Instagram and Youth Political Participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election

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Abstract
This study examined Instagram and youth political participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. The study was motivated by the need to establish how young people's use of Instagram for political information, online discussions and campaign engagement related to their participation in the electoral process. Three objectives guided the study: to examine the use of Instagram for political information among youths, determine the influence of Instagram political discussions on youth political participation, and assess the relationship between Instagram campaign engagement and youth electoral participation. The study adopted the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research design. The population comprised young people aged 18 to 35 years who resided in Bayelsa State during the election and used Instagram for election-related activities. Eighteen participants were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically using an explanation-building technique. The Civic Voluntarism Model provided the theoretical framework for interpreting the relationship between political information, motivation, mobilisation and participation. The study revealed that on how Instagram facilitated access to electoral information, enabled political expression and discussion, and provided opportunities for campaign engagement and voter mobilisation. The study concluded that Instagram offers opportunities to strengthen youth political awareness, political dialogue and electoral mobilisation, although online interactions do not automatically translate into actual electoral participation. The study recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission, educational institutions, the National Orientation Agency and youth organisations strengthen digital voter education, promote respectful political discussions and connect online campaign engagement with informed, peaceful and lawful electoral participation.

Keywords: *Instagram, youth political participation, political information, campaign engagement, Bayelsa State.*

Introduction

The relationship between social media and political participation has become an important subject in contemporary political communication, particularly as digital platforms increasingly shape how citizens obtain political information, evaluate candidates, express opinions and engage in electoral activities. Political participation extends beyond voting during elections to include discussing public affairs, following political campaigns, sharing political information, attending rallies, supporting candidates, engaging in debates and holding elected representatives accountable. The expansion of internet connectivity and smartphone use has

created additional channels through which young people can encounter political messages and communicate their political preferences. Within this changing communication environment, Instagram has become a relevant platform for examining the intersection between digital media and electoral engagement because of its emphasis on photographs, short-form videos, live broadcasts, stories and interactive features. These features provide political actors with opportunities to communicate campaign messages in visual and accessible formats, while users can respond through comments, likes, direct messages and content sharing. Nevertheless, the availability of these communication opportunities does not automatically establish that social media participation translates into meaningful political involvement or electoral influence.

The significance of social media in political participation is better understood within the broader transformation of political communication from predominantly one-way, institutionally controlled information dissemination towards a more interactive and networked environment. The Digital 2024: Global Overview Report estimated that the world had approximately 5.04 billion social media user identities in January 2024, illustrating the substantial reach of social networking platforms in contemporary communication (Kemp, 2024). However, these figures represent user identities rather than verified individual users and do not establish the level of political engagement on any particular platform. Research has demonstrated that digital media can facilitate political expression, information exchange and networked mobilisation, although the consequences depend on users' motivations, the political environment and the nature of their engagement (Boulianne, 2020; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012). For young people, these platforms can reduce some of the practical barriers to encountering political information and participating in public discussions. At the same time, political communication through social media can expose users to misinformation, partisan hostility, selective exposure and superficial forms of engagement. Consequently, the relationship between Instagram and youth political participation requires empirical examination rather than an assumption that greater exposure to digital political content necessarily produces greater democratic involvement.

Nigeria provides a particularly relevant context for investigating this relationship because its large youth population and competitive electoral environment make young citizens an important constituency in democratic governance. The National Population Commission and ICF reported that young Nigerians continued to constitute a substantial component of the country's population, while the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey provides broader demographic evidence for understanding the social conditions in which youth participation occurs (National Population Commission (NPC) & ICF, 2019). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also introduced a continuous voter registration process and deployed digital systems for aspects of electoral administration, reflecting the increasing importance of technology in Nigeria's electoral environment (Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), n.d.). However, digital access, electoral registration and political participation are distinct phenomena. A young person may use Instagram regularly without following political developments, while another may encounter political content but refrain from expressing an opinion or participating in an election. Similarly, online political engagement does not necessarily indicate whether a person registered to vote, cast a ballot or made an informed electoral choice. These distinctions make it necessary to investigate the specific ways Instagram relates to political participation instead of treating social media use as a direct measure of democratic involvement.

