

## Social Media Use, Social Capital, and Political Participation among Nigerian University Students

### Usos dels mitjans de comunicació social, capital social i participació política entre els estudiants universitaris de Nigèria

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*The arrival of social media, dubbed Web 2.0, has reconfigured the media and political landscape as well as media-politics relations in a way that is supplying the citizens with more powers. By limiting the gate-keeping of information common to the mainstream media, the social media generally offer platforms for stimulating mass participation through their information dissemination and networking power. While pundits and prognosticators are of the view that social media platforms stimulate as well as attenuate youths' community and political participation, findings remained inconclusive and are mostly skewed towards the examination of events in developed democracies. To offer a developing country perspective on the nexus between social media and political engagement among the youths, this study*

*L'aparició dels mitjans de comunicació social, coneguts com Web 2.0, ha reconfigurat el panorama i la relació entre els mitjans de comunicació i la política, en el sentit que els poders dels ciutadans en surten reforçats. En limitar la porta d'accés al control d'una informació que resultava habitual per als mitjans de comunicació, ara els mitjans de comunicació social, amb el poder de les xarxes, ofereixen una plataforma que estimula la participació massiva a través de la difusió de la seva informació. Mentre els analistes i vaticinadors opinen que aquesta plataforma tant pot incitar com retreure els joves cap a la participació ciutadana i política, les primeres recerques tendeixen a decantar-se cap a l'evidència del que està succeint a les democràcies desenvolupades. Per tal d'oferir l'exemple del nexa entre els*

*examined the democratising prowess of social media on Nigerian youths' community participation and political participation. Situated within the social capital theoretical paradigm, representative samples of youths were drawn from two universities in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The results showed that social media enhance the social capital and political participation of the youths, particularly during the period of national elections.*

**Key words:** social media, social capital, political participation, Nigeria, university students.

*mitjans de comunicació social i el compromís polític dels joves en un país en vies de desenvolupament, aquest estudi ha examinat la capacitat democratitzadora dels mitjans socials envers els joves nigerians i la seva implicació cívica i política. En el marc del paradigma teòric del capital social, es van estudiar mostres representatives d'estudiants de dues universitats d'Ilorin, a l'Estat de Kwara, Nigèria. Els resultats van mostrar que els mitjans socials activen tant el capital social com la participació política dels joves, particularment en període d'eleccions.*

**Paraules clau:** mitjans de comunicació social, capital social, participació política, Nigèria, estudiants universitaris.

For centuries, the mainstream media have enjoyed dominance as the primary channels through which the people are informed, educated, entertained and mobilized in the society. From the days of Plato in Athens Greek City State to present day democracies, the mainstream media perform significant roles in the societal emancipation and various forms of development. The arrival of the social media, dubbed Web 2.0, has, however, reconfigured the media and political landscape as well as media-politics relations in a way that is imbuing the citizens with more powers. From Obama election to 'Arab Spring', from Occupy Wall Street to global humanitarian response to Tsunami in Japan, the mobilising potential of social media has been proved to be effectual. Hence, scholars have devoted interest to explicating how these novel media are changing virtually every aspect of human life, particularly from the political perspective.

The development of social media as tools for simultaneous connection among people globally has given way for new means of mobilizing citizens towards a particular cause. Hitherto, no one ever envisaged a reduction in the towering roles of the mainstream mass media as societal information disseminator, citizens' educator and mass entertainer (Friedman and Friedman, 2008). Hence, Mainwaring (2011: 1) observed that "the evolution of social media into a robust mechanism for social transformation is already visible despite many adamant critics who insist that tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, among others, are little more than faddish distraction useful only

to exchange trivial information, have being proven wrong, time and time again.”

