

# Social Media Use For Political Socialisation and Participation Among Gen Z (1997–2012) in Universities in Osun State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the social media influences on political socialisation and participation among Generation Z in Nigeria. A mixed-method research design comprising surveys and focus group discussions was adopted using three universities for the study population. A sample size of 422 respondents was surveyed among 409 Generation Z undergraduates, using Agenda Melding Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and Networked Publics Theory. Descriptive results revealed strong positive impacts on political participation. Exposure to diverse viewpoints recorded a mean score of 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.96. The shaping of perceptions about political leaders had a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 0.98, while enabling critical evaluation of government activities also recorded a mean of 3.60 with a standard deviation of 0.97. Focus group discussions further revealed that interactive features such as polls, real-time updates, influencer engagement and campaign-related activities significantly motivate political participation. Inferential analysis indicated no statistically significant negative relationship between social media usage and political socialisation, as the correlation coefficient was negative 0.053 with a probability value of 0.284. No significant gender differences were observed in social media usage or political socialisation. The study concludes that social media functions as a democratising platform that enhances informed and interactive civic engagement among Generation Z university students in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Political Participation, Political Socialisation, Social Media, University Students.

## Introduction

Social media has redefined political communication by transforming how information is produced, distributed and consumed in contemporary societies (1–3). Unlike traditional media, digital platforms enable interactive, decentralised and user-generated communication, allowing citizens to participate actively in political discourse. Among younger demographics, particularly Generation Z (born 1997–2012), social media constitutes the primary channel for political exposure, discussion and mobilisation (4, 5). As digital natives, this cohort has grown up within algorithmically curated environments that shape

not only their social identities but also their political orientations. In Nigeria, youth account for over 60% of the population, positioning them as a critical demographic in democratic consolidation efforts (6). Social media platforms have become influential arenas for civic dialogue, advocacy and protest coordination. The #EndSARS movement exemplified how digital networks can mobilise youth-led collective action, amplify marginalised voices and attract global attention to domestic governance concerns (7, 8). These developments suggest that social media increasingly functions as an alternative public sphere within the Nigerian

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political landscape. Political socialisation refers to the lifelong process through which individuals acquire political knowledge, values, attitudes and behavioural orientations (9, 10). Social media has introduced new dynamics into this process by exposing individuals to diverse viewpoints, facilitating peer interaction and enabling personalised agenda construction (11). In addition, political participation has expanded beyond conventional acts such as voting and party membership to include digital activism, hashtag campaigns, online petitions and virtual political debates (12). Although numerous studies have examined social media and political participation in Nigeria, several limitations persist (13–16). First, much of the existing literature focuses on general youth populations or postgraduate students, with limited attention to Generation Z undergraduate cohorts across different institutional ownership structures (17, 18). Second, prior research often adopts descriptive approaches without integrating multidimensional theoretical frameworks that explain how digital exposure translates into cognitive, affective and behavioural political outcomes (18).

This study addresses these gaps by integrating Agenda Melding Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and Networked Publics Theory to examine how digital environments shape political learning and participation among Generation Z students. Agenda Melding Theory explains how individuals combine personal priorities with media and community agendas to form coherent political worldviews (19). Uses and Gratifications Theory conceptualises users as active agents who seek media content to satisfy informational and social needs (20). Networked Publics Theory highlights the affordances of digital platforms—persistence, scalability, searchability and replicability—that facilitate identity construction and collective mobilisation (21).

The objectives of the study are to: Examine patterns of social media use for political information and engagement. Assess the influence of social media on political attitudes, values and knowledge. Investigate the relationship between social media usage and political socialisation. Identify motivational factors influencing digital political participation. Analyse socio-demographic predictors of political engagement patterns.

The study tests the following hypotheses:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and political socialisation among Generation Z students.

H<sub>0</sub>: Male and female Generation Z students differ significantly in patterns of social media usage and political socialisation.