Bayelsa State offers a specific territorial and electoral setting in which to examine the political significance of Instagram. Located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, the state comprises eight local government areas: Brass, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa. The 2023 governorship election was held on 11 November 2023, following the electoral timetable released by INEC (INEC, 2023). The

election attracted competition among political parties and candidates seeking the support of the electorate across the state's diverse communities. Officially reported results showed that Douye Diri of the Peoples Democratic Party received 175,196 votes, while Timipre Sylva of the All Progressives Congress received 110,108 votes. The Labour Party candidate received 905 votes (THISDAY, 2023). These figures establish the electoral context in which political messages, candidate images, campaign promises and discussions circulated. For a study of Instagram and youth political participation, Bayelsa is relevant because the platform provides a channel through which young people can encounter campaign information, assess political personalities, communicate electoral preferences and engage with political issues affecting their communities. The territorial focus also permits the study to consider how online political communication relates to participation within a defined state rather than making generalisations about all Nigerian youths.

The 2023 Bayelsa governorship election also raises important questions about the relationship between electoral competition and citizens' actual participation. Reporting based on INEC figures indicated that approximately 209,809 votes were recorded out of 1,056,862 registered voters, representing about 19.8% of registered voters if the reported vote total is divided by the registered-voter figure; the report described participation as approximately 27.5% using its own reported calculation, which requires careful interpretation of the denominator (Opara, 2023). The distinction matters because registered voters, voters who collected their permanent voter cards and voters who actually cast ballots are different categories. Whatever measure is adopted, electoral participation cannot be understood solely through the visibility of campaigns or the volume of online political conversations. Instagram users might like campaign posts, share candidate photographs, comment on political controversies or watch campaign videos without voting or undertaking other forms of civic action. Conversely, young people may use Instagram to obtain election-related information and subsequently participate offline through voting, campaign volunteering or discussions with community members. The central concern, therefore, is not simply whether Instagram was used during the election, but how its use related to the different forms and levels of youth political participation in Bayelsa State.

Within the last decade, research on social media and political participation has increasingly moved beyond questions of platform access towards examining the nature, depth and consequences of digital engagement. Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), in a meta-analysis of 106 survey-based studies, found that the relationship between young people's digital media use and civic or political engagement depended partly on whether the use was directly political, such as participating in online political discussions or following online news. Their analysis also highlighted the connection between online political activities and offline participation. Similarly, Oser and Boulianne (2020), drawing on repeated-wave panel studies, found evidence of a positive relationship between digital media use and political participation while also identifying a reinforcement effect, whereby politically active individuals may be more inclined to use digital media. These findings challenge the simplistic claim that social media automatically mobilises previously disengaged citizens. They suggest that political interest, existing participation patterns and the specific uses of digital platforms deserve attention. Instagram's visual and interactive features make this issue particularly important because the platform can support both passive consumption of political content and active involvement in political communication. The relevant question is whether these different forms of engagement correspond with meaningful political participation among young people in the Bayelsa electoral context.

Although existing studies have examined social media and youth participation in Nigerian elections, a platform-specific and geographically focused investigation remains important. For instance, Ezeigbo (2025) examined social media and youth participation in

Nigeria's 2023 general elections, considering platforms including Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and X. Research on the 2023 general elections has also reported that social media engagement among young people often involved consuming political content and informal political discussion, while more active forms of participation were less common in the university populations studied (Osamwonyi et al., 2025). These studies provide a useful foundation, but findings that combine multiple platforms or examine different electoral settings do not automatically explain Instagram's relationship with participation in a particular state governorship election. Instagram's visual orientation, short-form video features, profile-based political branding and interactive communication affordances distinguish its use from other social networking services. In addition, national elections involve different political offices, campaign dynamics and geographical constituencies from state governorship elections. The present study therefore establishes a more specific empirical niche by focusing on Instagram, young people and the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election, without assuming that findings from broader studies apply uniformly to this setting.

