Social media, political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of social media in influencing political thinking, perception, and participation is becoming increasingly important, as evident in the volume of research the topic has attracted. This article presents findings on social media, political efficacy, and political participation in Nigeria. The objective is to evaluate the relationship between social media and political efficacy; social media and political participation; and political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria. To this end, the study adopted a web survey design for sample participants across the country, using links distributed through Facebook and Twitter. Snowball sampling was adopted to determine the total number of respondents (N = 3,407). The results of the descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient yielded evidence that the majority of social media users in Nigeria are male, young, educated and largely unemployed . It concludes that social media influences political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria.

Keywords: internal efficacy, external efficacy, political efficacy, political participation, social media.

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1. Introduction

Technology remains a generation-bridging factor that is not restricted by age or class, given that both young and old users have been caught up in the trend. The growing interest in technology is readily expressed in the use of phones to connect, advertise brands, fulfill educational responsibilities, and participate in political activities organized through social media platforms. Social media has increased the chances of the young and old to develop a political consciousness and participate actively in politics (Rahmawati, 2014). Yet, it has also led to the formulation of inhibitive and vindictive political opinions, as well as facilitated political apathy. It has led to an entrenchment of information impunity culture which threatens national cohesion (Jiang, 2016).

Research suggests that the views on the role of social media in the Nigerian political process are divergent. While some applaud its revolutionary role and clamor for its increased usage, others decry its inherent vulnerability, calling for its control. For instance, Dungse et al. (2018) state that the role of social media in the Nigerian political process cannot be ignored. They maintain that through social media, political mobilization and dialogue are fostered while using the same means to amplify social change and political engagement. Okoro and Tsegyu (2017) note that the prevailing role that social media plays in electioneering campaigns and participation in both developed and developing countries across the continent of the world cannot be overstated. Ayo et al. (2015) approve of social media as allowing Nigerians to rapidly share information with peers without the interference of gatekeepers. At the same time, electorates are presented with myriad avenues to choose from when engaging in political communication. In Nigeria, as also seen in other parts of the world, social media gives electorates access to real-time information regarding political events and plays a vital role in ensuring that the political process is credible.

In contrast, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) conclude that since its introduction to the electoral process in Nigeria in 2011, social media has had a negative impact:

> [social media has been] used to attack opponents, spread false, hateful and inciting messages, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos, hack into people's accounts to commit all manner of fraud and launch spam and virus attacks on opponents' information, and make users fall prey to online scams that seemed genuine, resulting in several data and identity thefts.(p. 43).

This, the International Centre for Investigative Reporting [ICIR] (2019) argues, led to the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria's two-decade democracy, likely out of fear of violence. The ICIR (2019) characterized the social media arena ahead of the 2019 polls succinctly:

> violent propagandist messages spread on social media by agents of political parties, particularly supporters or opponents of the two major parties and their candidates: Incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). (p. 1)

Meanwhile, several studies have been conducted on social media and elections in Nigeria (Akinyetun et al., 2021; Ayo et al., 2015; Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016; Okoro & Tsegyu, 2017), as well as social media and political participation in Nigeria (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Ahmad, et al., 2019; Dungse et al., 2018; Duru, 2017; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Odunlami, 2013; Okolo et al., 2017). The major contribution of this present analysis is the assessment of social media as a predictor of political efficacy and political participation. Political efficacy, according to Campbell et al. (1954, as cited in Schulz, 2005), is the "feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change"(p. 2). Political efficacy is a significant variable neglected by the previous studies conducted in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that the analysis presented in this paper focuses on social media, political efficacy, and political participation, using data gathered from social media users in Nigeria.

The general objective of the study is to survey social media, political efficacy, and political participation. It will however pay specific attention to examining the relationship between social media and political efficacy; social media and political participation; and political efficacy and political participation. The paper seeks to answer several pertinent questions. What is the relationship between social media and political efficacy? Does social media affect political participation? To what extent does political efficacy influence political participation?

