Social media, civic engagement, and political participation of generation Z in Nigeria

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Abstract
Born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, Generation Z is a digitally native cohort with a significant presence in Nigeria's evolving political landscape. This research offers insights into how the Gen Z population utilises social media platforms for engagement and how this influences their political and civic participation in Nigeria. The study is guided by the Technological Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) by exploring the nuances of the theoretical framework to interrogate the factors that influence social media, civic engagement, and the pattern of political participation of Gen Z. The study adopts the online survey method, using Google form and sample population was 500 respondents drawn from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The researchers used Cochran's formula to calculate the sample size for an infinite population. Survey questionnaire links were generated and administered through the snowball sampling technique. Findings showed that the Gen Z population is more politically active online than in physical spaces and spends more than four hours daily on social media. Facebook, followed by WhatsApp and X, are the most commonly used social media platforms among the Gen Z population. In addition, Gen Z's participation in online civic spaces and democratic discourse is motivated by convenience, a lack of trust in politicians, and safety concerns. The study concludes that although Gen Z is more politically active on social media, their level of political participation is low, as entertainment and creating personal identities take precedence over civic participation among them. Additionally, the findings have implications for Nigeria's democratic practices and civic space, as they provide insight into the form of democratic practices that Gen Z, who will become a dominant and critical mass in a few years, are engaged in and help in policy formation.
Keywords: civic engagement, Gen Z, political communication, Nigeria, social media

Introduction

One of the central issues within the media and communication ecology in the 21st century is the shifting terrain for political and civil discourse. With the advent of Internet technology and its communicative affordances, the space of the traditional media system as a public sphere is changing rapidly,s the new media system, including online news and social media platforms, becomes an alternative centre of civic discourse (Carpini, 2004). The emergence of digital media platforms has significantly influenced Generation Z, which comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012, in various facets of their activities. Additionally, the generation grows and becomes active around the period when global dynamics related to information and communication architecture yield new media experiences that promote the inclusiveness of those hitherto on the fringe of media ecology to have a voice, including social movements championing different causes.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has grown up with instant access to a vast amount of information and numerous platforms for communication. This has led to a significant increase in their engagement with political issues and a shift in their modes of political participation (Andersen, Kim, Jakob Ohme, Camilla Bjarnøe, Mats Joe Bordacconi, Erik Albæk, and Claes H. De VreeseAndersen, 2021; Parmelee, John H., Stephynie C. Perkins, and Berrin Beasley, 2022). With the ability to easily share and consume news and opinions online, Generation Z is more likely to be politically aware and active, exploring social media platforms to express their views and bond with like-minded individuals (Ronald Alfred & Ping Wong, 2022). Thus, the traditional media system is no longer the sole source of political information, as there is now a multiplicity of platforms for citizens to engage in political discourse.

These platforms offer interactivity and immediacy that traditional media cannot match. From live-streaming political events to engaging in real-time conversations with politicians and fellow citizens, social media has revolutionised how young people participate in politics. These features should promote democratic values and inclusion, as well as deepen political participation. As argued regarding the new media ecology, the availability of political information has reached unprecedented levels, with numerous sources and platforms (Andersen et al., 2021). Simultaneously, people are spending more time consuming the media than ever before. Additionally, it has become increasingly effortless to selectively shun political information while remaining connected to other aspects of the world (Mulyono, Budi, Idrus Affandi, Karim Suryadi, and Cecep Darmawan Mulyono., 2022).

On the contrary, however, some have argued that the new media ecology, rather than promoting political participation, contributes to the decline of active political participation among Generation Z (Towner & Muñoz, 2018). Thus, while new media, due to its affordances, should ordinarily be the driving force for civic engagement and political participation, it appears that there is a disconnect between political participation and civic engagement among the youth. For instance, the recently

conducted general elections in Nigeria and their campaign activities reveal the dark side of the online space and its negative capacity to generate polarisation, cyberbullying, echo chambers, and fake news, especially among Generation Z, which constitutes the majority of social media users (Ubong, 2024).