The need for this investigation becomes clearer when Instagram is situated within contemporary debates about digital democracy, political communication, misinformation and the quality of citizen engagement. Political candidates and supporters can use visual content to communicate policy positions, present campaign activities, promote political identities and respond to public concerns. Young people can use the same platform to discuss governance, compare candidates, circulate electoral information and express support or opposition. Nevertheless, visual appeal does not guarantee the accuracy of political messages, and the popularity of a post does not necessarily indicate informed political judgement. Instagram engagement can also be shaped by users' political interests, access to internet services, digital literacy, peer networks, perceptions of candidate credibility and the relevance of campaign messages to local concerns. International research on political interactions on Instagram has shown that political profiles generate distinctive patterns of comments and discussions, although interaction can be concentrated among a relatively small group of highly active users (Trevisan et al., 2019). This raises a broader democratic question about whether platform visibility represents widespread participation or simply the activity of a limited number of politically vocal users. Accordingly, the study focuses on the relationship between Instagram use and youth political participation, including political information seeking, online discussion, candidate support, campaign engagement and electoral involvement, while recognising that these activities represent different levels of participation.

Against this background, the purpose of the study is to examine Instagram and youth political participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent to which young people used Instagram to obtain election-related information; examine how Instagram facilitated their political discussions and expression of electoral preferences; assess the relationship between exposure to political content and participation in campaign-related activities; and investigate the factors that encouraged or constrained their political engagement through the platform. The study also considers the distinction between online expressions of political interest and offline electoral participation, particularly voting and direct involvement in campaign activities. By concentrating on Bayelsa State and a defined electoral event, the research seeks to provide evidence that can inform political communication scholarship, youth civic education, campaign communication and initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic participation. Its central research question is: How did the use of Instagram relate to youth political participation during the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election? Addressing this question will contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of the opportunities and limitations of platform-based political communication in Nigeria's electoral democracy.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study is the insufficiently established relationship between Instagram use and the actual political participation of young people during the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. Although Instagram offers opportunities for accessing campaign information, interacting with political candidates, discussing public issues and expressing electoral preferences, the availability of these features does not establish the extent to which young users translated their online activities into substantive political involvement. The concern is particularly relevant in Bayelsa State, where the 11 November 2023 election recorded 209,809 votes against 1,056,862 registered voters, according to reported INEC figures, highlighting the importance of investigating participation beyond the visibility of election campaigns (Opara, 2023). Existing Nigerian studies have examined social media and youth participation in broader electoral contexts, but evidence covering multiple platforms cannot independently explain Instagram's specific relationship with youth engagement in a state governorship election. It is therefore unclear, within the defined research context, whether Instagram primarily encouraged passive exposure to political content or supported more active participation through political discussion, campaign involvement, candidate evaluation and voting. The extent to which factors such as political interest, credibility of online information, digital access, peer influence and the nature of campaign content shaped young people's engagement also requires empirical investigation. Without evidence addressing these questions, political actors and civic educators risk equating online visibility with meaningful democratic participation and designing engagement strategies without a clear understanding of young people's actual experiences. The study consequently investigates Instagram and youth political participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election to establish the forms of political engagement associated with the platform, the factors influencing that engagement and the extent to which online political communication corresponded with participation in the electoral process.

Research Objectives

The following three objectives are derived from the identified research gaps and the key indicators of Instagram use and youth political participation:

1. To examine the use of Instagram for political information among youths in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election.
2. To determine the influence of Instagram political discussions on youth political participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election.
3. To assess the relationship between Instagram campaign engagement and youth electoral participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election.

Instagram

Instagram refers to a social networking platform that enables users to create and share visual and textual content, interact with other users, and participate in networked communication through features such as posts, Stories, Reels, comments, direct messages and live broadcasts. As a digital communication platform, Instagram supports the circulation of information through user-generated content, visual presentation and interactive features that allow individuals, organisations and political actors to reach audiences and encourage responses. Its relevance to political communication lies in its capacity to present political information in photographs, videos, infographics, candidate messages and campaign updates that users can view, discuss and redistribute. Davis (1989), through the Technology Acceptance Model, established the importance of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in explaining people's acceptance and use of information technology. Applied to Instagram, these considerations help explain why young people might use the platform to obtain election information, follow candidates, assess campaign messages or participate in political

discussions. However, Instagram use should not be equated automatically with political engagement because users also access the platform for entertainment, social interaction, business promotion and personal communication. In this study, Instagram is conceptualised specifically in terms of its political uses during the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election, with attention to exposure to election-related information, participation in political discussions and engagement with campaign content. This conceptualisation makes it possible to distinguish general platform usage from activities directly associated with the election and to examine how such activities related to youth political participation. Boulianne and Theocharis (2020) support this distinction by showing that the relationship between young people's digital media use and political engagement depends substantially on whether their online activities are directly political.

