth in the FCT; to identify the challenges that hinder effective political mobilization of youth through social media platforms in the FCT. The study adopted a survey research design using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. A total of 388 respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of the youth population in the study area. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distribution. The findings revealed that social media has become a major source of political information for youths, promoting awareness, civic consciousness, and engagement in political discourse. The study further found a strong positive relationship between social media engagement and political participation, as online activism often translates into offline involvement in elections, campaigns, and advocacy. However, the study also identified several challenges limiting the effective use of social media for political mobilization, including misinformation, poor internet access, high data costs, government restrictions, and fear of online harassment or surveillance. The study concluded that social media plays a transformative role in political education, mobilization, and participation among youths, in the FCT, but its full potential remains constrained by infrastructural, economic, and regulatory barriers. The study recommended that government and relevant stakeholders should promote digital literacy and civic education to combat misinformation, improve internet accessibility and affordability to foster inclusive participation, and strengthen online safety policies to ensure freedom of expression and protect users from digital harassment. By addressing these challenges, social media can continue to serve as a vital platform for enhancing political awareness, democratic participation of the youth in the FCT.

Keywords: Federal Capital Territory, Political awareness, Political Participation, Social Media, Youth

Introduction

Across the globe, social media has dramatically reshaped the contours of political communication, citizen participation, and democratic interaction. The emergence of digital technologies, particularly Web 2.0 applications, has revolutionized how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Citizens today, especially the youth, are no longer passive recipients of political messages but active participants in producing, reshaping, and contesting public discourse. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram,

YouTube, and TikTok have evolved into alternative public spheres where individuals' express political opinions, debate issues, and mobilize for collective action in ways that were previously unimaginable in traditional political systems (Castells, 2012). According to Loader, Vromen, and Xenos (2014), these digital networks have enabled what is referred to as "networked citizenship," a form of participatory culture in which young people connect around shared political interests and causes beyond formal institutions or party lines. This new dynamic has allowed marginalized voices especially youth, minorities, and women to gain visibility in political conversations, promoting inclusiveness in global political engagement. Yet, as Boulianne (2019) and Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, and Zheng (2014) note, the extent to which online engagement leads to tangible offline participation such as voting, protesting, or joining political parties differs significantly across countries and socio-economic groups, often reflecting underlying inequalities in access and literacy.

Globally, the role of social media in mobilizing political participation among youth has been vividly illustrated by several historical and contemporary movements. The Arab Spring uprisings of 2010–2012 marked a transformative period where social media served as a catalyst for revolutionary change across North Africa and the Middle East. Young people used Twitter and Facebook to coordinate protests, document state violence, and galvanize international solidarity (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Beyond the Arab world, Theocharis, 2015 noted that, movements such as *Black Lives Matter* in the United States, the *Umbrella Movement* in Hong Kong, and the global *Fridays for Future* climate strike spearheaded by youth activists demonstrate how social media can transcend borders, unite dispersed individuals, and amplify collective grievances. Through, the power of hashtags, viral videos, and online petitions, youth have developed a participatory political culture grounded in shared values, emotions, and peer influence.

In Africa, the past decade has witnessed a surge in the political use of social media, driven largely by the continent's youthful population and growing access to mobile technology. The spread of affordable smartphones and cheaper data plans has brought millions of young Africans online, making digital spaces central to political communication and participation. From the #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa to #ThisFlag in Zimbabwe and #BringBackOurGirls in Nigeria, social media has emerged as a tool for amplifying citizens' voices and holding governments accountable (Bosch, 2017).

In West Africa, particularly, the convergence of youth, politics, and social media has deepened democratic engagement but also provoked new tensions between governments and citizens. During elections in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, social media platforms have become critical tools for campaign communication, election observation, and the exposure of malpractice. Youth activists have leveraged platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter to counter fake news, track results, and demand accountability from political elites. Nigeria stands out as a notable example of this trend, especially during the 2020 #EndSARS movement one of the most significant youth-led digital mobilisations in African history. (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2021).

In Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the years between 2020 and 2025 have been a dynamic period for youth political participation mediated through social media. Abuja, being the seat of political power, serves as both a symbolic and practical centre of national discourse where youth are highly active online and offline. Social media platforms have provided FCT youths with access to political education, campaign updates, and spaces for policy debates that were previously limited to elite circles. As Nigeria continues to experience democratic consolidation alongside digital expansion, examining how social media shapes political awareness and participation among FCT youth is not only timely but also vital for understanding the evolving nature of civic engagement in the country.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, social media has become a dominant space for political communication, civic dialogue, and mobilisation among Nigerian youth. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have served as channels for youth to express opinions, demand accountability, and influence public discourse. However, despite the proliferation of digital engagement, there remains a critical gap between online activism and actual political participation. Many young Nigerians actively engage in debates and advocacy online but show limited participation in formal political processes such as voter registration, voting, running for office, or joining political parties. This disconnect raises questions about the real impact of social media on political empowerment and democratic participation in Nigeria's evolving digital society.

Moreover, while social media provides an avenue for information exchange and political awareness, it has also become a site of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda that distort public understanding of governance issues. The spread of false political narratives, particularly during election cycles, has contributed to political apathy and distrust in democratic institutions. In the context of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), where youth constitute a significant portion of the population, there is limited empirical evidence on how social media influences their political attitudes and decision-making. The challenge lies in determining whether increased exposure to political content online translates into meaningful political behaviour or merely fosters digital expressions without real-world engagement.

Additionally, external factors such as internet accessibility, digital literacy, and government regulation further complicate the role of social media in political participation. The suspension of Twitter in 2021, for instance, disrupted online political communication and raised concerns about freedom of expression and civic engagement among Nigerian youth.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media on political awareness and participation among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) from 2020 to 2025. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Assess the extent to which social media influences political awareness among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

- ii. Examine the relationship between social media engagement and actual political participation of youth in the FCT.
- iii. Identify the challenges that hinder effective political mobilisation of youth through social media platforms in the FCT.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H₁): There is a significant relationship between social media usage and the level of political awareness among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between social media usage and the level of political awareness among youth in the FCT.

Hypothesis Two (H₁): Social media engagement significantly influences political participation among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Social media engagement does not significantly influence political participation among youth in the FCT.

Hypothesis Three (H₁): Challenges such as misinformation, poor internet access, and government restrictions significantly hinder the effective use of social media for political mobilisation among youth in the FCT.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Challenges such as misinformation, poor internet access, and government restrictions do not significantly hinder the effective use of social media for political mobilisation among youth in the FCT.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Social Media

Social media refers to a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok facilitate interactive communication by enabling users to create profiles, share information, and build virtual communities. These platforms have revolutionized human communication, allowing individuals to participate in global discussions and exchange ideas in real time. The evolution of social media has thus redefined not only personal relationships but also political, social, and economic interactions across the world. Initially, social media was designed to enhance social networking and entertainment. However, over time, it has evolved into a major tool for political communication, news dissemination, and civic participation. According to Castells (2012), digital technologies and networked communication have restructured power dynamics by decentralizing information flow and reducing the control of traditional media. This democratization of communication allows ordinary citizens especially youth to challenge existing power structures and engage directly in public discourse. Consequently, social media has become an important arena where political ideas are shaped, contested, and propagated.

Concept of Political Awareness

Political awareness refers to the level of understanding and consciousness individuals have regarding political systems, governance processes, rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of political institutions. Almond and Verba (1963) describe it as the degree to

which citizens are informed about political issues and capable of making rational political decisions. It involves not only knowledge of political structures and actors but also awareness of one's civic duties and the implications of political choices. Political awareness is therefore a foundational element of democratic participation, as it enables citizens to make informed judgments and hold leaders accountable. Dalton (2016) emphasizes that informed citizens are more likely to develop political interest, participate in elections, and contribute to governance reforms.

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation refers to the activities by which citizens engage in the political process, either to influence decisions, select leaders, or express opinions on governance matters. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) define political participation as all actions aimed at affecting government policies or leadership selection, including voting, campaigning, attending meetings, protesting, or discussing politics. In democratic societies, political participation is both a right and a responsibility, essential for sustaining representative governance and accountability.

Traditionally, political participation was understood primarily in terms of formal activities such as voting, joining political parties, or running for office. However, recent scholarship recognizes informal and non-conventional forms of participation, including demonstrations, petitions, online activism, and social movements (Dalton, 2008). Understanding political participation in the digital age demands examining how technology, awareness, and social structures interact to shape youth involvement in governance.