Digital platforms shape political socialisation by reorganising how political information is encountered, evaluated and discussed within peer networks. Compared with broadcast media, social media enable user-generated political content, rapid diffusion and networked feedback, thereby intensifying exposure and interaction with political cues (22, 23). For Generation Z, whose news routines are strongly platform-centred, political learning is increasingly mediated by algorithmic curation and social endorsement signals that affect perceived relevance and credibility (24–26).

Contemporary studies show that social media use is positively associated with political interest, civic knowledge and participation, but the relationship varies by platform affordances, users' motivations and information quality (1, 2, 27). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that digital media can mobilise participation while also reinforcing existing engagement gaps, indicating the need to account for mediating psychological and contextual factors (3, 4).

In the Nigerian context, networked mobilisation around governance issues (including #EndSARS) demonstrates that platform-based communication can lower coordination costs, amplify youth voices and create hybrid online–offline repertoires of action (7, 8, 28). At the same time, misinformation, low trust in institutions and uneven digital literacy can dilute the substantive quality of engagement and produce performative participation (“click-tivism”) (29–31). These tensions are central to explaining why frequency of use may not automatically translate into deeper political socialisation outcomes.

Echo-chamber dynamics and algorithmic personalisation can simultaneously broaden and narrow political exposure. While cross-cutting interactions are possible, homophily and recommender systems can increase ideological clustering and selective exposure, shaping attitudes and evaluations (11, 32, 33). Consequently, the influence of social media on political socialisation is expected to be conditional on

credibility judgments, civic media literacy and peer influence.

To explain these processes, this study integrates three complementary frameworks. Agenda Melding Theory proposes that individuals actively combine personal priorities with media and community agendas to form coherent political worldviews (19). Within digital environments, agenda melding is enacted through following, sharing and joining issue publics, thereby integrating network agendas into personal issue salience. Need for Orientation (NFO) strengthens this mechanism because information seeking rises when uncertainty is high (34).

Uses and Gratifications Theory conceptualises social media users as purposeful actors who choose media to satisfy informational, social and identity needs (20). In political contexts, these gratifications include surveillance of political events, expression, social interaction and mobilisation, which map onto observed motivations such as real-time updates and interactive participation reported by Generation Z (35, 36).

Networked Publics Theory highlights the affordances of persistence, scalability, searchability and replicability that structure participation and identity work in digital publics (21). These affordances facilitate the spread of campaign content, influencer-led mobilisation and peer reinforcement that can translate into online and offline political behaviours (37, 38).

Guided by this conceptual framing, the study treats social media usage (frequency, exposure diversity, interactivity and campaign engagement) as the independent variable, political socialisation (cognitive and affective orientations) as the primary outcome and political participation (online and offline) as the behavioural outcome. Credibility perceptions, peer influence and digital literacy are considered plausible mediators that can strengthen or weaken the usage-socialisation relationship (39-43). This structure directly supports the hypotheses tested in the study.

## Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was employed to capture both measurable relationships and experiential insights. The quantitative component assessed patterns and statistical associations, while the qualitative component provided contextual interpretation. The mixed-method

approach was selected to enhance explanatory depth, triangulate findings and strengthen internal validity (44).

The study was conducted in Osun State, South-West Nigeria (approximate GPS coordinates 7°30'N-8°10'N; 4°00'E-5°05'E). The state hosts federal, state and private universities, making it suitable for institutional comparison.

## Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 51, 271 Generation Z undergraduate students across:

- a) Obafemi Awolowo University (Federal)
- b) Osun State University (State)
- c) Bowen University (Private)

A multistage sampling process was adopted:

- a) Purposive selection of universities
- b) Stratified selection of faculties
- c) Random selection of departments
- d) Proportional allocation of survey respondents

Using Fisher's formula, the minimum required sample size was 384. This was increased to 422 to account for non-response. Final valid responses totalled 409 [96.92% response rate].