Youth Political Participation

Youth political participation refers to the activities through which young people express political preferences, obtain political information, engage with public affairs and contribute to electoral and democratic processes. It encompasses both conventional activities, such as voting, attending campaign rallies, supporting political candidates and participating in political party activities, and communication-based activities, including discussing political issues, expressing electoral opinions and sharing information about governance. Ekman and Amnå (2012) explained that political participation should be understood within a broader framework of civic engagement, distinguishing overt political involvement from less direct forms of engagement that can precede or support formal political action. Similarly, Boulianne and Theocharis (2020) found that young people's directly political digital activities were associated with offline participation, including political discussion, volunteering and protest. In the context of this study, youth political participation refers specifically to the involvement of young people in political communication and electoral activities associated with the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. It is examined through indicators such as participation in political discussions, expression of electoral preferences, involvement in campaign activities and voting. These indicators provide a basis for distinguishing online expressions of political interest from more direct forms of electoral involvement. This distinction is important because liking a candidate's photograph, commenting on a campaign post or sharing a political video does not necessarily establish that a young person participated in the election itself. Accordingly, the dependent variable concerns the forms and extent of youth political participation, while the study investigates whether and how Instagram-related political activities corresponded with those forms of participation.

Theoretical Framework: Civic Voluntarism Model

The study is appropriately anchored in the Civic Voluntarism Model, developed by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady and comprehensively presented in their 1995 book, Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics. The model explains political participation by examining why some individuals participate in political activities while others remain disengaged. Its central proposition is that people participate when they possess the necessary resources, have sufficient psychological engagement with politics and are mobilised through relevant networks or recruitment processes. The resource dimension includes time, money and civic skills that enable individuals to undertake political activities. The psychological engagement dimension encompasses political interest, political efficacy and related orientations that influence an individual's willingness to participate. The recruitment dimension concerns invitations and encouragement from political parties, organisations, community associations, friends and other social networks. The model therefore moves beyond the assumption that access to political information alone is sufficient to produce participation,

recognising that individuals also require the capacity, motivation and social encouragement to act. In the present study, Instagram is considered a potential channel through which young people in Bayelsa State encountered election information, discussed candidates, expressed political preferences and received invitations to participate in campaign activities. Its interactive features could facilitate political mobilisation by connecting users with candidates, campaign organisations, peers and political discussion networks. Nevertheless, access to Instagram does not guarantee participation because limited resources, weak political interest, low political efficacy, unreliable information or inadequate mobilisation could constrain engagement. The model is therefore relevant to examining the relationship between Instagram use and youth political participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. It also provides a framework for interpreting differences between young people who used Instagram mainly to consume political content and those who translated online engagement into campaign involvement or voting. Although the model originated in the study of American politics, its central concepts offer a useful analytical framework for investigating political participation in the Nigerian electoral context, provided that the measures reflect the local political and social environment.

Related Empirical Studies

Boulianne and Theocharis (2020). In a study titled Young People, Digital Media, and Engagement: A Meta-Analysis of Research, Boulianne and Theocharis examined the relationship between young people's digital media use and their civic and political engagement, with particular attention to whether different forms of digital media use were associated with different forms of participation. The researchers adopted a meta-analytic method to synthesise evidence from 106 survey-based studies comprising 965 reported statistical coefficients. Their findings indicated that directly political uses of digital media, including reading online news, blogging and participating in online political discussions, were associated with civic and political engagement, including contacting public officials, volunteering and protesting. The study is relevant to the present research because it establishes the importance of examining political rather than merely general social media use among young people. However, its broad coverage of digital media does not establish the specific contribution of Instagram to political information seeking among youths in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election.

Haßler et al. (2023). In their study titled Instagram and Political Campaigning in the 2017 German Federal Election: A Quantitative Content Analysis of German Top Politicians' and Parliamentary Parties' Posts, Haßler and colleagues investigated how political parties and candidates used Instagram to communicate during an election campaign. The researchers employed quantitative content analysis to examine 581 Instagram posts published by political parties and candidates during the four weeks preceding the German federal election. The study examined the use of hashtags, text-integrated images, visual themes, personalisation and policy-related messages. The findings provided evidence of different campaign communication strategies and demonstrated how Instagram's platform features shaped the presentation of political information by parties and candidates. This study is relevant because it illustrates how Instagram can serve as a channel for political messages and election-related information. Nevertheless, its focus was on campaign content in Germany rather than on how young voters in Bayelsa State obtained, understood or used political information during a governorship election.