This study, therefore, investigates Generation Z's social media and civic engagement pattern(s) and how they affect their political participation. Specifically, the research focuses on Gen Z between the ages of 18 and 27. Although Gen Z are people born between 1997 and 2012, the choice of the age group between 18 and 27 is premised on the constitution of Nigeria, which puts the age at which a person can vote and be voted for at 18 years, effectively making the age category selected the politically active group among the Gen Z

Research Questions

1. What are Gen Z's population online civil engagement patterns in Nigeria?
2. What factors influence online civic engagement among Gen Zs in Nigeria?
3. How do the political contents the Gen Z population are exposed to on social media influence their political behaviours?

Social media use

Lately, social media has become one of Africa's most effective tools for political campaigns and a virtual platform for voters' civic engagement and opinion formation (Bohler-Muller & van der Merwe, 2011; Bosch, 2013). The development has positive implications for African democracy, such as promoting inclusion and democratic deliberation. It allows political candidates to communicate directly with their constituents, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers (Shirky, 2011). This can increase transparency and accountability in the political process, as citizens have more access to information and can actively participate in political discussions. Equally, social media can be a platform to mobilise and organise grassroots movements, empowering marginalised groups and giving them a voice in shaping the political landscape (Cheeseman, Nic, Jonathan Fisher, Idayat Hassan, and Jamie Hitchen, 2020). Overall, the use of social media in political campaigns has the potential to strengthen democracy in Africa by fostering greater citizen participation and promoting a more informed electorate (Ott & Rosser, 2013)

Social media has become crucial for Generation Z's participation in politics and civic engagement (Andersen et al., 2021). On social media, members of Generation Z are outspoken about their political opinions. They gain the ability to speak up, advocate for change, and take an active role in reshaping their communities (Ronald Alfred & Ping Wong, 2022). Also, through their usage of these forums, Gen Z advances a variety of viewpoints in political discourse while participating in political discussions, expressing their thoughts, and challenging established narratives. Furthermore, Generation Z's engagement in politics goes beyond online activism. They frequently participate in protests, rallies, and other direct actions to demand systemic change. This level of involvement showcases their determination to create a better future and their refusal to remain passive in the face of injustice. As Gen Z continues to grow in influence, it is clear that it will have a significant impact on and shape the future political landscape.

Despite the positive aspects of social media use among Gen Z, studies have raised concerns about the surge in discourse in online social and political spheres, which sometimes leads to harassment, trolling, and uncivil behaviour(Nieżurawska-Zając, 2018). Furthermore, Gen Z activities such as participation in online movements have been found to have a reverse effect of dormancy in offline engagement, such that participants in a social cause or movement have a false sense of participation in a civic cause by clicking a link, retweeting a tweet, creating or forwarding a hashtag to contacts without any commensurate physical actions (Carr, 2010). As the UN uses it, this practice, called slacktivism, refers to a tendency where people support a cause (online) by taking easy steps but are not fully involved or devoted to effecting change. This phenomenon is often criticised for diluting the impact of genuine activism and diverting attention from more tangible forms of engagement (Parmelee et al., 2022).

Findings from Mustapha, Lambe Kayode, Victor Olanrewaju Gbonegun, and Maryam Lasisi Mustapha (2016) on the use of social media space, especially among the youth in Nigeria, state that the space provides political information and a template for physical mobilisation for political action, and engagement in political processes. This connection and transition between online and offline engagement have been instrumental in recent social protests in Nigeria, such as the # EndSARS movement. The #EndSars movement, which gained momentum on social media platforms, showcased the power of online activism in mobilising the Nigerian youth and driving change. Through hashtags, online campaigns, and information sharing, social media became a powerful tool for organising protests, raising awareness, and demanding justice. This demonstrates that social media can catalyse political action and play a vital role in shaping societal movements (Erubami, Joshua Aghogho, Emmanuel Ufuophu-Biri, Luke Ifeanyi Anorue, Uzoma Oluchukwu Nwabunze, and Emeka SS Orekyeh. 2021).