## Inclusion Criteria

- a) Born between 1997 and 2012
- b) Registered undergraduate student
- c) Active social media user (minimum one-hour daily engagement)

## Exclusion Criteria

- a) Postgraduate students
- b) Non-Gen Z students
- c) Incomplete questionnaire responses

## Data Collection Instruments

The survey instrument comprised:

- a) Section A: Demographics
- b) Section B: Patterns of Social Media Use
- c) Section C: Political Awareness
- d) Section D: Political Attitudes
- e) Section E: Political Participation

All items used a 5-point Likert scale [1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree].

Three Focus Group Discussions (twelve participants each) were conducted using a semi-structured guide.

## Validity and Reliability

Face validity was established through expert review. A pilot survey [ $n = 40$ ] yielded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.88 [overall  $\alpha = 0.87$ ], indicating high internal consistency.

### Data Analysis

- Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS:
- a) Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency)
  - b) Pearson correlation [ $\alpha = 0.05$ ]
  - c) Independent samples t-test
- Qualitative data were analysed using thematic coding:
- a) Transcription
  - b) Open coding
  - c) Category development
  - d) Theme consolidation
  - e) Integration with quantitative findings

### Methodological Flow

- Stage a: Institutional Selection
- Stage b: Stratified Faculty Sampling
- Stage c: Random Department Sampling
- Stage d: Proportional Survey Distribution
- Stage e: SPSS Statistical Analysis
- Stage f: FGD Thematic Coding
- Stage g: Mixed-Method Integration

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

## Results

**Table 1:** Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Age	16–18 years	127	31.1%	2.13
	19–21 years	141	34.5%	
	22–24 years	101	24.7%	
	25–28 years	40	9.8%	
Gender	Male	194	47.4%	1.53
	Female	215	52.6%	
Marital Status	Single	368	90.0%	1.12
	Married	31	7.6%	
	Divorced	10	2.4%	
Level of Study	100 Level	89	21.8%	2.73
	200 Level	96	23.5%	
	300 Level	100	24.4%	
	400 Level	85	20.8%	
	500 Level	39	9.5%	
University	Bowen University	42	10.3%	2.56
	Uni-Osun (UNIOSUN)	94	23.0%	
	OAU	273	66.7%	
Total		409	100.0%	

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the respondents. The demographic profile of the 409 respondents confirms a typical Gen Z undergraduate sample in Osun State universities: predominantly 19–21 years old, 34.5%, n=141; mean age category 2.13, slightly female-skewed, 52.6%, n=215; mean 1.53; overwhelmingly single 90.0%, n=368, mean 1.12; and evenly distributed across study levels 300Level highest at 24.4%, mean 2.73. University representation reflects the proportional sampling design, with OAU domina-

ting at 66.7% n=273, followed by Uni-Osun, 23% [n=94] and Bowen University, 10.3% [n=42; mean 2.56]. This youthful, mostly single, mid-programme cohort with balanced gender and institutional diversity provides a robust foundation for analysing social media’s influence on political socialisation and participation, as younger, digitally native students’ exhibit greater platform engagement and varying exposure to political discourse across public and private university contexts.

**Table 2:** Influence of Social Media on Attitudes, Values and Knowledge

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media has increased my interest in political issues	409	1.00	5.00	3.59	0.97
Social media has improved my knowledge of government policies and political processes	409	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.00

Social media has exposed me to diverse political viewpoints and ideologies	409	1.00	5.00	3.62	0.96
Social media has shaped my perception of political leaders in Nigeria	409	1.00	5.00	3.60	0.98
Social media helps me critically evaluate government performance	409	1.00	5.00	3.60	0.97
I use social media to fact-check information about politics and current events	409	1.00	5.00	3.59	0.95

Table 2 presents the results on the influence of social media on attitudes, values and knowledge of the respondents. The results of the analysis of the perceptions of the respondents concerning the influence of social media on their attitudes, values and knowledge displayed in Table 2 show that the effect is always positive in all the dimensions measured, N = 409. The mean scores were between 3.58 and 3.62 on a positive 5-point Likert scale and had a standard deviation of 0.95-1.00, which reflects moderate to high levels of agreement and low levels of variability in the responses. In particular, exposure to a wide range of political

opinions and ideologies received the greatest average score, M = 3.62, SD = 0.96, successively modified outlook on political officials in Nigeria, M = 3.60, SD = 0.98, critical assessment of the government performance, M = 3.60, SD = 0.97, greater attention to political matters, M = 3.59, SD = 0.97, fact-checking on political information, M = 3.59, SD = 0.95. The total mean of 3.60 supports the substantive influence of social media on the improvement of cognitive and attitudinal aspects of political participation among the participants of the sample.