Review of Literature

Influence of Social Media on Political Awareness among Youth

Social media has evolved into one of the most transformative forces in the realm of political communication, civic engagement, and awareness creation. Over the last two decades, digital platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have redefined how citizens especially young people consume, process, and engage with political information. What was once a passive process of receiving filtered information through traditional media has now become an interactive, dynamic, and participatory phenomenon in which individuals can produce and disseminate political content to wide audiences. According to Papacharissi (2021), social media has "revolutionized the architecture of political communication" by dismantling traditional gatekeeping mechanisms that once limited access to political discourse. Boulianne (2022) further explains that these platforms enable young people to develop independent political perspectives by allowing them to engage directly with civic actors, journalists, and even policymakers. This democratization of information access has helped nurture political consciousness and participatory citizenship across the globe, particularly among youth who historically faced barriers to political inclusion.

In North America and Europe, social media's contribution to political awareness has been unprecedented in recent electoral cycles. The 2020 U.S. presidential election serves as a

case in point, where digital activism fuelled by hashtags, viral videos, and grassroots mobilization played a crucial role in stimulating youth political interest and voter turnout. According to Pew Research Centre (2021), nearly 72% of Americans aged 18 to 29 used social media platforms to follow political events, candidates, and issues, marking one of the highest engagement rates in U.S. electoral history. This level of digital participation not only enhanced political knowledge but also influenced civic behaviour, as social media exposure correlated strongly with voting likelihood and issue-based activism. Jenkins et al. (2023) observed that the United Kingdom witnessed similar trends, where youth increasingly relied on digital communities rather than traditional political institutions for socialization into civic life.

In Asia and Latin America, the story is much the same: social media has become both a tool for political learning and a catalyst for reformist movements. The 2019–2021 Hong Kong protests, the Indian farmers' movement, and the youth-led digital activism in Chile all demonstrated that young people harness online platforms to inform, organize, and influence public opinion (Tufekci, 2022).

Across the African continent, the role of social media in fostering political awareness has become increasingly visible and influential since the mid-2010s. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube have become vital instruments through which African youth discuss political developments, expose corruption, and challenge government narratives. #ENDSARS movement in Nigeria, #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa, and the #CongoBleeding campaign in the Democratic Republic of Congo are prime examples of youth-driven digital activism.

In Nigeria, the influence of social media on youth political awareness has been particularly profound, especially in the post-2015 era marked by increased internet penetration and political polarization. Adebayo and Okafor (2023) observe that Nigerian youth now rely more on social media platforms than on television or newspapers for political news and analysis. This reliance stems largely from widespread mistrust of traditional media outlets, many of which are perceived as biased or co-opted by political elites.

In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, social media has profoundly shaped political awareness among youth between 2020 and 2025. The city, being the administrative and political centre of Nigeria, provides a unique context in which exposure to governance issues and civic activities is relatively higher than in many other regions. Online-based civic initiatives such as "VoteReady Nigeria," "WeMoveNaija," and "Young Voices Abuja" have played instrumental roles in raising awareness about voter registration, government accountability, and constitutional rights.

Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Youth Political Participation

Youth political participation has undergone a remarkable transformation in the digital era. Traditional modes of engagement such as voting, joining political parties, or attending rallies have been expanded to include online activism, digital petitions, virtual protests, and issue-based campaigns organized entirely through social media. Theocharis and van Deth

(2021) argue that social media has fundamentally diversified the repertoire of political participation by giving young people the tools to express dissent, mobilize collective action, and influence policy discussions without necessarily being part of formal institutions. This transformation has blurred the boundary between online and offline participation, as digital engagement increasingly shapes public opinion and drives physical mobilization.

Camilo and Jensen (2023) observed that youth political participation in Europe is now predominantly “networked,” with online communities acting as platforms for organizing events, coordinating protests, and disseminating political information. Similarly, Boulianne (2022) found a strong correlation between the intensity of online interactions measured by likes, shares, and comments and traditional forms of participation, such as voting and attending rallies.

In the global South, particularly in Asia and Latin America, social media has become a vital channel for youth political participation amidst political constraints. Countries such as Indonesia, India, and Chile have witnessed a surge in online civic movements where young people organize, deliberate, and mobilize around pressing issues. According to Snelson and Hu (2022), social media activism in these regions often bridges the gap between marginalized citizens and formal political institutions by providing low-cost, accessible means of participation. Hashtag campaigns such as #MeTooIndia and #NoMasAFP in Chile demonstrate that digital participation enables youth to challenge power structures and demand social justice beyond geographical boundaries.