Political Participation in the pre and digital Age in Nigeria

Political participation is a multidimensional activity involving citizens' awareness, mobilisation, and engagement in the political processes of a state. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) argue that political participation serves as an instrument for fostering democratic commitment through membership, voting in elections, and acquiring political knowledge and education. For Waller (2013), political participation comprises interaction with politicians, participation in civic groups and organisations, and engagement in political activities such as petitions, campaigns, demonstrations and debates. Political participation is not only restricted to participation in elections but also extends to being involved in discussions on issues of government, policies, programmes and other aspects of governance. It is not a one-off engagement but a continuous process that is sustained even though it usually climaxes during electioneering periods (Othman, Muhammad Fuad, Nazariah Osman, and Isah Shehu Mohammed, 2020). Political participation among the citizens is influenced by (i) their level of knowledge and skills concerning democratic processes, (ii) the availability and accessibility of critical information about democratic processes, and (iii) their willingness to get involved in these processes.

During the pre-digital era in Nigeria, political participation was primarily influenced by religion, family, culture, and traditional institutions (Nwauba & Chieji, 2019). These nuances were critical to shaping Nigerians' political attitudes and behaviours in different elections, from the 1959 general elections to the first military takeover in Nigeria. Likewise, the traditional mass media system, comprising broadcast and print media, also played a key role in political participation in the pre-digital era, disseminating political information and sensitising citizens to exercise their franchise. Before the influence of digital media in political communication, the dual issues of ignorance and purposeful deceit on the part of some politicians are the foundation of

political apathy among many Nigerians. This prevents the general public from seeing a connection between their underdevelopment and lack of political participation (Fabiyi, 2009). Political indifference in the pre-digital era was primarily due to the inaccessibility of political information to citizens.

The emergence of the Internet has brought a paradigm shift in the Nigerian political landscape and the entire gamut of political participation. The shift was triggered by the political class's adoption of social media and other internet-based channels of political communication(Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019). This adoption sparked a widespread political revolution among citizens, especially those born in the digital era known as Gen Z (Uwalaka, 2021). In the Nigerian political landscape, the usage of social media by the political elites was not widespread until 2011 (Bode, 2016). The adoption by political parties and candidates of the digital space as one of the information and communication platforms has played a significant role in stimulating the interest of citizens, especially the youth population, who are Internet savvy (Abimbade, Olayoku, & Herro, 2022) . This stemmed from the availability of political information at their disposal, which made them politically educated and enlightened compared to succeeding generations (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019). In the digital era, the Internet, particularly social media, offers a platform for politically underrepresented groups seeking political inclusion and plurality to express their opinions and perspectives on the political process. Sassen (1998) argues th the effectiveness of social media in civic engagement is more pronounced when people are already civic-minded and reasonably active on social media.

Additionally, the accessibility and availability of political information in the digital space have brought about a generational shift in the political behaviour and participation patterns among Nigerians. The succeeding generations, especially the Baby Boom generation (1946-1964) and Generation X (1965-1980), viewed politics negatively. Their negative disposition towards politics stemmed from the limited availability of political information, which had a detrimental effect on their level of political participation (Erubami, Paul Bebenimibo, & Edith Ugochi Ohaja, 2021). However, from the early stages of Generation Y (millennials) to Generation Z, political participation has witnessed a significant increase due to the repositioning of political activities by political actors from traditional to digital spaces. Additionally, the use of various internet platforms for political communication has been described as a game-changer in promoting accountability (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019). It has allowed the citizens to hold leaders accountable for their actions and inactions. Not only that, but it has also entrenched the universal right to freedom of expression, which allows citizens to speak out against oppressive and poor governance. These developments have played an essential role in stimulating the exponential increase in political participation among the Internet-savvy Generation Z compared to previous generations that did not have the luxury of the Internet to enable them to be politically aware and exercise their civic responsibility (Möller, Judith, Robbert Nicolai Van De Velde, Lisa Merten, and Cornelius Puschmann, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) guides this theory. Developed by Davis (1989), the model provides an explanatory framework for understanding how people accept and utilise technology (Davis, 1989; Wahyudi, 2023). The model explains that two parameters drive a person's intention to use technology: Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU). The perceived ease of use (PEOU), one of the two components of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), is concerned with the level to which a person believes that technology is simple and easy to use (Ibrahim & Shiring, 2022). Perceived usefulness (PU), the second strand of the model, helps explain the level to which an individual believes that using technology can improve performance and productivity.