**Table 3:** Relationship with Political Socialisation

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use social media to learn about different political ideologies and perspectives	409	1.00	5.00	3.69	0.95
Social media helps me understand the impact of politics on my daily life	409	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.96
I use social media to learn about different political parties and their ideologies	409	1.00	5.00	3.72	0.95
Social media influences my opinions on social and political issues	409	1.00	5.00	3.69	0.96
Social media helps me understand the role of government in society	409	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.95
I use social media to follow news about local politics	409	1.00	5.00	3.74	0.94

Table 3 presents the results of objective 3 on the relationship with political socialisation. The perceived roles of social media in the process of political socialisation are outlined in Table 3 and the responses of the participants show strong consensus, N = 409, with the range of responses having a mean of 3.67 to 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.94 to 0.96. The highest level of support was on using social media to keep track of local politics news, M = 3.74, SD = 0.94 and to know more about political parties and their ideologies, M = 3.72, SD = 0.95, which is how informed

participation is encouraged. Other instead of learning about political ideologies and views, M = 3.69, SD = 0.95, influencing the opinion on the social and political issues, M = 3.69, SD = 0.96, understanding the role of the government in the society, M = 3.67, SD = 0.95 and understanding the way the politics impact the regular life further cement an overall mean of 3.70. The results of these findings are marked by a high level of concentration of the scores, thus showing how social media is a key agent in the political socialisation of the sampled population.

**Table 4:** Motivational Factors

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Trust in the credibility of political information motivates my political participation	409	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.98
Peer influence motivates my political engagement on social media	409	1.00	5.00	3.45	1.00
Social media interactivity encourages me to participate politically	409	1.00	5.00	3.56	0.99

Usage of social media for campaigns influences my decision to vote	409	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.01
The availability of real-time updates motivates me to use social media for politics	409	1.00	5.00	3.53	0.96
Social media influencers influence my political decisions	409	1.00	5.00	3.52	1.00

Table 4 presents the results of objective 4 on the motivational factors that influence political engagement among the respondents. Table 4 shows that a moderate level of agreement was expressed by motivational factors that influenced political engagement through social media, with the mean scores between 3.43 and 3.56 and standard deviation between 0.96 and 1.01. The strongest motivator turned out to be social media interactivity, M = 3.56, SD = 0.99 and it was more

powerful than the effect of influencers, M = 3.52, SD = 1.00, real-time updates, M = 3.53, SD = 0.96, using a campaign to influence voting decisions, M = 3.50, SD = 1.01, peer influence, M = 3.45, SD = 1.00 and trust in the credibility. With an average of 3.50, these findings indicate that interactive and dynamic aspects of social media websites are the main driving factors behind political involvement, albeit to a lesser extent due to concerns of credibility and outside interference.

**Table 5: Social Demographic Factors**

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My gender influences how I use social media for politics	409	1.00	5.00	3.19	0.99
My age affects the type of political content I engage with on social media	409	1.00	5.00	3.16	0.99
My level of study determines the depth of my political discussions on social media	409	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.99
Students in private universities use social media differently for politics than those in public universities	409	1.00	5.00	3.21	0.99
Students in public universities are more politically engaged on social media than those in private universities	409	1.00	5.00	3.25	0.98
Academic workload influences how I engage politically on social media	409	1.00	5.00	3.06	0.97