Across Africa, the rise of social media has significantly altered the landscape of youth political participation. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have become powerful tools for civic mobilization, electoral monitoring, and social accountability. Chilwa and Ifukor (2021) note that digital activism has become central to Africa’s evolving democratic culture, particularly among younger generations who use these platforms to organize protests and demand reforms. The 2021 Ugandan elections highlighted this trend, as youth used social media to disseminate information, report electoral malpractice, and resist digital blackouts imposed by the government. Likewise, in Kenya and Ghana, youth have leveraged online engagement to advocate for anti-corruption measures, youth inclusion in governance, and gender equality (Nwankwo & Mensah, 2022). These examples underscore how social media has provided African youth with unprecedented opportunities to participate in the political process often bypassing traditional party structures.

In Nigeria, social media engagement has emerged as a critical driver of youth political participation, reshaping how young people interact with politics. The 2020 #EndSARS movement marked a defining moment in Nigeria’s civic history, demonstrating how online mobilization could lead to large-scale physical protests. Ogunyemi and Eze (2022) emphasize that social media provided Nigerian youth with a sense of political efficacy and belonging, encouraging them to transition from digital dialogue to street-level activism.

Challenges Limiting the Effective Use of Social Media for Political Mobilization

Globally, the promise of social media as a tool for political mobilization is countered by deep structural, ethical, and institutional challenges that continue to undermine its effectiveness. One of the most persistent global issues is the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which severely distorts political awareness and weakens democratic dialogue. Allcott and Gentzkow (2021) found that false news on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (now X) spreads significantly faster and more widely than factual information, primarily because sensational or emotionally charged content attracts higher engagement. This distortion of truth not only misleads citizens but also fragments public opinion along ideological and emotional lines. During major elections, such as the 2020 U.S. presidential election and the 2022 Brazilian general election, misinformation campaigns were strategically designed to manipulate voter behaviour and fuel political polarization (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2022). Moreover, governments and political elites have increasingly exploited these dynamics by sponsoring disinformation campaigns, turning social media into an arena for digital propaganda rather than civic empowerment. As Bradshaw and Howard (2022) note, digital authoritarianism characterized by online surveillance, censorship, and information manipulation has become a growing threat to the integrity of online mobilization across both democratic and non-democratic nations.

Beyond misinformation, data privacy and state surveillance also pose serious challenges to digital activism. Many governments have expanded their monitoring of citizens' online activities under the pretext of national security, discouraging free political expression. Tufekci (2022) highlights how the fear of surveillance has a "chilling effect" on political participation, where users avoid expressing dissenting views online to protect themselves from state reprisal. In countries such as China, Russia, and even some Western democracies, online mobilization efforts are routinely infiltrated, censored, or derailed through algorithmic control and the deployment of automated bot accounts (Keller & Klinger, 2023).

Across Africa, socio-economic and infrastructural barriers play a more prominent role in limiting the effectiveness of social media for political mobilization. While mobile connectivity has grown rapidly, access remains uneven. According to the GSMA (2023), sub-Saharan Africa still has one of the lowest internet penetration rates globally, with only about 40% of the population regularly accessing the internet. This digital divide disproportionately affects rural populations, women, and low-income groups, effectively excluding large segments of society from digital civic participation.

In Nigeria, the challenges limiting social media's role in political mobilization are multifaceted. While youth engagement online has expanded dramatically since 2020, structural barriers continue to obstruct its impact. Olayemi and Sule (2023) discovered that misinformation and political propaganda are rampant in Nigeria's digital space, often manipulated by partisan actors to influence youth sentiments.

Within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), these challenges manifest in unique ways due to the region's socio-political context and its proximity to federal power structures.

Although the FCT enjoys better internet infrastructure compared to other regions, youth activists still encounter network instability, government monitoring, and self-censorship. Ibrahim and Suleiman (2025) note that many young people in the FCT are cautious about expressing political opinions online, particularly those critical of government policies, due to fears of surveillance and potential legal repercussions.

Theoretical Framework

The Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973, provides a useful lens for understanding how individuals actively seek out and utilize media to fulfil specific needs and desires. Unlike traditional media theories that view audiences as passive recipients of media influence, UGT assumes that individuals are active participants who make conscious choices about which media to consume based on personal motivations. The theory posits that media users are goal-oriented, meaning they choose media that best satisfies their cognitive, affective, personal, and social needs. In this context, the theory recognizes audiences as autonomous agents capable of interpreting and manipulating media content for their own benefit.

In relation to social media use for political mobilization, UGT explains why young people in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) turn to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok for political engagement. According to recent studies by Ojediran (2022), young citizens use social media not only for entertainment but also to seek political information, express opinions, and participate in civic discussions. The gratification derived from such activities often includes gaining political awareness, connecting with like-minded peers, and expressing one's identity in the digital sphere. Social media thus becomes an outlet for political communication where youth can engage directly with politicians, political parties, and social movements, bypassing the traditional gatekeeping role of mainstream media.