Of much concern, however, is how social media are informing peoples' sense of community and political engagement. While there are demonstrable evidences that social media are offering increasing avenues for social networking, political education and political engagement, the alternative viewpoint is that the novel platform fragment, atomise and diminish collectivist senses among members of the society. Scholars, for example, found that social media use is a significant predictor of social capital, civic engagement and political participation in the North America (Kahne and Middaugh, 2012; Kahne, Middaugh and Allen, 2014; Park, Kee and Valenzuela, 2009; Yang and DeHart, 2016; Zuniga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012). Similar findings have equally been documented in Europe (Calenda and Meijer, 2009; Xenos, Vromen, and Loader, 2014), Latin America (Klesner, 2004; Valenzuela, Arriagada and Scherman, 2014) and Asia (Salman and Saad, 2015; Wang, 2007). There are others studies pointing to disconnection with political and social life, resulting from disruptive nature of new and social media (Ogochukwu, 2014; Putnam, 2000; Vromen, 2008, 2011).

Despite the growing global concerns over the form of social and political engagements emerging from increasing dependence on the social media among the youths, little is known about how this phenomenon is playing out in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, despite the increasing popularity of social media and widening democratic space. In view of this gap, this study aims at providing a developing country perspective on the role of social media in the renewed political activism among Nigerian youths, who are finding new engagement and mobilisation platforms after long-term hegemonic and propagandistic dominance of the media landscape via state-controlled and elite-owned media system.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

Social capital theory was propounded by Robert Putnam. Defining it, however, posed a huge challenge to scholars (Beaudoin, 2007; Gupta *et al.*, 2003; Ramos-Pinto, 2006). Defined as “connection among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000: 19), social capital is mostly associated with community building and civic engagement. Zuniga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012: 320) viewed social capital as “an antecedent of behaviour that is oriented toward the public good, either at the community or the political level.”

Citing Lin (2001), Beaudoin (2007: 640) posited that “social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structures, which can be mobilised when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action.” Simply put, social capital represents involvement of individuals in community engagements with a view to building network aimed at achieving collective endeavour. Citing Coleman (1988), Halpern (2005) described social capital as all human relationships, which include obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of social structure, informal channels, norms and effective sanctions. Putman (2000: 288) conceptualises social capital from social norms and

networks perspective, describing it as “...an institutional mechanism with the power to ensure compliance with the collectively desirable behaviour.”

Although classical conceptualisation of social capital does not distinguish between differential *raison d'être* of the trust among different social groups, Gupta *et al.* (2003) were of the opinion that trust among members of socially undesirable groups is an antithesis of social capital. Social capital is thus the basis of communal vitality resulting from voluntary engagement to explore opportunities and solve common problems. As a multi-dimensional concept, social capital has been described as a resource, capacity to facilitate collective cooperation and action and confluence of norms and networks (Ramos-Pinto, 2006). Hence, scholars conclude that social capital is the vertebrae of democratic and civic relations in the society.

Social capital has been central to community relations in Nigeria for a long time. From the fight against colonialism to demilitarisation of the polity, Nigerians of various demographic classifications have demonstrated huge trust in their collective destinies. This high net worth of social capital was responsible for the realisation of liberal order that sequel the colonial rule and post-military regimes. Although the mainstream media played tremendous role in bringing Nigerians together for collective actions (Akinfeleye, 2003; Olukotun and Seteolu, 2001; Uche, 1989), the dominance of the media system by political and economic elites at the return of democracy in 1999 has reduced once a vibrant watchdog to a mere lapdog. The connection of Nigerians to the new and social media grid has, however, provided a renewed hope and public sphere with minimal gate-keeping. Hence, Nigerians, particularly the youths, have seized the momentum to return to the political war trenches, where they are now actively engaging the political system to the point of changing an incumbent regime for the first time in almost six decades of the nation's existence in an election where social media use was pivotal.