To achieve the stated objectives, the paper adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods presented in six sections. The following section engages in a conceptual framework of the study where the variables: social media, political efficacy, and political participation, are conceptualized alongside a working model. Section three reviews related literature on social media, political efficacy, and political participation. Then, section four, concerned with materials and methods, explains how the participants are

selected, the instrument used, and how the research is conducted to answer the research questions and hypotheses. As a result, section 5 discusses the results of the data collected and analyzed. Meanwhile, the last part, section 6, contains the conclusion and recommendations arising from the findings of the study.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Social media

Ahmad (2018) argues that the history of social media dates back to 1844 when Samuel Morse sent a telegraph from Washington DC to Baltimore. The author notes that another precursor of contemporary social media was recorded in 1969 when the military launched the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPAN) to connect universities on a proto-internet. It was not until 1997, when "Six Degrees" was founded by Andrew Weinreich, that a significant number of subscribers to social media was recorded. Social media has since then metamorphosed from a mere friend-making platform to all that one can think of, including a mechanism for influencing political activities. According to Okolo et al. (2017), social media is a collection of "online communications tools dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, and social curation" (p. 19). Okoro and Tsegyu (2017) define social media as web-based tools that promote communication of information online, whilst enhancing collaboration and participation. Social media could be used to refer to stations such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Linkedin, Instagram, and a host of others. Chijioke (2013) submits that "social media are simply internet-based interactive platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis" (p. 13). It is on this premise that social media are argued to be useful as online democratic and participatory communication channels that allows an unfettered exchange of information and documents among political candidates and electorates.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media can be described as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) further classified social media into six categories:

1. Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
2. Blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter)
3. Content communities (e.g. YouTube)

4. Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
5. Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)
6. Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)

Out of the aforementioned categories, the first three—social networking sites, blogs and microblogs, and content communities—are the most relevant tools for facilitating political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria, and as such, the term social media as used in this study refers to the three categories identified. Thence, for the sake of this study, social media refers to online communication tools that afford its users the opportunity of being active content producers rather than passive content consumers. It is used by the teeming population to foster communication, solidify business deals, present manifestoes to electorates and make demands from political candidates.

2.2 Political efficacy

The concept of political efficacy is essential to the study of political behavior and is a significant element of Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, suggesting that the individual's control beliefs generally result from his experiences or others' perception of political participation. Worthy of note, therefore, is that the assessment of "one's ability to act is related to expectations about the outcomes of these actions but that they are not equivalent" (Schulz, 2005, p. 3). That is, confidence in a positive outcome certainly provokes action. However, "even with a high sense of self-efficacy, the action is unlikely to be taken if individuals have low outcome expectancies" (p. 3).

Political efficacy is a term that describes how much faith citizens put in their government and the belief that they hold an amount of influence over the government (Pedraza, 2016). It can be high or low. Higher levels of efficacy indicate that citizens believe their government is doing what is best for them and that their actions can positively impact the government (Acar & Ulug, 2021; Schulz, 2005). Meanwhile, low levels of efficacy point toward citizens' lack of faith in their government and the feeling that their actions have little or no impact upon the actions of the government (Pedraza, 2016). Political efficacy is divided into two separate components, namely: a personal sense of efficacy (internal efficacy) and a system-oriented sense of efficacy (external efficacy) (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). For Niemi et al. (1991), internal efficacy refers "to beliefs about one's competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics," (p. 1407) while external political efficacy refers "to beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to citizen demands" (p. 8). Internal efficacy is concerned with how a person feels that his or her abilities and knowledge can have a

decisive impact on the political processes. Internal efficacy is a pointer of the likelihood of a citizen to become politically conscious, active, vote, and do what he or she feels can positively impact the political system. Meanwhile, external efficacy deals with a person's perception of the government's responsiveness to his or her needs and how well the government protects his or her interests. This has to do with trust and to what degree a person feels government cares about the citizens. When external efficacy is low, it means people believe that the government does not care about them, thus leading to apathy toward government or politics (Pedraza, 2016).