Although other theories like the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2011), and the selective exposure theory (Festinger, 1957) exist that can equally be applied as theoretical planks to interrogate the focus of inquiry in this study, the researchers chose TAM based on its propensity to help rationalise the motivations for adopting and using technology since the core motive for the study is to assess the pattern of social media use by Gen Zs and its influence on their civic engagement, and political participation. For instance, Raghavan, Vishnupriya, Marya Wani, and Dolphy Abraham (2016), using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a framework in their study, explain that personality traits often mediate the connection between the adoption of technology for civic participation and the outcomes of such participation. Another study also reveals a positive correlation between the use of social media and Gen Z political participation (Bogale, 2023; Pang, Hua, Qin, Kaiyangand Min Ji, 2021).

Using the nuances of the TAM model as the theoretical foundation in this study will enable researchers to gain insight into how factors such as socio-political dynamics influence social media adoption and its connection to political participation and civic engagement.

Methodology

This study employed the quantitative research approach and used online survey method. The survey data enabled the researchers to explore the variables highlighted in the study. The data collected were analysed using frequency analysis, chi-square tests, and correlation, and the results are presented in tables. The study population consists of Generation Z across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. As stated in the introduction section of the paper, the Gen Z generation are people born between 1997 and 2012. However, the study focused on the segment of the Gen Z population that is old enough to participate in politics through voting or being voted for. The Nigerian constitution puts the voting age at 18 and above. Therefore, using the stratified sampling method, we drew our sample from the older segment of Gen Z, aged 18-27, across the country's six geopolitical zones. The researcher could not find any database on the exact population of Gen Z within the age group being studied. Since the total number of Gen Z within the age bracket is unknown, the sample size was determined using the Cochran formula for calculating sample size for an indefinitely large population.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- Z = Z-score (1.96 for 95% confidence level)
- p = estimated proportion (0.5 is most conservative)
- e = margin of error (0.05 or 5%)

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Although the recommended sample size from the calculation was 384, the researchers considered the possibility of a lower response rate often associated with online surveys and decided to conduct oversampling to achieve fair representation from all six geopolitical zones. They increased the sample size from the recommended 384 to 540. Since the actual or estimated population of Gen Z within the specified age bracket is unknown, as there is no official data available on this, we used an equal allocation rather than a proportional distribution of sample size across the six geopolitical zones. We acknowledged the limitations of equal allocation, but we considered it the most appropriate method in a situation where the exact population or estimate is unknown (Raifman, Sarah, Michelle A. DeVost, Jean C. Digitale, Yea-Hung Chen, and Meghan D. Morris, 2022; Varshney, Rahul, Srikant Gupta, and Irfan Ali, 2017). Therefore, we calculated the total sample population for each zone as follows:

Sample per zone = Total sample size/ Number of zones = 540/6 = 90

Table 1

Sample Size Allocation

Geopolitical Zone	Sample Size
North Central	90
North East	90
North West	90
South East	90
South West	90
South South	90
Total	540

The data for the study were collected through the online survey questionnaire using Google Forms. The researchers purposively selected the population for the study, as its focus is on Gen Z, and they employed the snowball sampling technique to administer the survey instrument. We posted the link on school social media platforms and other Gen Z-focused platforms. Participants were also recruited through referrals from participants identified by the researchers earlier until the total sample size for the study was reached.

Data Analysis and Results

From the 540 copies of the questionnaire administered, 500 respondents completed and returned the questionnaire, representing a 93% return rate.