Table 5 presents the results of the objective on the social demographic factor on the formation of social media use among the respondents. Table 5 shows the influence of socio-demographic variables on the formation of social media use in political affairs, finding a reasonably balanced to moderate level of agreement among the respondents, N = 409. The view that students in public universities had the most political activity in social media as compared to their counterparts in the private institutions, M = 3.25, SD = 0.98 was followed by the difference between the activities of the students in the two groups, M = 3.21, SD = 0.99, level of study, M = 3.22, SD = 0.99, gender, M = 3.19, SD = 0.99 and age, M = 3.06, SD = 0.97. The average of 3.18 also reflects that although the socio-

demographic factors do have a somewhat influential effect, they are not disproportionately determining the trends of political engagement on social media among this group of people.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

The two hypotheses set out in this study were tested. Decision Rule: Significance Level ( $\alpha$ ) set at 0.05, 5%.

P-value: If p-value  $\leq$  0.05, reject the null hypothesis [ $H_0$ ]. If p-value  $>$  0.05, fail to reject the null hypothesis [ $H_0$ ].

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and political socialisation among Generation Z students.

**Table 6: Pearson Correlation Analysis**

Statement	Social Media Usage	Political Socialisation
Social Media Usage		
Pearson Correlation	1	-0.053
Sig. (2-tailed)		[0.284]
N	409 [100.0%]	409 [100.0%]

Political Socialisation		
Pearson Correlation	-0.053	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	[0.284]	
N	409 [100.0%]	409 [100.0%]

Table 6 presents a Pearson correlation analysis to test the null hypothesis [H<sub>0</sub>] that there is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and political socialisation among 409 Generation Z students. The correlation coefficient of -0.053 indicates a very weak negative association, suggesting that higher social media usage has a minimal tendency to reduce political socialisation. The p-value of 0.284, exceeding the 0.05 significance threshold, shows that this correlation is not statistically significant. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis [H<sub>0</sub>], as there is no evidence of a significant negative

relationship. The large sample size, N=409, supports the reliability of this finding, indicating that social media usage and political socialisation are largely unrelated in this sample. This implies that social media's role in shaping political socialisation among Generation Z in Nigeria may be limited, with factors like content relevance or individual engagement likely having greater influence.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Male and female Generation Z students differ significantly in their patterns of social media usage and political socialisation.

**Table 7:** Independent Samples t-test

Statement	Levene's Test	t-test for Equality of Means
	F	Sig.
Patterns of Usage		
Assumed equal variances	0.872	[0.351]
Political Socialisation		
Assumed equal variances	1.124	[0.290]

Table 7 presents an independent samples t-test to test the null hypothesis [H<sub>0</sub>] that male and female Gen Z students differ significantly in their patterns of social media usage and political socialisation, based on a sample of 409 respondents. For patterns of usage, Levene's Test, F = 0.872, p = 0.351 > 0.05, indicates equal variances and the t-test, t = 0.351, df = 407, p = 0.725 > 0.05, shows no significant gender difference, with a mean difference of 0.025, suggesting males and females have similar social media usage patterns. For political socialisation, Levene's Test, F = 1.124, p = 0.290 > 0.05, supports equal variances and the t-test, t = -0.227, df = 407, p = 0.820 > 0.05, indicates no significant difference, with a mean difference of -0.015, confirming similar socialisation levels.

Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis [H<sub>0</sub>], as there is no evidence of significant differences in social media usage or political socialisation between male and female Gen Z students. This implies that gender does not significantly influence how Generation Z students in Nigeria engage with social media for political purposes or their level of political socialisation, suggesting that other factors, such as content exposure or personal interest, may be more relevant.

**Theme One: Trends in the use of social media to seek political information and engage in politics**

The focus group discussion [FGD] data indicated that the Generation Z students harmoniously incorporate the use of social media in political activities in their everyday lives, which are manifested by habitual use, trends provided by algorithms and consistency with university-level schedules.