Internal efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in his ability to comprehend as well as act politically. Taking a cue from Bandura (1986), it is the individuals' "judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391), whereas external efficacy is an individual's belief in the adequate responsiveness of the political system. Internal efficacy is a motivating factor for political participation which combines "both elements of rationality and motivation" (Reichert, 2016, p. 1). The working definition of this study, therefore, is that political efficacy refers to the belief of an individual that a desired political action can be produced with his/her ability. It is an individual's conviction of being capable to influence politics. Consequently, a distinction is made with regard to internal efficacy as the belief that one's understanding of politics is sufficient to navigate participation in politics, and external efficacy as one's trust in government's readiness to respond to one's demands. By implication, internal efficacy affects the citizen directly because it draws on the individual's feelings.
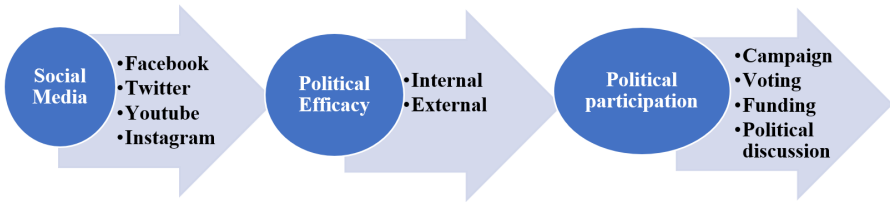
2.3 Political participation

Verba et al. (1995) define political participation as the "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people those policies" (p. 38). According to van Deth (2014), political participation refers to voluntary activities undertaken by a citizen to influence regulations and decisions associated with the political system. Kenski and Stroud (2006) define political participation as the "involvement in activities related to politics, such as donating to a campaign or influencing others to vote" (p. 175). Political participation involves a broad range of political activities which includes—but is not limited to—persuading others to make a political decision, belonging to a political campaign team, joining in political discussions and debates, seeking party funding, donating money, being a member of a political party, voting for the party's candidate, attending a political rally, forming political

groups, signing a petition, a volunteer of a political party, seeking support for a candidate, contacting politicians, and engaging in legal or illegal protests (Duru, 2017; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Odunlami, 2013; Yamamoto et al., 2013).

Political participation may be distinguished in four ways (Reichert, 2016): a) voting in elections, b) supporting an election campaign, c) attending a non-violent political demonstration, and d) participating in violent or unauthorized political protests. Hence, this study defines political participation as the voluntary overt or covert involvement in political activities to influence the political process and evoke desired results. This could be carried out under a broad category of political activities such as campaigning, voting, funding, or engaging in political discussions.

In this study, social media platforms are believed to be increasingly instrumental in engendering sociopolitical change. Social media provides its users with the platform to express their political views and actively participate in politics. Kenski and Stroud (2006), Rahmawati (2014), Reichert (2016), Sarieva (2018) and Schulz (2005) suggest that social media mechanisms are used to promote political efficacy and political participation. Thus, the relationship among social media, political efficacy, and political participation is presented in figure 1.

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model

3. Social media, political efficacy, and political participation

There have been differing views by scholars on the role of social media in influencing political efficacy on one hand and political participation on the other. Okoye (2008) opines that:

> Those who use social media more actively also participate in the political and democratic process. Those without access to media often resort to violent and other anti-social and anti-democratic behaviors, out of ignorance or frustration, or both. Others resort to complacency and/or resignation,

of what the late Bola Ige famously referred to as "siddon" look. (p. 272)

This view is also held by Okoro and Tsegyu (2017), who aver that the Nigerian political landscape is continually being redefined by social media as political candidates now use these platforms to engage electorates while electioneering[1], while in no lesser measure, electorates' connection with their preferred candidates has been facilitated. In a study carried out by the duo among university students in Nigeria, using the 2011 general elections as the unit of analysis, it was reported that the majority of the respondents were influenced by social media to vote for President Jonathan in 2011. In a study carried out by Okolo et al. (2017) on the role of social media in marketing political candidates in Nigeria, it is found out that social media platforms serve as credible tools and are capable of influencing the image of political candidates in Nigeria. They argue that social media influences the perception of electorates on a candidate and that through social media, candidates that would otherwise not be known due to their membership of a non-dominant party have also gained prominent recognition.

Papagiannidis and Manika (2016) studied political participation via different online and offline channels and found that social media and other online channels allow political participants to get involved in politics and express their opinion openly. Individual attitudes however are a function of social media use and real-life political participation. Duru (2017) concludes that aside from voting and interpersonal political discussion, political participation in Nigeria is low. This is attributable to a lack of democratic values and trust in the democratic process. This quagmire can be solved by using the [social] media to provide accurate information and creating knowledgeable citizens who are ready to participate in politics. Although placed within the context of this study, it seems as if Duru is making a case for lack of internal and external efficacy as the cause of low political participation. Citizens would rather stay apolitical than participate in a process they do not have faith in. As a result, improving internal and external efficacy remains a viable criterion for increased political participation in Nigeria. As Duru would have us believe, the conventional media, i.e. the press, persistently fails in this regard due to the lack of freedom it is characterized with. It is highly instructive to rely on social media to improve citizens' trust in the government to enhance political participation in Nigeria.