As the means of building and maintaining relationships, communication is central to development of social capital (Beaudoin, 2007; Putnam, 2000). The vast nature of contemporary society makes physical and direct contacts difficult, if not impossible. The mass media of communication and their latest offspring, the social media, are thus important avenues for building community of interest. Bakker and De Vreese (2012), for instance, surmised that the new media may well challenge the role or fill some of the gaps left by traditional strong socialisers such as family, church, and school, especially with regards to political socialisation. The increasing consolidation of Web 2.0, in addition to facilitating the building of networks, allows users to create content, thus enhancing interactivity and participatory space (Tous Rovirosa *et al.*, 2015). Bennett (2012: 22) also suggested that “the pervasive use of social technology enables individuals to become important catalysts of collective action processes as they activate their own social networks.” Social media also facilitate diasporic nationalism, allowing nations foreign residents to contribute to homeland politics from their international abodes (Mustapha and Wok, 2014, 2015). Since social media offer platform for participatory engagement, we propose that:

- H1: Social media use for political information is a strong predictor of social capital

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE YOUTH

Social media and youth are fluid concepts. The term social media, according to Haddon (2015: 1), “refers to principally, and narrowly, to the more communication and interaction-oriented parts of the internet, including blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook, and microblogging sites such as Twitter, as well as to diverse platforms for sharing audio-visual materials (e.g., YouTube, Flickr).” Social media facilitate faster, easier and cheaper access to the world through their ability to channel various communication codes (texts, pictures, audio and video) between among people, irrespective of temporo-spatial barriers. Youths, on the hand other hand, have been conceptualised, according to the United Nations Organization (2000), “as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence.” Described as important and vital asset to a society (Shabir *et al.*, 2014), youth varies in conceptualisation from one society to the other and in different countries (Haddon, 2015). The fluidity of the conceptualisations notwithstanding, there seems to be an association between social media use and being youthful.

As an integral part of youths’ communication and conversation activities (Adaugo, Ovute and Obochi, 2015; Shabir *et al.*, 2014), social media enhance exposure and awareness and facilitate exchange of ideas, opinions, data, etc. via texts, audio, video and pictorial modes. Although social media can meet youths’ cognitive, social integrative, pedagogical, marketing, entrepreneurship and other action-oriented needs and gratifications (Aydin, 2012; Jagongo and Kinuya, 2013; Lekhanya, 2015), they do have negative dimensions such as distraction, technostress, cyberbullying, online sexual predator, and diminishing face-to-face interaction (Adaja and Ayodele, 2013; Adaugo, Ovute and Obochi, 2015; Akram, Mahmud and Mahmood, 2015; Khurana, 2015). The most important attribute of social media, however, is democratising capacity, particularly among the youths.

The youths constitute the greatest number of social media users. This is because young people spend increasing amounts of time in the online world (Haddon, 2015, Mustapha and Wok, 2014). Across the world, therefore, social media occupy a prime of place in youth bridging and bonding via its multi-functional features. In the United States, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa, scholars have documented the centrality of social media to daily life experiences of the youth (see for example, Adaugo, Ovute and Obochi, 2015; Bober, Livingstone and Helsper, 2005; McMillan and Morrison, 2006).

In Nigeria, the liberalisation of telecommunication sector and availability of cheaper Android phone have increased level of Internet access and by extension Social Networking Sites. Ohiagu and Okorie (2014) thus argued that the youth remained one of the prominent users of the social media because the digital age is widely believed to belong to the youth and that this has impacted positively on their lives, making them to be aware, informed, and educated about local and global news and information. These scholars also observed that the youths often use the social media to solve societal ills. The creative use of social media in Nigeria that attracted global attention is the (Hash Tag) #Bring Back Our Girls that condemn government insensitivity to the abduction of over 200 young Chi-

bok girls by Boko Haram terrorists. Social media also played tremendous role in the build up to and during the 2015 general elections, where youths became unofficial monitors and observers, reporting incidences and forcing security and electoral officials to conduct a free and fair election.

As great platform for converging communities of interest, social media have been used to carry out various forms of online political activities such as discussing issues, creating political awareness, liking candidates, sharing posts, raising funds and signing petitions (Shetty, Rosario and Hyder, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). In most instances, the youths, whose media consumption is on the go, are the major ones deploying the social media for political communication. Barack Obama, for example, leveraged on the social media to get out the votes of the youths, particularly first-time voters, during the 2008 U.S. presidential election (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011; Kirk and Schill, 2011).

