

## Impact of Social Media on Political Awareness of Students of Education Political Science in Public Universities in Enugu State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study was on the impact of social media on political awareness of students of education political science in public universities in Enugu State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the investigation. One research question was answered while one null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level. Population of the study comprised all the 1,345 students of Education Political Science in the two major public universities in Enugu State, UNN and ESUT. Sample size of 404 was drawn through the stratified proportionate sampling technique. A researcher's developed instrument titled 'Social Media and Political Awareness Scale (SMPAS)' was used for data collection. The instrument was confirmed reliable through test-retest method with 0.76 as the reliability coefficient. The researcher with the help of four research assistants administered and retrieved 100% of the questionnaire through the direct approach. The mean was adopted for analysis of the research question, while z-test was applied in testing the null hypothesis. The study found that Social Media to a high extent influence students' political awareness. It was further found that mean ratings of students of UNN and ESUT did not differ significantly. It was concluded that social media has impact on political awareness of students. The study recommended that students should learn to identify genuine social media platforms housing political data and information, so as to decipher what political information is genuine or fake.*

**Keywords:** Impact, Social Media, Political Awareness, Education Political Science, Public Universities

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### Introduction

In today's interconnected world, information is essential for understanding and engaging with others in all aspects of life, including politics. Social media, with its strong presence in today's modern societies, serves as a platform for political awareness mobilisation, debate, and political advertising, thus guiding citizens in making informed choices among political candidates while disseminating information. Social media serves as a watchdog to the activities of government as for much government information is easily accessible and publicise for citizens

consent and consensus (Ekoh & Elizabeth, 2021). The access to information from legislative plenary, executive seating's and court rulings from institutions of government and organisational policies, budget, recruitment and service have been made more publicly due to social media which in long run aids good governance through transparency and accountability (Hillaris, 2021). In essence, it allows for user generated content and sharing content within one's virtual network, using internet powered platforms, making it easier for the public to have wider political oriented information.

In today's Nigerian politics, it has been noticed that a shift occurred in the dynamics of the political landscape due to the use of social media. It has been excessively used in political campaigns, political protests, political talk shows both by the politicians and the general public. In relation to the foregoing, Adams, et al. (2023) pointed out that the use of social media in elections initially became noticeable in the preparations for the 2011 Nigerian elections, and now receives more attention. Thus, the growth and utilisation of social media in the political activities in Nigeria have continued to attract a converging body of studies which serves as the foundation for this current investigation. Ghania, et al. (2020) stressed that through discussions on social media and in the main stream news, the Nigerian populace are able to get a wide range of political information and updates. Interestingly, Adams, et al. (2023) added that social media is affordable and accessible as one can easily access Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media on small internet-enabled mobile devices with the cheap internet data bundle from mobile telecommunication companies in Nigeria, such as: MTN, Airtel, 9Mobile, Glo, among others. This makes social media a veritable political tool.

Social media is a non-institutionalized online platform that depends primarily on user-generated content and complicated features that encourage two-way engagement (Stoycheff et al., 2017). On the other hand, Holloman, cited in Adams, et al. (2023) posited that social media is all about what people do with the technology, the software, the tools and the channels: sharing pictures and videos, writing product reviews, collecting content, connecting with old friends, sharing with new friends, collaborating in the workplace. It is one of the powerful tools for political information sharing and interaction, providing a virtual meeting place for people to discuss and debate social issues, regardless of their physical location (Abubakar et al., 2021). This implies it is one of the most readily overused means of communicating political matters to individuals and the general public. Thus, its usage in politics has undoubtedly increased drastically over the years.

Political awareness is believed to enable individuals to make informed decisions, participate effectively in the democratic process, and contribute to the functioning of their society. It simply means having basic knowledge of politics (Olubukola, 2023). This might imply having the understanding and knowledge of political processes, issues, systems, and the impact of political decisions on society. In essence, political awareness has to do with the opportunity of becoming knowledgeable about political parties, characteristics of politicians, political discussions, electoral processes, the arms of government, political campaigns, rallies and related events, etcetera. This was supported by Dakuku (2017), who stressed that political awareness involves several key components, including but are not limited to: awareness of current events, knowledge of political systems and structures, understanding political ideologies, civic responsibility, media literacy, and critical thinking and analysis. Political awareness in relation to social media could be seen as the possibility of the general public, including students getting

informed and reoriented about political matters around them through the internet powered social platforms.