On the other hand, Odunlami (2013) argues that demographic characteristics such as gender, religion, age, income, and education have more potential to shape political engagement and induce political participation. Odunlami's submission is based on the notion that before having access to

social media, the user must first be enlightened, come of age, be religiously or culturally receptive to technology, and be financially buoyant to acquire the required device. Hence, these become important influencing factors compared to social media itself. It is the individual's demographic features that will determine if he or she will be willing to participate in politics or not, and not necessarily social media.

Meanwhile, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) note that while some are using social media to increase political participation through campaigns and coverage of political happenings, others are using social media to spread hate speech and political divisiveness. The implication of spreading hate speech, disinformation, and propaganda as hinted by Okoro and Nwafor is that rather than consolidate the views of social media users towards internal and external efficacy and active participation in politics, social media tends to deepen politics of aloofness and low voter turnout. This can be a dangerous trend for a country like Nigeria where ethnic, religious, and cultural issues and keenly—and viciously—contested.

As earlier indicated, the focus of this research is to fill the void on the role of social media on political efficacy and political participation, given the dearth of literature on social media and political efficacy in Nigeria. Regardless, available literature—although largely foreign-based—will be appraised to understand the phenomena. As Schulz (2005) notes, political efficacy is crucial to participatory democracy—manifesting throughout the stages of political socialization. The Internet helps to develop the interests of its users toward politics and improved political efficacy.

Larson (2004) submits that Internet has become the main source of political efficacy and political participation, enhancing awareness about voting and campaigning. More so, social media increases the ratio of voters' turnout among users. It develops an approach which helps in voting and donating towards campaigns. This is substantiated by Jiang (2016) who in his research, finds out that there is a strong and non-negligible correlation between political efficacy, election interest, and political involvement among Internet users. The idea flowing concomitantly from the authors' submissions indicates that the Internet, particularly social media, has the tendency to induce political interest which in turn increases political awareness and participation as experienced in voting and campaigning. By developing political efficacy from social media usage, users can form opinions, vote, campaign, and increase voter turnout.

Rahmawati (2014) conducted a study in Indonesia to find out the impact of social media on political efficacy, political knowledge, and political participation. The results reveal that "social media use for political activities positively influence social media user's political knowledge, political

participation, and political efficacy" (p. 45). More so, the study finds out that "higher frequency of social media use for political activities leads to greater political efficacy," "higher frequency of social media use for political activities leads to greater political knowledge," and "greater political efficacy of social media users positively influences their political participation" (Rahmawati, 2014, p. 45).

The implication of these findings is clear. It shows that social media usage influences the knowledge, participation, and efficacy of its users. That is, when social media users become politically exposed and knowledgeable, they will be poised to participate more in politics, thus increasing their skills and knowledge of the process (internal efficacy) and becoming more able to form an opinion on the government (external efficacy).

Furthermore, the more social media is used for political activities, the more political efficacy is formed, as users—having engaged more in political discussions and debates, joined civic organizations, and attended political webinars—become more exposed to the political affairs, thus increasing their knowledge of politics (internal efficacy). Of course, when users' political efficacy is high, their view of the government, as well as their expectations, becomes high as well, leading them to participate more in political activities. Meanwhile, the research reveals that demographic characteristics such as gender, age, income level, and education level do not influence the usage of social media for political activities. This, however, is contrary to the findings of Odunlami (2013) that demographic characteristics have more potential to shape political engagement and induce political participation. This is an indication that more studies need to be conducted to ascertain the role of demographic characteristics in social media and political efficacy.

Cantijoch et al. (2012), having studied the use of the Internet, political engagement, and the impact of electronic discussion and political campaigning, report that the use of the Internet and all other electronic tools increases the knowledge of users about politics and induces political participation. The findings also claim that campaigning through the Internet has a direct impact on Internet users before, during, and after elections. Reichert (2016) who examines how political efficacy translates political knowledge into political participation in Germany, reports that internal political efficacy increases intentions to participate politically. This is because behavioral intentions are important preconditions of actual behavior.