The Uses and Gratification Theory also underscores that not all users engage with social media politically in the same way. Differences in digital literacy, social background, and political awareness influence how individuals use and interpret media content.

In conclusion, the Uses and Gratification Theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for understanding how and why Nigerian youth engage with social media for political mobilization. It emphasizes that social media use is driven by individual motivations, situational needs, and gratification outcomes. Within the context of the FCT, Abuja, this theory helps explain the dynamic relationship between young citizens and digital political participation, offering insight into both the empowering and limiting aspects of online mobilization and therefore adopted of the study.

Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)

The Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), developed by John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald in 1977, is another foundational framework that explains collective action and social movements. The theory emerged as a response to earlier psychological explanations of

collective behaviour, emphasizing instead that social movements succeed or fail based on their ability to acquire and effectively utilize resources such as money, labour, media, technology, and organizational structures. RMT argues that grievances alone are insufficient to produce sustained collective action; rather, mobilization requires tangible and intangible resources, strategic planning, and leadership to achieve objectives.

Social media and political mobilization, RMT provides a robust explanation of how digital platforms serve as vital resources for organizing, communicating, and mobilizing people toward political causes

Furthermore, RMT emphasizes the importance of organizational networks and leadership in sustaining collective movements. Online political mobilization often requires key influencers, activists, and organizations to strategically channel resources for maximum impact. As noted by Suleiman and Bello (2022), during Nigeria's #EndSARS protests, digital activists utilized Twitter to raise funds, coordinate logistics, and disseminate real-time updates, demonstrating how social media acted as both a communication tool and a resource mobilization platform. Such coordination reflects RMT's central idea that successful mobilization depends on resource availability and management rather than spontaneous participation.

In conclusion, the Resource Mobilization Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how resources technological, financial, and organizational shape political mobilization in the digital era. It aligns with the Nigerian and FCT contexts, where social media platforms have become central to resource coordination for activism and civic participation. The theory underscores that while motivation and grievance are important, effective mobilization depends largely on access to and management of resources. Together with the Uses and Gratification Theory, RMT offers a multidimensional theoretical foundation for analysing social media's role in political mobilization among youth in the FCT

Methodology

The Study Area

The study was conducted in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, which serves as the political and administrative headquarters of Nigeria. Abuja was officially designated as the capital of Nigeria in December 1991, replacing Lagos, due to its central location, accessibility, and neutrality in terms of ethnic and regional divisions. Geographically, the FCT is located in the North-Central region of Nigeria and covers an estimated land area of about 7,315 square kilometres.

The choice of the FCT as the study area is further justified because of the concentration of youth organizations, NGOs, and political groups in Abuja which provides a fertile ground for analysing the role of social media in shaping political consciousness and participation

Source of Data

The study relied exclusively on primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were obtained directly from the field through the administration of structured questionnaires to respondents selected within the Federal Capital Territory.

Secondary data, on the other hand, were gathered from relevant published and unpublished materials such as books, journal articles, official reports, newspapers, policy documents, and credible online databases.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised youth residents within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, who are active users of social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok for political communication and mobilization.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Given the large population size, it was impractical to study all youth residents of the FCT. Therefore, the sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination, which is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n = sample size, N = population size, and e = level of precision (0.05). By applying the formula,

$$n = \frac{1,250,000}{1 + 1,250,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{1,250,000}{3,126}$$

$$= 400.$$

Hence, a total of 400 respondents constituted the sample size for this study.

The sampling technique adopted was the stratified random sampling technique. The FCT was divided into its six area councils Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Kuje, Gwagwalada, Kwali, and Abaji to ensure fair representation. From each council, a proportional number of respondents were selected based on population density, ensuring that both urban and semi-urban areas were represented.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using a **structured questionnaire** designed to obtain relevant information directly from the respondents. The questionnaires were distributed physically in selected areas of the six area councils and digitally via Google Forms to capture respondents who preferred online participation. The distribution was facilitated by research assistants who were trained to ensure proper administration and retrieval of questionnaires. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, a total of 370 were successfully

retrieved and deemed valid for analysis, representing a **92.5% response rate**. This high response rate indicates the willingness of youth in the FCT to participate in studies that address political and social issues relevant to their daily lives.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using **descriptive statistical methods**. Responses from the questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25) for systematic analysis.