**Sub-Theme: Checking daily episodically**

According to the students, they periodically checked political content several times a day, almost automatically. According to one of the participants: "I look at social media first thing in the morning and whenever I have a break, I look at it to get the political updates" [FGD1]. Another observed: "It is automatic; even when I am having lectures, I scroll quickly in search of news on politics" [FGD2]. This routine incorporation makes social media one of the main, in-built platforms of political exposure.

**Sub-Theme: Trends and Hash tags Domination**

Viral and short-form content is very influential in engagement. One respondent remarked: "My primary source is TikTok and Twitter trends; they are fast and thrilling regarding politics [FGD2] and another one remarked: "Politics on TikTok and

Twitter trends make me feel immediate and exciting" [FGD3]. This means that in algorithmic curation, interest is maintained, but immediacy and sensation are put first.

#### **Sub-Theme: Rhythms Related to Campus**

The peaks of usage are during academic downtimes. One of the students told me: "I immerse myself in online political debates at night; that is where I can sleep occasionally, sometimes it is difficult to sleep" [FGD2] and another: "I scroll political content at night; it influences my sleeping sometimes" [FGD3]. It can be inferred that these beats portray the use of social media as a versatile filler of campus life transitions.

### **Theme Two: Influencers of the Level of Political Participation**

The peer dynamics, the platform affordance and external actors were found to drive political participation on social media according to the FGD data.

#### **Sub-Theme: Peer Pressure**

Peer networks have a very strong motivation to engage through social influence. Respondents stated: "I get inspired by seeing other people talk about politics" [FGD1], another quipped "I feel like I have to post when my peers repost" [FGD3]. It can be inferred that the political expression is normalised and exaggerated through peer interactions.

#### **Sub-Theme: Platform Features**

Interactive and real-time features increase participation. One of the respondents remarked: "Real-time updates help me stay engaged" [FGD2] and another one added: "Polls and stories allow me to be engaged interactively" [FGD1]. This shows that the design aspects embrace active and engaged engagement.

#### **Sub-Theme: Extrinsic Factors**

Decisions are influenced by influencers, campaigns and accessibility. "The reason is that influencers influence my decision" [FGD1] and another noted that "campaigns on social media influence voting" [FGD2]. The use of external cues, which are enhanced with mobile access, leads to greater socialisation and mobilisation of politics.

## **Discussion**

Findings indicate that social media meaningfully shapes political learning and engagement among Generation Z undergraduates in Osun State. High mean ratings for exposure to diverse viewpoints

and leader evaluation suggest that platforms function as routine infrastructures for political information, consistent with contemporary scholarship on digitally networked participation (1, 27). Similar patterns have been reported in multi-country studies showing that platform affordances can broaden political repertoires by enabling low-threshold engagement and rapid information exchange (2, 23).

Agenda-Melding Theory offers a strong explanation for the observed gains in political socialisation. Respondents' high scores on local news tracking and learning party ideologies indicate active integration of media and community agendas into personal issue priorities, a process amplified by peer discussion and network signals (19, 34). In highly connected student networks, agenda melding is likely reinforced through repeated exposure, sharing and deliberation in issue publics.

Uses and Gratifications Theory is supported by the prominence of interactivity and real-time updates as motivational drivers of participation. The qualitative evidence that polls, campaign updates and influencer content stimulate engagement aligns with research showing that information-seeking and expressive gratifications predict both online discussion and offline participation (20, 35, 36). These findings imply that students are not passive recipients of political messages but strategic users who curate political content to satisfy civic and identity needs.

Networked Publics Theory further clarifies why campaign-related engagement and influencer mobilisation emerged as salient. Platform affordances, especially scalability and persistence support diffusion of campaign content and collective sense-making, while searchability facilitates factchecking and issue tracking (21, 37). However, the same affordances can accelerate misinformation and polarised narratives, potentially reducing the depth of deliberation when credibility is low (29, 33).