Table 2

Social Media Usage Among Gen Z (N =500)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	464	92.8
A few times a week	9	1.8
Weekly	13	2.6
Rarely	8	1.6
Never	6	1.2
Total	500	100

This table indicates the frequency of social media usage among the Gen Z population in Nigeria. The results show that most study participants, totalling 464, representing 92.8% of the sample population, used social media platforms daily. Therefore, the results demonstrate a high engagement on social media platforms by Gen Z.

Table 3

Daily Time Spent on Social Media Among Gen Z (N = 500)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	6	1.2
1-2 hours	26	5.2
2-4 hours	74	14.8
More than 4 hours	394	78.8
Total	500	100

This table shows that a significant percentage of Gen Z (78.8%) who participated in the study spent more than two hours daily on various social media platforms. It can be deduced from this table that Gen Z's level of digital engagement is considerably high.

Table 4

Social Media Platforms Used by Gen Z in Nigeria (N = 500)

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Whatsapp	500	100
Facebook	500	100
TikTok	425	85
Instagram	307	61.4
Telegram	40	8
X (Twitter)	264	52.8
Snapchat	247	49.4
LinkedIn	15	3
WeChat	3	0.6
Threads	3	0.6
Twitch	1	0.2

The question for the data analysed in this table aimed to establish the social media platforms used frequently by Gen Zs in Nigeria. Therefore, the cumulative percentage in this table exceeds 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one social media platform. The analysis indicates WhatsApp. Facebook and TikTok are the most frequently used social media platforms. By implication, this analysis suggests that Gen Z users employ multiple social media platforms for their civic engagement.

Table 5

Patterns of Online Civic Engagement by Gen Z in Nigeria (N = 500)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sometimes	84	16.8
Rarely	113	22.6
Often	172	34.4
Always	104	20.8
Never	27	5.4
Total	500	100

The table shows that 16.8% of the respondents sometimes participate in online civic discussions. Respondents who actively participate in online discussions (always and often) account for 55.2%, while 5.4% indicate that they do not engage in online discussions. Additionally, the analysis revealed that although most Gen Zs in Nigeria are engaged online, the pattern or mode of online civic participation is not uniform, which may influence their attitudes toward online engagement and political views.

Table 6

Factors for Online Civic Engagement Preference by Gen Zs (N = 500)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Convenience	191	38.2
Lack of Trust in Politicians and the System that Gen Z voices will be heard	189	37.8
Safety	120	24.0

Total	500	100

The analysis revealed a clear hierarchy of motivating factors for Gen Z participation in civic engagement. The table showed convenience, lack of trust in the politicians, and safety as the factors motivating Gen Z to participate in online civic engagement,

Table 7

Relationship between social media political content exposure and its perceived influence on Gen Z political views

Analysis	Statistic	df	N	p-value	Effect Size
Chi-Square Test	49.8	25	500	0.005	Cramer's V = 0.158
Spearman Correlation	0.213	-	500	0.001	r_s = 0.213

The chi-square test in this analysis examines whether there is a significant relationship between the social media political content Gen Z is exposed to and its association with their political views. Cramer's V, which guides the analysis, ranges from 0 (no association) to 1 (Perfect association). The results with a Cramer's value of 0.158 suggest a weak to moderate association. The results indicate that other factors may also influence their views despite the evidence of association. Also, the Spearman correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between Gen Z exposure frequency and their offline political engagement. With Spearman's rho (rs) ranging from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to +1 (perfect positive correlation) and a calculated value of 0.213, there is a weak positive correlation. This suggests that as Gen Z's exposure to politics increases, their political views are slightly influenced, but the effect is not substantial.

Discussion of Results

What are the Gen Z population's Online Civic Engagement Patterns in Nigeria?

By employing a quantitative research approach and adopting the survey method, the study, through its findings, provides knowledge on the nexus between social media, civic engagement, and the emerging pattern of political participation among Gen Z in Nigeria. At the same time, the research, based on its findings, explains the social media potential for promoting civic engagement and mobilisation among Generation Z, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of their political participation.