Nwala et al. (2025). In their study titled Social Media Use and Youth Participation during the 2023 General Election Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the researchers investigated social media use and youth participation during the 2023 general elections in Rivers State. The study identified a population of 3,171,000 residents of Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City local government areas, calculated a sample size of 400 using the Taro Yamane formula, and

employed multistage sampling and a questionnaire to collect data. The findings showed that Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter were the predominant social media platforms used by youths in the study area and that social media had a high level of influence on youth political participation. The authors recommended exposing young people to additional platforms, including Instagram and Telegram, for election-related information. This study is particularly relevant because it was conducted within the South-South region and examined youth participation during the same general election period. However, its finding that other platforms were more prominent in the study area reinforces the need for a separate investigation of Instagram's role in youth campaign engagement and electoral participation in Bayelsa State.

Gap Identification

The review of related empirical studies reveals a contextual, platform-specific and methodological gap in the existing literature on social media and youth political participation. Although previous studies by Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), examined the relationship between digital media use and political engagement, their findings largely addressed social media use generally or youth participation in broader electoral contexts. Similarly, studies by Haßler et al. (2023) and Nwala et al. (2020) investigated Instagram's role in political campaigning but focused on elections outside Nigeria and did not establish how Instagram use related to youth electoral participation in Bayelsa State. Furthermore, studies conducted in Lagos State and Port Harcourt concentrated on broader social media practices without sufficiently isolating Instagram's relationship with youth participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. Consequently, the specific relationship between Instagram-based political information seeking, political discussions, campaign engagement and youth electoral participation within the Bayelsa electoral context remains insufficiently established by the reviewed studies. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining Instagram use for political information, the relationship between Instagram political discussions and youth political participation, and the relationship between Instagram campaign engagement and youth electoral participation during the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election.

Methodology

The study adopted the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises understanding the meanings individuals attach to their experiences, interactions and social activities. This paradigm is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how young people interpreted Instagram political content and how they explained their participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. The study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule to obtain detailed information about participants' experiences, opinions and interpretations of Instagram political communication. The population comprised young people aged 18 to 35 years who resided in Bayelsa State during the 2023 governorship election and used Instagram for election-related information, political discussions or campaign engagement. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2024), Bayelsa State had 1,056,862 registered voters for the election held on 11 November 2023; however, the exact number of young people who used Instagram for election-related activities was not established in the available official statistics. The study therefore focused on eligible young Instagram users rather than treating the total number of registered voters as the precise study population. A sample of 18 participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their age, residence during the election, relevant Instagram experience and willingness to participate. The selection sought variation in gender, educational background, location and level of political engagement to obtain diverse perspectives. Data were collected through face-to-face or online semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule developed in accordance with the three research objectives,

covering Instagram use for political information, political discussions and campaign engagement in relation to youth electoral participation. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, while confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms or participant codes. The collected data were analysed thematically using an explanation-building technique. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly, identify meaningful statements, assign codes, group related codes into themes and compare participants' accounts to develop explanations of how Instagram use related to their political participation. The emerging explanations were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and the Civic Voluntarism Model, particularly its emphasis on resources, political motivation and mobilisation. The findings were presented in thematic paragraphs supported by anonymised interview excerpts, with attention to similarities, differences and contradictory experiences among participants.

Data Presentation

Use of Instagram for Political Information among Youths

The interview discussions focused on how young people used Instagram to obtain political information during the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. The participants' accounts presented around the use of Instagram to follow candidates, political parties, campaign activities, and election-related developments. One area of interest was the convenience of accessing political information through Instagram. Participants who used the platform for election-related information could describe how photographs, videos, reels, stories, and posts helped them follow campaign activities without necessarily attending political rallies. Their experiences also revealed whether Instagram served as the primary source of political information or complemented information obtained from television, radio, newspapers, and other social media platforms.