Data Presentation

A total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were administered on the respondents, out of which 12 were missing. Therefore, the researcher was left with (388) questionnaires to analyze.

Data Analysis

The data was presented using frequency count and percentage in tabular form.

Table 4.2.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 388)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	54.1
	Female	178	45.9
Total		388	100.0
Age	18–25 years	102	26.3
	26–35 years	148	38.1
	36–45 years	87	22.4
	46 years and above	51	13.1
Total		388	100.0
Educational Qualification	SSCE	86	22.2
	ND/NCE	104	26.8
	HND/B.Sc	139	35.8
	M.Sc/Ph.D	59	15.2
Total		388	100.0
Occupation	Student	121	31.2
	Civil Servant	145	37.4
	Business	92	23.7
	Others	30	7.7
Total		388	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2025.

The analysis presented in Table 4.2.1 provides a clear demographic profile of the 388 respondents who participated in the study on the influence of social media on political awareness and participation among youth in the federal capital territory FCT

The gender distribution indicates that 210 respondents, representing 54.1%, were male, while 178 respondents 45.9% were female.

The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 26 to 35 years age group 38.1%, followed by those aged 18 to 25 years 26.3%.

In terms of educational qualification, respondents with HND/B.Sc. constituted the largest group, with 139 respondents (35.8%), indicating that a significant proportion of the participants possessed first-degree qualifications. This was followed by those with ND/NCE, numbering 104 respondents (26.8%) and other qualifications as indicated in the table

The occupational distribution shows that civil servant constitute the largest group of respondents 37.4%, followed by students 31.2%, and other groups as indicated in the table.

Table 4.2.2: Influence of Social Media on Political Awareness among Youth (FCT) (N = 388)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Social media provides reliable information about political events and government activities.	172 (44.3%)	141 (36.3%)	34 (8.8%)	27 (7.0%)	14 (3.6%)	388 (100%)
2	Exposure to political content on social media increases awareness of national issues.	198 (51.0%)	127 (32.7%)	29 (7.5%)	23 (5.9%)	11 (2.8%)	388 (100%)
3	Social media has enhanced understanding of political rights and responsibilities.	185 (47.7%)	132 (34.0%)	36 (9.3%)	23 (5.9%)	12 (3.1%)	388 (100%)
4	Discussions on social media promote political literacy among youth.	176 (45.4%)	139 (35.8%)	38 (9.8%)	25 (6.4%)	10 (2.6%)	388 (100%)
5	Political campaigns on social media influence perception of leadership and governance.	189 (48.7%)	130 (33.5%)	34 (8.8%)	26 (6.7%)	9 (2.3%)	388 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The findings presented in Table 4.2.2 show that the respondents strongly agree that social media significantly influences political awareness among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The grand mean of 4.18 clearly indicates a general consensus that social media has become an essential medium for political enlightenment, civic education, and the dissemination of governance-related information. The inclusion of total frequencies and percentages across all items as indicated in the table demonstrates a consistent trend, where the majority of respondents selected “Strongly Agree” and “Agree,” suggesting a high level of confidence in social media’s role as an instrument for political consciousness.

In summary, the analysis affirms that social media has become a powerful driver of political awareness among the youth in the FCT. The consistently high levels of agreement across all five items suggest that digital platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok serve as important spaces for political education and opinion formation

Table 4.2.3: Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Youth Political Participation

S/N	Statement	SA+A	U	D+SD	Total
1	active participation in social media, discussions motivates political involvement	280 (72.1%)	45 (11.6%)	63 (16.3%)	388(100%)
2	Social media platforms are effective for mobilizing youth participation in elections.	285 (73.4%)	45 (11.6%)	58 (15.0%)	388(100%)
3	sharing, political content, online increases commitment to civic responsibilities	285 (73.5%)	50 (12.9%)	53(13.6%)	388(100%)
4	social media campaigns encourage voter registration and turnout	295 (76.0%)	45 (11.6%)	48 (12.4%)	388(100%)

5	online political activism leads to increased off-line participation in political events.	285 (73.4%)	50 (12.9%)	53 (13.6%)	388(100%)
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Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The findings presented in Table 4.2.3 show that social media engagement has a strong influence on youth political participation in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The data reveals that a large proportion of respondents agreed that activities on social media platforms contribute meaningfully to the political involvement of young people. For the first item, “Active participation in social media discussions motivates political involvement,” a total of 280 respondents representing 72.1 percent agreed, 45 respondents or 11.6 percent were undecided, while 63 respondents or 16.3 percent disagreed. This result suggests that discussions on social media platforms encourage youths to show greater interest in national politics. Many young people use social networks to express opinions and exchange ideas about governance, which promotes active citizenship. This finding is supported by Ekwe (2020), who observed that online political discussions contribute to the growth of democratic participation among young Nigerians. This is followed by analysis on second, third, fourth and fifth statements as indicated in the table above.