Ahmad et al. (2019) conducted research focusing on university students in Pakistan on the use of social media in political participation, submitting that online political activities on social media have a significant influence on political efficacy because users actively share political content online with

their friends, family, and colleagues, causing them to participate in real-life political activities. The study also reveals that the participants regularly use Facebook to communicate with politicians. The study concludes that social media plays an important role in political efficacy and political participation. Chan and Guo (2013) examines Facebook use in political activities and state that "social media use among youth can facilitate greater political and civic engagement, particularly for those who perceive that they have limited ability to participate and understand political affairs" (p. 461). The keywords here are: limited, ability, and understand. Going by our conceptualization of political efficacy, particularly, internal efficacy, the findings by the authors indicate that social media use can improve a user's internal efficacy. Put differently, social media can improve the ability and understanding of the user (internal efficacy) to participate in politics, and by extension, place more trust in the political process (external efficacy).

From the literature reviewed, there is no denying that social media presents ample opportunities and challenges for political efficacy and political participation, which makes it all the more imperative to study the phenomena, particularly in the Nigerian context.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Participants

Respondents were surveyed online in 2019. An online-based survey (web survey) was used because it is relatively inexpensive, can be used to reach a wide range of people, and enables results to be obtained in real-time.[2] The survey was designed using Google Forms and the link was shared through social media, particularly on Facebook and Twitter. The study then adopted the snowball sampling technique[3] whereby the participants were encouraged to forward the link of the instrument to other people in their cohort (18 years and above). However, ethical considerations were made in this procedure such that the survey encouraged participants' voluntary involvement without financial gratification for participation or referrals. More so, the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed as personal information that could reveal the identity of the respondents was not obtained.

Additionally, a cover letter explaining the essence and content of the instrument was included on the first page to ensure that only those interested will proceed. The data collection process spanned eight weeks, after which the link was deactivated. As a result, a total of 3,407 participants unevenly spread across the thirty-six states (and the Federal Capital Territory) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria took part in the study during this period.

4.2 Method

Having identified the independent (social media) and dependent variables (political efficacy and political participation), a questionnaire entitled "Social Media, Political Efficacy and Participation Questionnaire" [SMPEPQ] was designed for the study. SMPEPQ contains two parts tagged I and II. Part I was meant to elicit data on demographic characteristics of the participants such as age group, gender, education level, employment status, and income level; this was to measure the predictors of social media usage. Meanwhile, part II contains a set of questions that combines the variables of the study: social media, political efficacy, and political participation. To represent social media, the study selected four popular social media platforms in Nigeria: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram. For political efficacy, two components thereof—internal and external— were selected, and the researcher used four abilities of political interaction[4] for each of the components: 1) ability to express political opinion, 2) ability to influence political decisions, 3) ability to influence an election, and 4) ability to demand the observance of existing laws. Meanwhile, for political participation, the author identified several popular means of participating in politics: campaigning, voting, engaging in discussions, and funding. As a result, the author framed 16 items for valuation (see Table 1), to which participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point response scale (5=strongly disagree, 4=disagree, 3=neutral, 2=agree, and 1=strongly agree).

Table 1. Structure of Social Media, Political Efficacy and Political Participation Scale

Social media	Political efficacy		Political participation
	Internal efficacy	External efficacy	
I often feel disconnected from the world when I don't visit Facebook	I can publicly and freely express my political opinion	The government (people in charge) is working to ensure that citizens express their political opinion freely	I make use of social media to campaign for an electoral candidate
Twitter helps me to stay abreast of recent trends in the country	I can influence political decisions	The government (people in charge) is willing to share information on political decisions	I make use of social media to participate in online polls ahead of an election

I regularly make use of Instagram to connect with friends and share a memorable experience	I can influence the election of a political leader whose political views I share	The government (people in charge) is interested in ensuring that all political views are accommodated	I make use of social media to engage in a political discussion
I often use Youtube to watch educative and entertaining videos	I can demand that existing law be observed	The government (people in charge) is committed to carrying out citizens' lawful demands	I make use of social media to donate to a political cause