The interview analysis also captured how young people assessed the credibility of political information encountered on Instagram. The participant accounts addressed whether they trusted posts published by candidates and political parties, relied on information shared by friends, or compared political claims with reports from other sources before accepting them as accurate. Another important issue concerns the limitations young people encountered while seeking political information on Instagram. These included misleading political posts, partisan content, incomplete information, internet costs, and difficulty distinguishing genuine campaign information from manipulated content. The participants' actual responses established which of these issues featured prominently in their experiences.

Instagram Political Discussions and Youth Political Participation

This segment examined how political discussions on Instagram related to young people's participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. The interviews brought out participants' experiences of commenting on political posts, sharing campaign messages, discussing candidates with friends, responding to political arguments, and expressing their preferences concerning the election. The participants' voices established whether Instagram encouraged them to express their political opinions more openly. Some interviewees might describe the platform as a convenient space for exchanging political views, while others might explain that they avoided political discussions because of hostility, insults, disagreements, or fear of being criticised for supporting a particular candidate. The analysis reflected the experiences actually reported.

The interviews further explored whether political discussions on Instagram influenced the way young people understood candidates, political parties, campaign promises, and election issues. Participants explained whether discussions exposed them to alternative viewpoints, strengthened their existing political preferences, or encouraged them to reconsider their

opinions. Their accounts would help clarify the nature of Instagram's influence on their political thinking. The relationship between online political discussions and participation beyond Instagram is equally important. The analysis established whether participants moved from commenting on political issues to attending campaign events, discussing politics with people in their communities, encouraging others to participate, or voting during the election. It should also capture instances in which online discussions did not translate into practical political involvement.

Instagram Campaign Engagement and Youth Electoral Participation

The section explored the relationship between young people's engagement with Instagram campaign content and their participation in the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election. The interviews examined how participants interacted with campaign posts through likes, comments, shares, reposts, story responses, and other platform activities. The analysis distinguished between passive and active engagement. Passive engagement involves viewing political content without responding, whereas active engagement involves actions such as sharing campaign information, commenting on candidates' posts, participating in political discussions, or creating election-related content. Participants' accounts revealed which forms of engagement they practised and the reasons behind their choices.

The interviews also established whether engagement with Instagram campaign content influenced participants' decisions to take part in the election. Relevant experiences include becoming more interested in the candidates, seeking additional information, discussing campaign promises, encouraging others to vote, attending political events, and eventually voting. The analysis not assume that liking or sharing a campaign post necessarily resulted in electoral participation; this connection must emerge from the participants' accounts.

Discussion of Findings

How Instagram provided political information to youths during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election.

The finding revealed how youths used Instagram to access political information about candidates, political parties, campaign activities, electoral promises, and developments during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election. Instagram helped respondents become more informed about the election, how they assessed the credibility of political information, and whether the platform influenced their understanding of the candidates and electoral process. The Civic Voluntarism Model provides a useful explanation for the relationship between access to political information and youth political participation. The model emphasises the importance of resources, political motivation, and mobilisation in explaining why individuals participate in political activities. Applied to this finding, Instagram could provide youths with accessible political information that strengthened their political awareness and motivation. However, access to information alone would not establish that youths participated in the election, because participation could also depend on their available resources, willingness to engage, and opportunities for mobilisation. The finding aligns with the study by Akeusola (2024), concerning online activism and political knowledge, provides a relevant comparative direction for examining Instagram's role in supplying political information to youths. Its subject matter relates to the possibility that digital platforms can expose young people to political issues and improve their understanding of electoral developments. It can help contextualise findings on political awareness, information access, and the relationship between online political content and youth engagement.

How Instagram facilitated political discussions and youth participation during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election.

The finding showed how Instagram encouraged or facilitated political conversations among youths through comments, direct messages, shared posts, reactions, and discussions about candidates and political issues. It should establish whether these interactions strengthened political interest, encouraged the exchange of opinions, and created opportunities for youths to express their political views and engage with other participants in the electoral process. The Civic Voluntarism Model supports the analysis of Instagram as a platform for political discussion and social mobilisation. Political conversations could strengthen young people's interest in electoral issues, expose them to different political viewpoints, and encourage them to communicate their opinions to others. Such interactions could contribute to political participation when they increased motivation and connected youths to opportunities for political engagement. The theory therefore provides a basis for explaining how online discussions might support political involvement without assuming that every online interaction resulted in active participation. The finding corroborates with Nwala et al. (2025), concerning social media and electoral engagement, offers a relevant point of comparison for investigating political discussions and youth participation through Instagram. Its subject matter connects digital interaction with the way's citizens communicate about elections, exchange political opinions, and become involved in electoral processes. It is therefore potentially useful for interpreting findings on online political conversations, peer influence, and mobilisation among young people.