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Generally, media and politics are in a robust, divergent but symbiotic relationship in a functioning democracy (Barner, 2010). As the public sphere and open marketplace of ideas (Baran and Davis, 2012; Mustapha, Ahmad and Abubakar, 2014), the media provide platform for articulation and contestation of viewpoints that aid members of the public to make informed decision. Social media have taken media democratic function further by allowing both synchronous and asynchronous interactions and serving as platform for collective action. By serving as two-way communication route, social media allow political organisations and aspirants to communicate and connect with the electorates and the constituents while taking feedback instantaneously or at a later time. It is, therefore, not uncommon these days for political aspirants to maintain profiles on social network sites and other mobile social media like Twitter.

But there are raging polemics on the role of social media in politics and political participation. Situated between mobilisation hypothesis that explicates how social media reduce information cost and reinforcement model that believes social media only potentiate the already politically active citizens (Borge and Cardenal, 2010; Kirk and Schill, 2011), social media could be said to have functional and dysfunctional political roles. Although there are arguments about declining political engagement and youths' political apathy across the world, some robust but inconclusive evidences have been arrayed on the effects of social media on political participation and civic engagement (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011; Haddon, 2015; Ward and De Vreese, 2011). Bakker and De Vreese (2011), however, cautioned that any attempt at explicating the relationship between social media-political nexus should be conscious of the mediating or moderating effects of personal and social metrics of the users, usage patterns, as well as the contexts and content of the political messages. This state of affairs triggered exploration of social media role in political lives of the future generation.

Using data collected by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, de Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril and Rojas (2009: 553) explored the influence of traditional informa-



tion sourced online on political engagement. They found that “the use of traditional sources online is related positively to different types of political engagement both online and offline.” In a study of Swedish adolescents aged 13-17 years old, Östman (2010) found that involvement in Users Generated Content (UGC) predict offline and online political participation. Using the 2008 U.S. presidential election as a political laboratory, Kirk and Schill (2011) concluded that from being political ‘mouthpieces or magnifiers,’ CNN usage of YouTube created a digital agora, a participatory space that enhanced civic engagement, citizen efficacy and political participation. According to them, “Citizens not only received campaign messages and political information but also engage both candidates and each other in deliberations about this nation’s future” (Kirk and Schill, 2011: 326).

Amidst evidence supporting the mobilization power of social media, there are arguments positing that social media weaken political participation, particularly by limiting citizens to the realm of virtual engagement alone. In a study examining whether reliance on social networking sites predict civic engagement and political participation, Zhang *et al.* (2010: 75) found that “reliance on social networking sites is significantly related to increased civic participation [non-electoral volunteerism and participation in community project] but not to political participation [direct or indirect involvement in election of political official as well as development and implementation of policy].” Examining how younger Asians online use relates to civic activities in Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei and Tokyo, Lin *et al.* (2010) reported dominance of entertainment use, but added that the youth in these countries discuss public affairs and seek out civic and political information online. They thus concluded on futuristic potential of social media in politically transformation and mobilization of these youths. Ward and De Vreese (2011) also reported that social media create new forms of participation, specifically lifestyle politics and issue-based engagement among UK youths.

Olayiwola (2014) offered that Nigeria employed the usage of the social media for political participation and communication during the April 2011 general elections. He posited that key stakeholders in the electoral process, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians and political parties, the electorates, and civil society organizations made extensive use of the social media during the elections. Accordingly, it was observed that INEC used the social media to share information on 2011 elections and to receive feedbacks from the public. Politicians and Political Parties also used social media to connect with the voters and canvass for their supports. Similarly, civil societies and voters used social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp to report their experiences at the polls and circulate results from constituencies even before official declaration of the winners. All these evidenced the global acceptability of social media as potent democratic resources, particularly in fledgling democracies like Nigeria, where the mainstream media are in the firm grip of government and political elites. Hence, we proposed that:

- H2: Social media use for political information is a strong predictor for political participation
- H3: Social capital is a strong predictor of political participation

## METHOD

### DATA COLLECTION

This study collected data, using self-administered questionnaire served on postgraduate students in social sciences and humanities faculties at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria (a federal government-owned university) and Al-Hikma University Ilorin, Nigeria (a privately-owned university) prior to 2015 general elections. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, 355 respondents (University of Ilorin-208; Al-Hikma University-107) were sampled in relation to the proportion of the students in the sample frame. In addition to the demographic variable, data collected include those measuring key constructs of the study (social media use for political participation, social capital and political participation).