The data collected and analysed show high social media engagement among Gen Z, as indicated in Table 2, with the majority of the sampled population using social media platforms several times a day. Facebook, Whatsapp, and X were indicated as the most preferred and frequently used social media platforms. These findings resonate and align with studies on Gen Z activities online and their impact on participation in online democratic discourse, as they have been found to prioritise social media platforms as a means of communication over traditional media systems(Boulianne, 2015). Also, the results support previous studies findings that Gen Z is a heavy user of social media platforms. These platforms are key to their social interaction and, at the same time, shape their perception of social issues as the digital integration into their social lives is high (Devi, 2024; Hidayat, 2023; Suwana, Fiona, Alila Pramiyanti, Ira Mayangsari, Reni Nuraeni, and Yasinta Firdaus, 2020) According to the Worldometers (2025), the median age of Nigeria's population is estimated to be 18 years, and the increase in internet penetration now stands at 45.5%. Additionally, the number of internet users in Nigeria increased from 2023 to 2024, reaching 2 million (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024).

The two factors drive prolonged online engagement and the number of hours consumed by Gen Z, surpassing the global average of 2-5 hours from a Western perspective when compared. Perhaps the high average number of hours spent by Gen Z on social media platforms in Nigeria when compared to the global north average can be attributed to the relative affordability of acquiring smartmobile phones leading to proliferation in the use of social media platforms like Facebook, X and Twitter, which have gradually become the preferred hub for civil discourse among the Gen Zs. However, while Gen Z is highly present in online activities, their participation in online civil discourse can be described as a paradox, as their pattern of engagement oscillates between sometimes and rarely, indicating a high digital presence but moderate engagement.

Using Cenite, Mark, and Yu Zhang's (2022) categorisation of the pattern of digital citizenship into active, standby, disengaged and disillusioned, evidence from the analysed data showed that the Gen Z population in Nigeria, although highly skilled in the use of digital technology and digitally connected, they remained passive, and disconnected in democratic participation. Also, Wijaya, Iriando, Fanny KT Sitompul, Leon M. Harju, Musa K. Payokwa, and Wilhelmina A. Insoraky. (2024) and Zhang, Weiyu, Zhuo Chen, Yeow-Tong Chia, and Jia Ying Neoh (2022) found that, although Gen Z is highly savvy in the use of digital technology, this savviness does not have a direct correlation with political participation and online civil engagement. In addition, studies have shown that the Gen Z population engage with social media platforms primarily for entertainment rather than active political engagement (Yağmur, 2024). This factor can also be seen as accounting for their low participation in democratic discourse.

Notably, the social media platforms' preference, as indicated in the analysed data, showed 100% for Facebook and 100% for WhatsApp among the sampled respondents. This suggests that efforts to initiate civic engagement would be more effective and produce significant results on these two platforms than on others. As argued by Ittefaq, Muhammad, Hyunjin Seo, Mauryne Abwao, and Annalise Baines (2022),the nature of WhatsApp, which supports personalised interaction, and Facebook's

affordances for creating a community forum may be responsible for its attractiveness to the Gen Z population as a platform for civic engagement.

What factors influence online civic engagement among Gen Zs in Nigeria?

Although the data analysis showed that Gen Z's level of online civic engagement on public issues is low, the evidence from the analysed data suggests that they prefer online civic engagement to physical, political participation in any online democratic discourse they are part of. This finding aligns with the argument that the attractiveness and preference of the Gen Z population for online platforms for communication are connected to their increased stake in the offline discursive arena, which addresses security concerns (Feng, Shihui, Mengqian Li, & Ola Erstad 2021; Pang, 2021). As a result, the findings revealed an interesting intersection between safety, convenience, distrust of the mainstream political system, and significant online engagement among the Gen Z population. For instance, there is a recorded history of intolerance by successive governments in Nigeria, as well as the suppression of views held by citizens that run contrary to the government's position. An example of this is the government clampdown on #EndSARS protesters in Nigeria in 2020, in which many youths lost their lives. Udoudom et al. (2023) echo this, explaining that the government sometimes invokes censorship mechanisms to silence opposing views and mobilisation movements that can challenge its authority on public issues in Nigeria.