4.3 Reliability

To test whether the variables used in this study were reliable or not, a reliability test using IBM SPSS Statistic 22 was conducted. A Cronbach's analysis was conducted on the "Social Media" subscale of the survey, where it was found that the subscale's alpha level was .71, indicating that the subscale has adequate reliability. A Cronbach's analysis was conducted on the "Political Efficacy" subscale of the survey, and it was found that the subscale's alpha level was .77, indicating adequate reliability. Finally, a Cronbach's analysis was conducted on the "Political Participation" subscale of the survey, and it was found that the subscale's alpha level was .81 which indicates that the subscale is reliable. Since Cronbach's alpha score for satisfactory reliability is .70, all the variables in this study are reliable. Precautions were taken to avoid systematic error; offset and scale factor. This was done by checking for zero error before taking readings and by plotting a graph. The result of the graph shows that the expected intercept was not cut. As a result, an error was absent, thus indicating the validity and reliability of the instrument.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data were converted from Google Forms to excel and imported to IBM SPSS 22, after which the sociodemographic variables (i.e. age group, gender, income, education, employment status) were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and the results presented in the resultant section (see Results and Discussion). To test the hypotheses, the data collected was analyzed through Pearson product-moment Correlation Coefficient. The result is presented in the next section (see Results and Discussion).

4.4 Limitation of the Study

The study adopted a mixed method, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach made use of correlational analytical tools which depicts the framework as being less linear. This denotes that an increase in social media may not necessarily lead

to an increase in political efficacy and political participation, or otherwise. Therefore, it is not predictive. Moreover, given that the sample of the study is not representative of the population, the study marginally establishes that social media is a predictor of political efficacy and political participation in the country. At best, the study serves as a preliminary model building for further research.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 2. Sociodemographic variables

Sociodemographic characteristic of participants (n=3,407)	Variable	%
Gender	Male	58.3
	Female	41.7
		100.0
Age group	18-27 years	47.9
	28-37 years	30.3
	38-47 years	15.1
	48 years and above	6.7
		100.0
Education level	Primary	16.8
	Secondary	26.7
	Post-secondary	56.5
		100.0
Income level	Below 50,000NGN	57.0
	50,000-100,000NGN	31.3
	100,000-150,000NGN	6.7
	150,000NGN and above	5.0
		100.0
Employment status	Employed	43.4
	Unemployed	56.6
		100.0

Table 2 summarizes the sociodemographic attributes of the participants. It shows that 58.3 percent of participants are male while 41.7 percent are female, which implies that more male respondents participated in the study than females. Out of the total participants, 47.9 percent are within the age group of 18-27 years, 30.3 percent are between 28-37 years, 15.1 percent are

in the age category of 38-47 years, and the remaining 6.7 percent are either 48 years old or above. Hence, the majority of the participants are in the age category of 18-27 years, which indicates that the majority of social media users in Nigeria are youths.

Participants' distribution according to education level reveal that 16.8 percent of participants are primary school certificate holders, 26.7 percent did not attend beyond secondary school, while 56.5 percent attained post-secondary education. Thus, the majority of social media users in Nigeria have post-secondary school education and are therefore suited to make an opinionated, yet informed decision on the subject matter.

With respect to participants' income level (on a monthly basis), 57 percent earn below ₦50,000 (i.e. below \$129[5]), 31.3 percent earn between ₦50,000 and ₦100,000 (i.e. \$129-\$258), 6.7 percent earn between ₦100,000 and ₦150,000 (i.e. \$258-\$387), while 5 percent earn more than ₦150,000 (i.e. \$387 and above). As a result, the majority of social media users in Nigeria are low earners (earning below ₦50,000 monthly). Concerning the employment status of the respondents, the study reveals that 43.4 percent of the participants are employed, in contrast to 56.6 percent who are unemployed.