Table 4.2.4: Challenges Limiting Effective Use of Social Media for Political Mobilization Among Youth

S/N	Statement	SA+A	U	D+SD	Total
1	This information and fake news reduced trust in political information on social media.	310(79.9%)	35(9.0%)	43(11.1%)	388(100%)
2	poor Internet access	305(78.6%)	40(10.3%)	43(11.1%)	388(100%)

	affect the ability of youth to engage politically online.				
3	government restrictions, limit free, political expression on social media.	305(78.6%)	38(9.8%)	45(11.6%)	388(100%)
4	high data costs discourage youth from sustained online political participation.	305(78.6%)	40(10.3%)	43(11.1%)	388(100%)
5	Fear of online harassment, or surveillance reduces youth engagement, and political discourse.	295(76.0%)	45(11.6%)	48(12.4%)	388(100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings in Table 4.2.4 reveal that numerous challenges limit the effective use of social media for political mobilization among youth in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). A significant issue identified by respondents is the spread of misinformation and fake news on social media platforms. For the first statement, “Misinformation and fake news reduce trust

in political information on social media,” 310 respondents representing 79.9 percent agreed, while 35 respondents or 9 percent were undecided and 43 respondents or 11 percent disagreed. This finding indicates that misinformation significantly undermines the credibility of online political content. Many youths perceive that the constant spread of unverified political information creates confusion, deepens polarization, and discourages genuine political participation. This aligns with the observations of Allcott and Gentzkow (2021), who found that fake news spreads faster and influences public opinion more strongly than verified information during political campaigns. This is followed by the second, third, fourth and fifth statements as indicated in the table above

Discussion of Major Findings

This study sought to understand how digital platforms are shaping the political culture and civic involvement of Nigerian youth in the context of evolving democratic processes. The demography data revealed that out of a total sample size of 388 respondents, a larger proportion of participants were within the 18–35 age bracket, representing the most active group on social media platforms. Both male and female respondents were adequately represented, indicating gender inclusivity in the study. The educational background of respondents showed that most participants held tertiary qualifications such as ND/NCE and HND/B.Sc., suggesting that the majority of the respondents were educated and capable of understanding political issues discussed online. The occupational distribution revealed that a considerable number of respondents were students and civil servants, reflecting the urban and youthful composition of the Federal Capital Territory. This demographic profile is crucial because it aligns with previous studies indicating that young, educated, and urban-based individuals are more likely to use social media for political awareness and civic engagement (Boulianne, 2022; Osei-Appiah & Asiedu, 2021).

The findings from the first objective, to assess the extent to which social media influences political awareness among youth in the federal capital territory FCT, indicated that digital platforms play a vital role in informing and educating young citizens about governance, leadership, and civic rights. A majority of respondents strongly agreed that social media provides reliable political information and promotes understanding of political rights and responsibilities. The study also revealed that exposure to political content on platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have contributed to increased awareness of national issues and enhanced the ability of youth to critically evaluate government policies. Discussions and debates on social media were found to improve political literacy among young Nigerians. This finding aligns with the arguments of Loader et al. (2020) and Papacharissi (2021), who asserted that social media serves as a civic space where young people learn, discuss, and mobilize around political concerns. In the context of the FCT, youth engagement in online political discourse between 2020 and 2025 increased significantly, suggesting that social media has become a central tool for promoting civic consciousness.

The findings from the second objective, which focused on the relationship between social media engagement and youth political participation, demonstrated that active involvement in social media discussions correlates strongly with political engagement among

young people. Respondents agreed that social media platforms are effective tools for mobilizing youth participation in elections, encouraging voter registration, and promoting civic responsibilities. Many participants noted that digital activism, including online petitions, hashtag campaigns, and virtual political rallies, has motivated them to take part in real-world political events. This finding confirms earlier studies by Theocharis and van Deth (2021) and Camilo and Jensen (2023), who observed that digital participation acts as an entry point into formal political processes. The results from the FCT also reflect how digital networks have redefined civic participation among Nigerian youth, particularly during the 2023 general elections, when online political engagement translated into increased voter turnout and political awareness. However, the data also suggested that while online activism is high, there remains a gap between virtual participation and consistent physical political involvement, indicating that some digital engagement remains confined to “clicktivism” rather than sustained political commitment.