From the data analysis results, the Gen Z population perceived the different social media platforms as relatively safe compared to the offline world, which incentivised their active participation in online discourse and activities and fostered the consciousness that their voices would be heard. Relating this finding to the technological acceptance mode employed as a theoretical framework for the paper, the two components of the TAM model, which are perceived usefulness and ease of use, are both relevant to the findings as the Gen Z population perceived the social media space as platforms that provide a form of security and convenience to express their views. Additionally, the study's findings showed that the Gen Z population expressed a high level of ease in using social media platforms for civil discourse. One of the reasons is the structural nature of digital media configuration, which enables the aggregation of individuals with like minds into a homogeneous group from which they can advance arguments about their interests. This is consistent with the submission of Italiano & Ramirez (2023), who argued that social media provides an atmosphere of virtual solidarity through which people with similar beliefs and opinions converge to express their views, and this may not be attainable in physical space.

Apart from convenience and safety issues, the study also indicates that distrust of the Nigerian political system is a key driver for the Gen Z population's preference for online civil engagement. 25.12% of respondents believe that the opinions of the Gen Z population are not heard and are often overshadowed by the elitist-driven nature of the mainstream physical democratic space. The arguments from other studies that support this finding explain that the Gen Z population preferred the online digital space for their democratic discursive activities because the physical traditional democratic space is unresponsive, elitist and often foists the hegemonic ideas of the ruling class on the population without any space of opportunity for citizens to express alternative views (Feng et al., 2021; Haqqi & Wijayati, 2023; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Tufekci, 2017). As such, the Gen Z population in Nigeria, as analysed, engages in what could be referred to as slacktivism by leveraging the affordances of social media platforms in Nigeria to participate in civic debates that create and encourage alternative opinions, challenging the elitist and political class views.

How do the political contents the Gen Z population are exposed to on social media influence their political behaviours?

Findings from the analysed data, through chi-square analysis and correlation, showed that the political content the Gen Z population is exposed to influences their political behaviours both offline and online. The process of political education and participation among the youth, including Gen Z, is significantly driven by digital media platforms. Gen Z's perception of political candidates, political parties, and who to vote for is influenced by the information they are exposed to on social media platforms. Reinforcing this assertion, (Morah & Nwafor, 2024) found that the political content Gen Z exposed themselves to significantly impacted their voting decision patterns during the 2023 Nigerian general election. Most politicians are gradually recognising the potential quality of social media as a tool for mobilisation and participation, and now frame and disseminate information on Facebook, Whatsapp, X, and others. Although political content on social media platforms has its drawbacks as tools for political participation, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and fake news, it can also help mobilise and sensitise citizens, leading to increased participation in democracy.

Conclusion

This study examines and provides insight into the relationship between social media, civic engagement, and political participation among Generation Z in Nigeria. The study concludes that the relationship between social media, civic participation, and political engagement is complex and continues to evolve. While the Gen Z population's mode of communication has been described as highly digital and potentially a veritable tool for deepening democratic and civic discourse, evidence suggests a low level of political and civic participation online, as most Gen Z members use social media space for entertainment and personal identity. Nevertheless, social media is increasingly becoming a space for expressing alternative opinions away from the traditional mainstream discursive space that only echoes the hegemonic ideas of the elites and the ruling class.

For Nigeria's democracy, both its current state and its future, the use of social media platforms to drive political participation among the Gen Z population presents both opportunities and threats. Nigeria has a young population, with the youth accounting for over 60% and a median age of 1 (WorldoMeters, 2025). The generation will soon take centre stage in political activities in Nigeria. Since digital media is at the core of their communication practices, as digital natives, the communicative space will be reconfigured to provide space for alternative opinions, drive transparency, and hold the government accountable. Examples of this transformation have been evident in digital activities, such as the #EndSARS and # BringBackOurGirls movements, which speak to and challenge powers. However, there are also threats, including the proliferation of fake news, echo chambers, and the incivility inherent in the digital discourse, which, instead of driving and deepening the democratic space, can lead to the polarisation of the social media space, taking on the characteristics of ethnic and religious division.

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