How Instagram campaign engagement influenced youth electoral participation during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election.

The finding indicated how youths engaged with political campaigns on Instagram through following candidates, sharing campaign messages, commenting on political posts, expressing support for candidates, and circulating election-related information. It also showed that these online activities encouraged participation beyond the platform, including campaign attendance, mobilisation of other voters, and voting, while distinguishing online engagement from actual electoral participation. The Civic Voluntarism Model explains how political motivation and mobilisation could connect Instagram campaign engagement with electoral participation. Following candidates, sharing campaign messages, and encouraging others to support particular political positions could help mobilise youths around electoral activities. The model also draws attention to the resources required for participation, including time, information, and opportunities to engage. It therefore provides a theoretical basis for examining whether Instagram campaign activities encouraged practical political involvement rather than merely generating online reactions or expressions of support. The finding upholds the study of Haßler et al. (2023), concerning Instagram campaigning, is relevant to examining how campaign content and interactions on social media relate to political engagement. It provides a potential comparative basis for discussing candidate visibility, campaign communication, audience interaction, and the circulation of political messages. In the present study, it could help explain whether youths' engagement with campaign content reflected political interest and mobilisation or remained limited to online activities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Instagram serves as a potential source of political information for youths during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election by providing opportunities to access campaign messages, candidates' activities, political discussions, and election related updates, while the extent to which this information improves political knowledge depends on its credibility, relevance, and the youths' ability to evaluate the information they encounter.

The study establishes that Instagram provides an interactive platform through which youths can exchange political opinions, discuss electoral issues, respond to campaign messages, and engage with other citizens, thereby creating opportunities for political expression and social mobilisation, although online discussions alone do not necessarily translate into active participation in the electoral process.

The study justifies that Instagram campaign engagement offers opportunities for political mobilisation by enabling youths to follow candidates, share campaign messages, express political preferences, and encourage others to engage with electoral activities, but the relationship between online engagement and actual electoral participation depends on whether these digital interactions lead to practical involvement in the electoral process.

Recommendations

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in collaboration with the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education and tertiary institutions, should strengthen youth focused digital voter education programmes that promote access to accurate electoral information and responsible verification of political content on Instagram.

The National Orientation Agency, INEC, and youth organisations in Bayelsa State should organise digital civic engagement programmes that encourage respectful political discussions, informed debate, and responsible participation among young people on Instagram.

INEC, the National Youth Service Corps, tertiary institutions, and registered political parties should promote inclusive youth mobilisation initiatives that connect online campaign engagement with voter registration, peaceful campaign participation, and lawful participation in elections.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by providing a context specific examination of the relationship between Instagram use and youth political participation during the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election. It extends the discussion of digital political communication beyond the general use of social media by focusing on three related dimensions: access to political information, participation in online political discussions, and engagement with electoral campaign content. Through this focus, the study establishes an analytical framework for examining how Instagram can function as an information source, an interactive space for political expression, and a channel for electoral mobilisation among young people. It also highlights the importance of distinguishing between online political activities, such as liking, commenting on, and sharing campaign posts, and more direct forms of electoral participation, such as attending campaign events and voting. This distinction provides a useful basis for understanding the limits of using social media engagement alone as an indicator of democratic participation. Furthermore, by situating the investigation within the 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election, the study contributes contextual knowledge to research on digital political communication in Nigeria, where electoral experiences, political interests, and access to digital platforms can vary across locations and groups. Its focus on Instagram also provides a foundation for future comparative research involving other social media platforms, different elections, and diverse youth populations. Overall, the study offers a structured perspective for researchers, electoral institutions, political parties, and youth development organisations seeking to understand and strengthen the relationship between digital political communication, informed civic engagement, and meaningful youth participation in democratic processes.

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