Students might benefit from getting relevant, correct, and up-to-date information through social media. Social media help create an environment where students can work together to learn about politics, especially the Nigerian politics. However, the social media is not without some serious challenges, which can serve as an impediment to its ability to serve as a platform where students can better learn about government policies and political issues. Adams et al., (2023) observed that in Nigeria, the social media landscape is often characterised by falsehood rumours, attacks, political and religious fanaticism, and hate speeches to malign, intimidate and discredit opponents. Adams et al. added that some political analysts opined that Peter Obi (the presidential aspirant of the Labour party in the 2023 Nigerian general elections) was popular only on social media and should not be deceived by the massive follower ship he had on social media. This throws more light on the fact that campaigning for a politician on social media is not a yardstick to winning an election because the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has no polling unit on social media.

There seems to be widespread of misleading and fake political information on some social media platforms, leading to distort public perception and influence political decisions based on inaccuracies as observed by (Jega, 2019). Furthermore, Olubukola (2023) observed that in politics related to Nigeria, including Enugu State, there are issues of political propaganda and manipulation of public opinions, privacy concerns, political harassment and trolling, conspiracy theories and distrustful narratives, all perpetrated through the various social media platforms. Yet, there is dearth of literature on social media and political awareness as it affects university students in Enugu State. It is on the basis of this gap, that the study sought to investigate the impact of social media on political awareness of students of education political science in public universities in Enugu State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of social media' s greatest strength is its ability to allow the mass audience to have access to different categories of information on the internet, including those of politics. It avails the general public the opportunity to become more conscious of political matters and happenings within and outside of their domicile country. However, there always concerns about the quality, reliability and genuineness of political information that the public, including students have to, via different social media platforms. There seems to be widespread of misleading and fake political information on some social media platforms, leading to distort public perception and influence political decisions based on inaccuracies. It seems to have paved ways for political propaganda and manipulation of public opinions through targeted advertising, bots, and coordinated campaigns, which undermines democratic processes and sways elections. It is posed with privacy concerns as the use of personal data by social media platforms for political purposes raise significant privacy questions that are yet to be provided answers to. They seem to become platforms for political harassment and trolling, leading to silencing of voices and discouragement of participation in political affairs. Currently, the issue of conspiracy theories and distrustful narratives seem to find undeniable expressions on social media, thereby eroding public trust in institutions, including the media, government, and electoral processes. For the highlighted issues, the problem of this study is put in an interrogatory manner, as: in what ways do social media influence political awareness of students in public universities in Enugu State?

### Research Question

This research question was provided answer to in the study:

1. How does Social Media influence political awareness of students of education political science in public universities in Enugu State?

### Hypothesis

The null hypothesis below was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in mean ratings of UNN students and ESUT students with regard to how Social Media influence their political awareness.

### Research Method

Survey research design was adopted for the study. Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which researchers administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people, to describe the perception, rating of responses, attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of the population on a matter being studied (Tanny, 2018). Since the study sought to analyse the impact of social media on political awareness of students of education political science in public universities in Enugu State based on mean response ratings of a sample of students, the design was considered suitable for the study.

Population of the study comprised all the 1,345 students of Education Political Science in the two major public universities in Enugu State, namely: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). This was composed of 805 students for UNN and 540 for ESUT. Source: Field work, 2024. Sample size is 404 was drawn through the stratified proportionate sampling technique. The sample was composed of 242 students of UNN and 162 students of ESUT, and each sample size represents 30% of the population of students of Education Political Science in each of the universities. The 30% was considered appropriate because it is in line with Nworgu (2015), who stated that 10% to 80% of any given population is adequate for a research work.

A researcher's developed instrument titled 'Social Media and Political Awareness Scale (SMPAS)' was used for data collection. The four likert rated instrument was validated by three lecturers, while test-retest method was used to confirm the reliability of the instrument at coefficient of 0.76. This was in consonance with Nworgu (2015), who recommended that coefficient value of 0.60 and above is adequate for any research work. The researcher with the help of four research assistants administered and retrieved 100% of the questionnaire through the direct approach. The mean was adopted for analysis of the research question, while z-test was applied in testing the null hypothesis. Mean rating with 2.5 and above was considered high extent, and low extent if it falls below. On the other, if z-calculated falls below z-critical, the null hypothesis is not rejected, and vice versa.

### Presentation and Interpretation of Results

**Research Question 1:** How does Social Media influence political awareness of students of education political science in public universities in Enugu State?

**Table 1:** Mean rating of students of education political science on how Social Media influence their political awareness.