### MEASURES

- **Demographic Variable:** Four main demographic variables measured in this studies were age ( $M=25.8$ ,  $Min=17$ ,  $Max=35$ ). Religion (Christianity=32.2%, Islam=67.8%), Gender (Male=50.1%, Female=49.9%). The demographic metrics of the respondents mirror the population. The age reflected the fact that being youth in Nigeria surpassed age 25 recommended in many countries. Scholars have argued that youth age differs from countries to countries (see, for example, Haddon, 2015). The preponderance of respondents of Islamic faith relates to the fact that Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, Nigeria, is predominantly dominated by Muslims. Besides, Al-Hikma University is a faith-based university of Islamic orientation, although it has sizable Christian student population.
- **Respondents' Social Media Profile:** With regards to respondents' social media presence and usage, which was measured using multiple response questions, WhatsApp enjoyed greatest patronage (78.2%), followed by Facebook (69.9%), Twitter (34.3%), Skype (33.4%) and BBM (32.1%). On the average, respondents visit social media sites four days in a week ( $M=4.17$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ) and spend almost three hours on the social media daily ( $M=2.42$ ,  $SD=1.52$ ).
- **Predictors:** Two predictors were used in this study (social media use for political information and participation and social capital). The two items were measured using scaled items developed based on extensive literature review and consideration of the study context.

*Social Media Use for Political Information and Participation* (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.846$ ): This construct was measured using eight items on a five-point Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Items used included "I use social media to get information during 2015 elections" ( $M=3.82$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ), "I discuss political issues on Social Media on 2015 elections" ( $M=3.17$ ,  $SD=1.39$ ), "I post texts and comments on 2015 General Election using Social Media" ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ), etc.



*Social Capital* (Cronbach's alpha=.851): Measured with eight items on a five-point Likert scale to index community involvement and civic engagement. Items used in measuring social capital included "I enjoy great community relationship" (M=3.54, SD=1.27), "I belong to civic and political groups" (M=3.49, SD=1.20), "I participate in community action" (M=3.43, SD=1.20), and so on.

Criterion Variable: *Political participation* (Cronbach's alpha=.895): the dependent variable was measured using twelve items on a five-point Likert scale. Items include "I registered to vote in the 2015 general election" (M=3.61, SD=1.49), "I encouraged people to register to vote and vote" (M=3.52, SD=1.40), "I supported calls for good governance through social media" (M=3.33, SD=1.38), "I took part in discussion on election debates, on the social media" (M=3.36, SD=1.39), "I discussed politics with friends and family-oriented members" (M=3.55, SD=1.32), "I supported a political party on-line and off-line" (M=3.32, SD=1.46), etc.

## RESULTS

The three hypotheses advanced in this study were tested using a series of simple linear regression. Items measuring each constructs were computed and standardized to make them amenable for regression analysis. Although measures of the construct showed high internal consistency at both pilot and final data collection stages, a series of one-sample t-tests was conducted on the constructs to establish external validity of the findings. The recourse to one-sample t-test was informed by the exploratory nature of this study.

**Table 1. One-sample t-test comparing sample means with population means**

No.	Variable	M	SD	Mean difference	t	p
1.	Social media use	3.08	.892	.076	1.591	.112
2.	Social capital	3.12	.892	.130	2.704	.007
3.	Political participation	3.30	.938	.302	5.986	.005

One-sample t-test was used to compare the sample means to the population means with 3 as the cut-off point. The results as seen in Table 1 show that there is significant difference between sample means and population means for social media use. However, the sample means of social capital and political participation differ significantly from the population. The fact that there were smaller mean differences, however, gives confidence in inferring the sample to the population.