Table 3. Analysis of Research Questions

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I often feel disconnected from the world when I don't visit Facebook	25	45	5	20	5
2	Twitter helps me to stay abreast of recent trends in the country	25	25	15	20	15
3	I regularly make use of Instagram to connect with friends and share a memorable experience	25.1	44.9	5	10	15
4	I often use Youtube to watch educative and entertaining videos	35	35	20	5	5
5	I can publicly and freely express my political opinion	30	25	--	30	15
6	I can influence political decisions	40	30	--	15	15
7	I can influence the election of a political leader whose political views I share	44.9	10	--	20	25.1
8	I can demand that existing law be observed	45	5	--	30	20
9	The government (people in charge) is working to ensure that citizens express their political opinion freely	15	5	--	55	25
10	The government (people in charge) is willing to share information on political decisions	10	30	5	25	30

11	The government (people in charge) is interested in ensuring that all political views are accommodated	20	10	--	45	25
12	The government (people in charge) is committed to carrying out citizens' lawful demands	15	15	--	39.9	30
13	I make use of my social media platforms to campaign for an electoral candidate	30	60	--	--	10
14	I make use of social media to participate in online polls ahead of an election	45	30	--	15	10
15	I make use of social media to engage in political discussion	50	30	--	10	10
16	I make use of social media to donate to a political cause	25.1	5	--	54.9	15

Analysis of research questions as presented in Table 3 indicates that the 70 percent of the participants agree that they often feel disconnected from the world when they don't visit Facebook. Fifty percent agree that Twitter helps them to stay abreast of recent trends in the country. Additionally, 70 percent admit to using Instagram regularly to connect with friends and share a memorable experience while 70 percent also admit to using Youtube to watch educational and entertaining videos.

Meanwhile, 55 percent of participants believe that they can publicly and freely express their political opinion, with 70 percent agreeing that they can influence political decisions. Some 54.9 percent are convinced that they can influence the election of a political leader whose political views they share, even though the views of the participants are divided on their ability to demand that existing law be observed—i.e. 50 percent agree and 50 percent disagree.

Moreover, 80 percent of participants disagree that the government is working to ensure that citizens express their political opinion freely. In the same manner, 55 percent participants disagree that the government is willing to share information on political decisions. Furthermore, 70 percent disagree that the government is interested in ensuring that all political views are accommodated, just as 69.9 percent disagree that the government is committed to carrying out citizens' lawful demands.

Also, 90 percent of participants are convinced that they can make use of social media to campaign for an electoral candidate just as 75 percent concur that they make use of social media to participate in online polls ahead of an election. Likewise, 80 percent of participants make use of social media to engage in a political discussion, even though 69.9 percent disagree with making use of social media to donate to a political cause.

The above result leads us to conclude that the majority of social media users in Nigeria believe in using social media to connect with friends, stay abreast of recent trends in the country, share memorable experiences, watch entertaining videos, and engage in educational activities. The result also reveals that social media users in Nigeria have a positive internal political efficacy, believing that they can publicly express their political opinion, influence political decisions, and influence elections in favor of their preferred candidate. Although, it is surprising that their external political efficacy is negative and relatively low. Participants' trust in the government is weak, as they do not believe in the government's commitment to ensuring the free expression of political opinion, sharing of information, accommodation of all views, and carrying out of citizens' lawful demands. However, the result also shows that social media users in Nigeria actively use the available tools to participate in politics, through campaigning, participating in online polls, and engaging in political discussions, with the exception of donating to a political cause.

5.1 Test of Hypotheses

Table 4. Correlations

		Social media	Political efficacy	Political participation
Social media	Pearson Correlation	1	.292**	.112**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	3407	3407	3407
Political efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.292**	1	-.013
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.464
	N	3407	3407	3407
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	.112**	-.013	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.464	
	N	3407	3407	3407

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

Table 5: Correlations

		Social media	Internal political efficacy	External political efficacy
Social media	Pearson Correlation	1	.192**	.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	3407	3407	3407
Internal political efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.192**	1	-.205**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	3407	3407	3407
External political efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.176**	-.205**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	3407	3407	3407

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

$H0_1$ - Social media use has a significant relationship with political efficacy

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between social media and political efficacy in Nigeria. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, which was statistically significant ($r =.292$, $n = 3407$, $p < .001$). Overall, there was a weak positive correlation between an increase in social media usage and political efficacy in Nigeria. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that "social media use does not have a significant relationship with political efficacy" is rejected while the research hypothesis which states that "social media has a significant relationship with political efficacy" is accepted.

$H0_2$ - Social media use has a significant relationship with political participation

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between social media and political participation in Nigeria. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, which was statistically significant ($r =.112$, $n = 3407$, $p < .001$). Overall, there was a weak positive correlation between an increase in social media usage and political participation in Nigeria. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that "social media use does not have a significant relationship with political participation" is rejected and the research hypothesis which

states that "social media use has a significant relationship with political participation" is accepted.