The findings from the third objective, which sought to identify the challenges limiting effective social media use for political mobilization, revealed several structural and contextual barriers. A significant majority of respondents agreed that misinformation and fake news undermine trust in political communication online. This finding aligns with the work of Allcott and Gentzkow (2021), who demonstrated that misinformation spreads faster and more widely than verified information on digital platforms, often influencing public opinion and political behaviour. Respondents also cited poor internet connectivity, high data costs, and unstable power supply as major hindrances to consistent online engagement. Government restrictions, surveillance, and censorship further discourage free expression and political activism online, as was observed during the 2021 Twitter suspension in Nigeria. Additionally, concerns about online harassment, cyberbullying, and privacy invasion were highlighted as deterrents to youth participation in digital political discourse. These findings are supported by Ogunlana and Bello (2024), who noted that the fear of state surveillance and intimidation negatively affects youth engagement in political communication.

In summary, the study’s findings indicate that social media has emerged as a powerful tool for political awareness and participation among Nigerian youth in the Federal Capital Territory. It has democratized access to political information, empowered young citizens to engage in policy discussions, and fostered a sense of political agency. Nonetheless, challenges such as misinformation, infrastructural deficiencies, high internet costs, and restrictive government policies continue to limit its full potential as a medium for political mobilization. The study concludes that for social media to serve as a sustainable platform for democratic participation, there is a need for improved digital literacy among youth, stronger internet infrastructure, and the protection of online freedoms. By addressing these challenges, social media can continue to play a transformative role in deepening political awareness, participation, and democratic engagement among youth in the Federal Capital Territory and beyond.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has revolutionized political participation among youths in the FCT and Nigeria at large by providing easy access to political information, promoting political discussions, and enhancing civic awareness. It has empowered young people to become more informed, vocal, and active in governance and electoral processes. The findings confirm that social media serves as a bridge between online engagement and offline political participation, as it allows youths to express opinions, mobilize support, and challenge political narratives.

However, the study also concludes that the full potential of social media in political mobilization has not been realized due to barriers such as misinformation, digital divide, poor infrastructure, and fear of government surveillance. Addressing these barriers will help improve the credibility and effectiveness of digital political communication.

Finally, the study underscores that social media remains an indispensable tool for democratic development. When properly regulated and supported with digital literacy programs, it can enhance transparency, accountability, and active participation of youths in nation-building.

Recommendations

- i. The government and educational institutions should integrate digital literacy and civic education programs into youth development initiatives. This will equip young people with skills to critically evaluate online political information, identify misinformation, and engage constructively in political discussions.
- ii. The government and telecommunication companies should collaborate to improve internet infrastructure and reduce data costs. Affordable and stable internet services will encourage greater youth participation in online political activities and facilitate inclusive digital democracy.
- iii. Government should enforce effective policies to protect users from cyberbullying, harassment, and unlawful surveillance. Creating a secure online environment will enhance trust, encourage freedom of expression, and motivate more youths to participate actively in political discourse through social media platforms.
- iv. Government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations should promote digital literacy programmes aimed at helping youths critically evaluate political information on social media. This will reduce the spread and influence of misinformation and fake news, which the study identified as a major challenge to political engagements
- v. The federal government and telecommunication companies should invest in improving internet connectivity across the Federal Capital Territory. Reliable and affordable internet access will enhance youth participation in online political discussions and civic engagement.
- vi. Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) should collaborate with service providers to reduce the cost of internet data. Affordable data plans will encourage sustained political participation among youths, especially students and unemployed individuals.

- vii. The government should ensure that policies regulating social media do not restrict freedom of expression or discourage political participation. Transparent and rights-respecting regulations will foster trust and encourage youths to engage openly in political discourse.
- viii. Political parties, government institutions, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should actively use social media platforms to disseminate accurate political information, voter education materials, and election updates targeted at youths in the FCT.
- ix. Political actors should design social media campaigns that specifically address youth concerns such as employment, education, and governance. Youth-cantered messaging will enhance political interest and participation.
- x. Measures Against Online Harassment and Cyberbullying: Social media platforms and relevant authorities should strengthen mechanisms to protect users from harassment, hate speech, and intimidation. A safer digital environment will encourage more youths to participate in political discussions.
- xi. Civil society organizations and political groups should create initiatives that convert online political engagement into offline participation, such as town hall meetings, community dialogues, and voter mobilization activities within the FCT.

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