The non-significant correlation between overall usage intensity and political socialisation suggests that exposure alone is insufficient. The literature indicates that algorithmic filtering, selective exposure and echo-chamber formation may shape which political cues are encountered and whether they improve knowledge or merely reinforce prior beliefs (11, 32). This helps explain why some

students may be highly active on platforms yet display limited gains in substantive political learning.

Gender differences were not statistically significant, indicating that within this cohort, platform-based political engagement may be converging across sexes, likely because access patterns and platform literacies are increasingly shared among undergraduates. Similar convergence has been observed where digital participation is structured more by network composition and motivations than by socio-demographic traits alone (4, 27).

Overall, the results suggest that social media acts as an enabling environment for political socialisation and participation, but the strength of influence depends on mediating factors such as credibility perception, civic media literacy and perceived political efficacy. These findings support the study's conclusion that social media can serve as a democratising agent for informed civic engagement, while also underscoring the need for institutional interventions that improve information quality and digital civic competencies (29–31).

## Conclusion

This study advances understanding of digital political socialisation among Generation Z undergraduates in an emerging democracy. The mixed-method evidence indicates that social media facilitates cognitive and affective political socialisation through exposure to diverse viewpoints, issue tracking and interactive engagement. Nonetheless, results suggest that usage intensity alone does not determine depth of political learning, highlighting the importance of credibility judgments, civic media literacy and perceived efficacy as mediating mechanisms.

By integrating Agenda Melding, Uses and Gratifications and Networked Publics perspectives, the study explains how students curate agendas, pursue civic gratifications and mobilise within digitally mediated publics. Practically, the findings underline that platform-based participation is most likely to translate into meaningful civic action when institutional supports strengthen information quality and deliberative norms.

The practical implications of the study are that universities should integrate structured digital civic literacy modules into general studies

curricula, emphasising verification skills and reflective political discussion. Policymakers and electoral stakeholders should leverage interactive digital tools (polls, live debates, verified campaign channels) to deepen youth engagement and reduce information disorder. Platforms should enhance algorithmic transparency and strengthen misinformation moderation practices that protect democratic discourse. Civic organisations should partner with student networks to bridge online activism and offline participation through community programmes and issue-based engagement.

There are limitations to this study and they are: a cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal research is recommended to capture change over time and this constitutes a limitation to the study. The study is self-reported. Self-reported measures may introduce response bias; future studies can combine surveys with digital trace data where ethically feasible. The institutional scope was limited to one Nigerian state; comparative inter-state or national samples would improve generalisability. The platform and algorithmic exposure variables were not directly measured; future work should incorporate measures of content type, network heterogeneity and recommender-system effects.

## Abbreviations

Gen Z: Generation Z (Those born between 1997 and 2012), FGD: Focus Group Discussion, M: Mean, OAU: Obafemi Awolowo University, SD: Standard Deviation, SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, UNIOSUN: Osun State University.

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All authors whose works were cited are duly listed in the references.

## Author Contributions

Sunday Zechariah Olanihun: conceptualization, literature review, discussion of findings, I Bayo Oloyede: literature review, discussion of findings, editing, Omowale Adelabu: field work, data analysis, discussion of findings, Bernice O Sanusi: methodology, data analysis, Felix Olajide Talabi: literature review, data curation, data analysis, discussion of findings, conclusion, editing, Tiwalola Madoc Obajuluwa: introduction, data curation, analysis, discussion of findings, Victor Oluwole Adefemi: literature review, data collection,

discussing the findings, Adebola Adewunmi Aderibigbe: writing the literature, data interpretation, editing, Omowumi Bukola Olaseinde: introduction, materials and methods, data curation, conclusion, Olalekan Olatunji: data collection, discussion of findings, editing, Francis Femi Adetunji: proofreading, discussing, writing the literature, Samson Adedapo Bello: introduction, writing the literature, discussing, editing.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

### Data Availability

Data for the study are available on request.

### Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors confirm that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the conception, analysis, writing, or editing of this manuscript.

### Ethics Approval

The study received ethical approval from the University Ethical Approval Committee. Reference number: RUN/REC/2025/389.

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