To test the hypotheses advanced, initial analysis was conducted to clean, normalise and transform the data using SPSS (version 21.0). Similarly, test of linearity, collinearity, homogeneity of variance, and normal distribution were performed. Table 2 presented the inter-item correlations results.

**Table 2. Inter-item correlations**

Variables	Social media use	Social capital	Political participation
Social media use	1.00	.470**	.500**
Social capital		1.00	.628**
Political participation			1.00

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

The results of inter-item correlations show that no item is inordinately correlated to another item. Therefore, the data do not violate the collinearity requirement. The positive and significant relationship between the constructs also reveals the data have in-built linear relationship, which is an important precondition for predicting significant variance in the dependent variable.

**Table 3. Regression showing social media use as a predictor of social capital**

Model	B	SE	t	P
Constant	1.686	.152	11.063	.001
Social media use	.471	.048	9.860	.001

$F_{(1,343)} = 97.171$ ,  $P = .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.221$ .

Dependent variable: Social capital.

Table 3 presents the result of the test of hypothesis one, which posits that social media use for political information is a strong predictor of social capital. The result shows a  $R^2 = 0.221$ ,  $p < 0.001$  which means that social media used explains 22.1% variance in respondents social capital. This result corresponds with the findings of Livingstone (2006) that groups can be strengthened by all the benefits of online media and online media engagement complements physical interaction and engagement. Civic and political participation are activities that create social capital, and the two concepts are intimately related when discussing how media can affect human behaviour.

**Table 4. Regression showing social media use as a predictor of political participation**

Model	B	SE	t	P
Constant	1.687	.157	20.72	.005
Social media use	.525	.049	10.68	.005

$F_{(1,344)} = 114.11$ ,  $P = .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.250$ .

Dependent variable: political participation.

Hypothesis 2 advanced that social media use for political information is a strong predictor of political participation. The result in Table 4 reveals that social media

use explained 25% variance in respondents' political participation. This finding supports Park, Kee and Valenzuela's (2009); study, which found merit in social media as a tool for increased political participation. According to their findings, social media use correlated to information seeking and political action. Their survey of students across two universities in the United States resulted in data that indicated that involvement in political groups on social media correlated to increased political participation online and offline. Also, this discovery aligns with findings of De Zúñiga, Puig-i-Abril and Rojas (2009), which showed that informational use of media might make people more inclined to discuss political matters, and in the long run increase engagement and participation levels. Park, Kee and Valenzuela ; (2009) also found positive association between using Facebook for political and civic purpose and actual political and civic participation (Gustafsson, 2012). The same conclusion was reached by Bakker and De Vreese (2011) who reported increased association between Internet use and political participation than mainstream media use and political participation.

**Table 5. Regression showing social capital as a predictor of political participation**

Model	B	SE	t	p
Constant	1.236	.144	8.582	.005
Social capital	.660	.044	14.93	.005

$F_{(1,344)} = 119.26, P = .001, R^2 = 0.392.$

Dependent variable: political participation.

Hypothesis 3 stated that social capital is a strong predictor of political participation. The results as detailed in Table 5 confirmed the prediction. Social capital predicted 39.2% in political participation of the respondents selected in this study. This finding corroborates the research of Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe (2008), which used panel data, and concluded that Facebook use was strongly associated with higher outcomes of bridging social capital and by extension civic engagement and participation in political process. Citing the works of many scholars, Vromen (2008) also connected social capital with the tendency to take up civic and political responsibilities. Klesner (2007) also reported a robust relationship between social capital and political participation among citizens of Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Peru.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined previous prediction that social capital is tangentially related to political participation in a way that generates vibrant and healthy democracy (Beaudoin, 2007; Ramos-Pinto, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Zuniga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012). While Africa as a continent and Nigeria, its most populous country, have a long history of social capital, scholarship in this theoretical paradigm has paid little attention to documenting the phenomenon. Having deployed social capital to challenge capricious authorities and draconian regimes in the past,

Nigeria's social capital often gets threatened by political elites' appeal to primordial sentiments in settling political scores to the detriment of the larger polity. The dominance of the public sphere, typified by the mainstream media, by the elite further weakens citizens' opportunity for bonding and bridging.