H0₃ - Political efficacy has a significant relationship with political participation

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria. There was a negative correlation between the two variables, which was not statistically significant ($r = -.013$, $n = 3407$, $p > .05$). Overall, there was a weak negative correlation between political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that "political efficacy does not have a significant relationship with political participation" is accepted and the research hypothesis which states that "political efficacy does not have a significant relationship with political participation" is rejected.

5.2 Discussion

This study examines social media, political efficacy, and political participation in Nigeria by using a sample of 3,407 respondents as the unit of analysis. The findings are supported by various studies in the literature. For instance, Rahmawati (2014) submitted that social media positively influences political efficacy. The author found out that a higher frequency of social media use for political activities leads to greater political efficacy. Reichert (2016) concluded that political efficacy correlates with increased social media use and translates into political participation. This view was upheld by Ahmad et al. (2019), who state that online political activities have a significant influence on political efficacy. They maintain that social media users actively use the Internet to disseminate political content to their network, upon which political efficacy depends. These studies support the hypothesis of the present study that social media allows its users to participate in politics effectively and to respond to the government's policies. Social media increases the political consciousness of its users in engaging in political activities and influencing the political system.

Furthermore, Cantijoch et al. (2012) conclude that the use of the Internet increases political knowledge and encourages political participation. This is consistent with Chan and Guo (2013)'s findings that social media facilitates enhanced civic engagement and political participation. More so, Ahmad et al. (2019) state that youths are the most dominant consumers of online content and users of social media. It is therefore not unexpected to find them participating more in online and offline political activities. The finding

is also supported by Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) who conclude that there is a positive correlation and significant relationship between social media usage for political participation among the youths. They found out that both social media and political participation move in the same direction, whereby an increase in the use of social media would increase the use of social media for political participation by the youths. This finding is also presented by Akinyetun et al. (2021) that "social media has made the majority of its users, sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural commentators; with everyone having his/her own opinion as well as a platform to air such opinion even without adequate knowledge of the topic" (p. 190). Social media has opened new opportunities for civic engagement and political participation by creating a new ground for virtual engagements between citizens and politicians whilst eliminating communication lag.

In addition, the finding was corroborated by McCluskey et al. (2004) that the gap between desired efficacy and actual efficacy—the efficacy gap—determines the type of collaborative participation. In other words, a larger efficacy gap influences less difficult forms of participation i.e voting, while a smaller efficacy gap encourages effortful political engagements. In line with this submission, Schulz (2005) found out that citizens of various countries responded similarly to internal efficacy, but differently to external efficacy. This engenders a significant difference in the political activities and participation of individuals. This view was validated by Odunlami (2013) that political participation is more a function of demographic characteristics and less of political efficacy.

6. Conclusion

The findings reached in this study draws attention to the role of social media in influencing the political behavior of citizens and how their control beliefs are constructed through experience. Social media is fast replacing traditional media as a relevant tool for criticizing the government, expressing citizens' needs, and influencing government action. Citizens are more poised to assume that they have more role to play in impacting the government, exercising political rights, and fulfilling civic obligations. For a country with a youth bulge and an increasing number of social media users, this finding expounds on how Nigerian youths can use social media to influence government action and increase political participation. The study established that the increased use of social media for political activities leads to greater political efficacy, which in turn translates into increased political participation. Through social media, citizens can disseminate

political content to their friends, family, and business associates with the belief that they can positively influence government decisions, organize campaigns, induce political discussions, monitor elections and report cases of electoral malpractice, engender political advocacy and consultation, and organize political protests and demonstrations.

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Notes

[1] Social media was first used for electioneering in Nigeria by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2011 and has since become a prominent element of the electoral process in Nigeria (see Okoro & Tsegyu, 2017)

[2] The online or web survey is a form of questionnaire survey that is administered over the Internet using various platforms. It is less time consuming and allows respondents to complete surveys at their convenience (see Akinyetun, 2016).

[3] Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects; the use of currently enrolled research participants to recruit additional research participants (see Oregon State University, 2010)

[4] The abilities for political interaction are appropriate for efficient evaluation of political efficacy (see Sarieva, 2018)

[5] The Naira (₦) - Dollar ($) conversion is subject to prevailing exchange rate.

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