S/N	Social media impact students' political knowledge in the following ways:	Mean (UNN Students) (N=242)	Remark	Mean (ESUT Students) (N=162)	Remark
1.	Make students become aware of their political rights and privileges	2.61	High Extent	2.51	High Extent
2.	It inform students about electoral discussions	2.53	High Extent	2.73	High Extent
3.	Enlighten students about the various political parties available	2.58	High Extent	2.53	High Extent
4.	Informs students about internal conflicts in individual political party	2.55	High Extent	2.57	High Extent
5.	Offer students information leadership of any trending political party	2.84	High Extent	2.71	High Extent
6.	Inform them information about each political party' s candidacy for different political aspiration	2.72	High Extent	2.68	High Extent
7.	Enlighten students on trending political activities being involved in by the various arms of government	2.81	High Extent	2.64	High Extent
8.	Inform students about schedules of the various categories of election	2.52	High Extent	2.70	High Extent
9.	Inform students about the leadership of the various arms of government	2.78	High Extent	2.68	High Extent
10.	Inform students about contemporary issues in international politics	2.59	High Extent	2.56	High Extent
11.	Inform them of need to get involved in political discussions	3.01	High Extent	2.72	High Extent
12.	Enlighten them on the procedure and requirement towards registering and obtaining voter' s card	2.54	High Extent	2.63	High Extent
13.	Inform students of the Social Media handles of candidates and campaign team	2.98	High Extent	2.87	High Extent
14.	Enlighten students on how to make one' s vote count after casting a vote. For instance, staying until the counting is concluded	2.85	High Extent	2.94	High Extent
15.	Inform students about trending political dates in Nigeria. For instance, May Day, Democracy Day, etc.	2.90	High Extent	3.00	High Extent
	<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>High</b>

Results on Table 1 show that the overall average ratings for both UNN students and ESUT students, 2.72 and 2.70 are greater than the cut-off point, 2.5. The report indicates that mean of individual item on the table met the point of acceptance, implying the independent variable (Social Media) to a high extent influence students’ political awareness, which is considered here as the dependent variable.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in mean ratings of UNN students and ESUT students with regard to how Social Media influence their political awareness.

**Table 2:** z-test for mean ratings of UNN students and ESUT students on how Social Media influence their political awareness

Variables	N	X	SD	z-crit	z-cal	DF	∞	Remark
UNN Students	242	2.72	0.88	1.96	1.67	402	0.05	Not rejected
ESUT Students	162	2.70	0.91					

On Table 2, it can be seen that z-crit is 1.96 while z-cal is 1.67 at 402 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The result shows that z-crit (1.96) is greater than z-cal (1.67), leading to the null hypothesis not being rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference in mean ratings of UNN students and ESUT students with regard to how Social Media influence their political awareness. Hence, the data collected did not provide enough evidence that could have let to rejection of the null hypothesis.

## Discussion of Findings

The study reported that social media impacts students' political knowledge in the following ways: make students become aware of their political rights and privileges; it inform students about electoral discussions; enlighten students about the various political parties available; informs students about internal conflicts in individual political party; offer students information leadership of any trending political party; inform them information about each political party' s candidacy for different political aspiration; enlighten students on trending political activities being involved in by the various arms of government; inform students about schedules of the various categories of election; inform students about the leadership of the various arms of government; inform students about contemporary issues in international politics; inform them of need to get involved in political discussions; enlighten them on the procedure and requirement towards registering and obtaining voter' s card; inform students of the social media handles of candidates and campaign team; enlighten students on how to make one' s vote count after casting a vote, such as staying until the counting is concluded, and inform students about trending political dates in Nigeria.

Similarly, Olubukola (2023) reported the youths in the town are active political commentators on social media and are informed about the politics of the land and nation on major topics online and offline, meaning it makes youths become active political commentators on non-institutionalized platforms. On the contrary Nazir and Ariz (2023) argued that the more students talk about politics on social media, the better they understand politics, but since social media activities doesn' t involve users, they only do little to raise political awareness. This study



shows that students learn more about politics when they talk about it with their peers than when they only use social media. For people to understand politics through social media, they need to talk about politics. Students' political awareness also depends on their gender, age, and how much money they have. The study further reported that there is no significant difference in mean ratings of UNN students and ESUT students with regard to how Social Media influence their political awareness.

### Conclusion

Findings of the investigation is social media has influence on political awareness of students of education political science in the universities where the study was conducted. The extent to which social media impact students' political awareness is high. The responses of students of UNN and ESUT on how social media impact students' political awareness did not vary significant. The study concluded that to a high extent, social media has impact on the political awareness of students.

### Recommendations

Based on findings of the study, the research advocates the students should learn to identify genuine social media platforms housing political data and information. By identifying the social media platforms with information integrity, students would be able to decipher what political information is genuine and or fake. The implication of this is that students would become rest assured that political information at their disposal can be relied upon for whatever political purpose they need such awareness for. With this, students would not be misinformed by the platforms of social media. It will also help them decipher which type social media best provide the suitable political information. The manner in which they are able to rightly process the political information accessed on social media could go a long way to determining their level of participation in politics and political affairs.

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