The arrival of social media offers a new avenue to reenact civic engagement, communitarianism and political engagement in a participatory manner. While scholars are divided in their views as to the role of social media in building social capital and enhancing political participation (Kirk and Schill, 2011; Ward and De Vreese, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2010), veritable data support the belief that social media are positive forces, although content, contexts, personal and social characteristics of the users mediate their power (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011; Bennett, 2012). Amidst the polemics surrounding the positive and negative tendencies of social media, the opportunity the platform offers citizens to become co-creators as well as consumers of political discourses remains incontestable.

This study presents Nigerian perspective to the ongoing debate on social media, social capital and political participation, based on the increasing Internet penetration and access assisted by wireless mobile telephony and affordability of android phone set, which have reawakened deliberative practices among Nigerians. The study reveals a great deal of social media use, awareness of community bonding and bridging as preconditions for trust building, associational activities and community collaborations. The findings also provide insight into the use of social media for appropriating political information, stimulating and mobilising for political action and participating in political process. All the results in this study affirm the role of social media in causing various forms of political participation as documented by scholars from the United States, Europe, Australia and Asia. By adding Nigeria and Africa to the catalogue of social media, social capital and political participation studies, this research provides inter-cultural validity and generalisation that are essential in theory development.

## CONCLUSION

From the Cave to the post-Industrial world, media have been central to human relations at social, economic and political realms. The arrival of social media represents another turn in the annals of media-society debates. While some scholars and media stakeholders are optimistic, seeing social media as democratic resources, some see them as clogs on the democratic progress wheel, capable of eroding the little trust citizens have in the societies and the politics. Some even nurse the fear that social media further atomise the already weakened societies, thus destroying the remaining strands of social capital and intensifying political disinterest, particularly among the youths.

Although numerous studies have debunked negative perceptions of social media-politics nexus, most are from western democratic milieus. This study fills the gap by adding Nigerian and African dimension to this important field of inquiry. Since social media continue to evolve, efforts are needed to continue the profiling and cataloguing of the entire ramifications of social media phenomenon in the Information

Society. This study is a demonstration of the need to explore what is becoming the Fifth Estate with a view to sensitising key institutions that could help in facilitating the integration of these apparatuses into our democratic kitty. Already challenging the Fourth Estate to be up and doing, social media are reconfiguring expressive and deliberative practices that help in deepening democratic attitudes that may dovetail into good governance. Individuals, civil societies, governments and corporations thus need to realise the futility of living in the past as the contemporary digital agora is rendering repressive tendencies and authoritarian values impotent.

This study identifies significant importance of social media to societal sense of community and protection of collective assets as well as destinies through bonding, bridging, civic and political engagements. The design locale of the study, sample and analytical method adopted posed certain challenges which future endeavours should rectify. While cross-sectional design facilitates a snap-shot of a phenomenon, it cannot account for entire elements of causation. Hence, the limited variance explained by the independent variable. Future studies should consider a longitudinal and panel design that can account to shift in respondents cognitive, affective and conative dispositions.

A more elaborate sample, representative of the Nigerian youth, is also desirable in future studies in order to facilitate more extensive generalisations and external validity of the findings in this study. The use of simple linear regression also limits the power of the analysis and effect sizes that is measurable. Elaborate and exponential analysis such as hierarchical multiple regression, step-wise regression and Structural Equation Modelling that can help model the relationship and path effects better should be used in future research. Additionally, experimenting with qualitative design or mixed-method could also be explored in the future so as to arrive at strong theoretical contributions with great ontological and epistemological benefits for the field.

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