



Online Activism and Political Knowledge among Nigerian Youth during the 2023 Elections: Analyzing the Role of Online Information Sources

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Abstract: This study appraises the nexus between online activism, political knowledge, and the mediating influence of diverse online information sources among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections. Through an analysis of these relationships, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the role digital spaces play in shaping political awareness among young individuals. Specifically, this study seeks to examine whether engagement in online activism during the 2023 Nigerian elections positively correlates with increased levels of political knowledge among Nigerian youth and whether the influence of engagement in online activism on political knowledge is mediated by the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources. This study employs a quantitative approach that incorporates techniques such as Pearson's correlation and mediation analysis. Data were collected through an online survey of 409 Nigerian youth aged 18–35 years. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between engagement in online activism and political knowledge, substantiating the hypothesis that active participation in digital advocacy activities enhances political awareness among Nigerian youths. Furthermore, mediation analysis showed that exposure to diverse online information sources mediates the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge, emphasizing the role of online platforms as conduits for political information and awareness. These findings underscore the pivotal role of online platforms in shaping the political knowledge landscape of Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections.

Keywords: Election; online activism; political efficacy; political knowledge; social med

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1. Introduction

The evolving landscape of the digital age has brought about unprecedented changes in various spheres of human life including information dissemination, communication, and civic engagement. As societies navigate this dynamic digital ecosystem, the role of online platforms in shaping political awareness and participation has become increasingly prominent (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). The present study centres its exploration within the unique context of Nigeria, a nation undergoing significant political transformations following the 2023 elections, where the voices and actions of Nigerian youth were poised to play a decisive role (Peterside, 2023).

Nigeria, one of the most populous countries in Africa, is experiencing substantial growth in digital connectivity and Internet penetration, particularly among youth demographics. With an estimated 122 million internet users and a median age of 17.2 years (Kemp, 2023), Nigerian youth are embracing digital platforms as a means of communication, information sharing, and participation, with an estimated 122 million internet users and a median age of 17. This transformation not only alters traditional communication patterns but also provides a novel arena for civic engagement and political discourse (Akinyetun, 2021a).

The 2023 general elections marked a crucial juncture for Nigeria's democratic trajectory, not only for its political significance in the progression of democratic rule but also because it coincides with a period of heightened youth activism, both online and offline (Animasawun, 2023). Nigerian youth, equipped with digital tools, leveraged social media platforms and other online channels to express their political views, demand accountability, and advocate for change.

The amalgamation of the digital landscape and political sphere has given rise to the concept of online activism (Cooper, 2023). Young individuals use digital platforms to organize campaigns, share information, and engage in discussions about pressing societal issues. Simultaneously, these platforms offer a plethora of information sources, ranging from established news websites to social media platforms, creating a complex web of online spaces that influences individuals' perceptions and knowledge about politics (Akinyetun, 2021a; Akinyetun, 2021b; Mustapha et al., 2023). The convergence of online activism and political knowledge is gaining significance in today's digital political landscapes. Although digital platforms are known to enhance civic engagement, the importance of political knowledge is

acknowledged. A research gap exists in understanding Nigerian youths' involvement in the upcoming 2023 elections, particularly in the relationship between online activism, political knowledge, and online information sources. Existing studies on online activism often overlook its impact on political knowledge, focusing on mobilization (Cooper, 2023; Greijdanus et al., 2020). Similarly, research on youth's political knowledge often disregards the educational potential of digital platforms (Robinson, 2019).

This gap leaves unexplored areas of how online activism can enhance political knowledge among Nigerian youth, especially during the 2023 election. Furthermore, while some studies acknowledge the role of online information sources in political awareness (Intyaswati et al., 2021), the mediation between online activism and political knowledge needs more exploration. Investigating how social media platforms shape political understanding is crucial. Addressing this gap is essential to grasp how online activism bolsters political knowledge and influences Nigerian youth's participation in the electoral process.

This research endeavours to bridge this gap by investigating the intricate and unexplored dimensions of the interplay between online activism, political knowledge, and the mediating role of diverse online information sources. Through an empirical lens, this study sheds light on the extent to which digital activism augments political awareness among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the multifarious ways in which digital spaces intersect democratic processes. The objectives and hypotheses of this study are as follows.

1.1. Hypotheses

H1: Engagement in online activism during the 2023 Nigerian elections is positively correlated with increased levels of political knowledge among Nigerian youths.

H2: The influence of engagement in online activism on political knowledge among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections is mediated by the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources such as social media platforms and news websites.

2. Literature Review

Intyaswati et al. (2021) explored the use of social media as a means of political learning among undergraduate Indonesian students. The study found that social media use positively influences political knowledge by mediating online discussions. This suggests that integrating political discussions into online courses can enhance students' political knowledge. Greijdanus et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of online activism and its relationship with offline collective action. They highlight the dual role of social media in facilitating both individual experiences and community building while also acknowledging the potential for online activism to contribute to offline protests. The authors emphasize that the Internet's amplification of activism can also expose it to increased repression in certain contexts. Cooper (2023) addressed the effectiveness of online activism by investigating the demographic and temporal factors that influence its impact. This study identifies young people and women as key beneficiaries of online activism, highlighting their alignment with digital action. Additionally, it emphasizes the effectiveness of online activism in achieving short-term goals and raising the awareness of specific issues. Matthes (2022) contributes to the discourse by challenging the assumption that social media inherently enhances political engagement among young adults. This study suggests that the prevalence of non-political content on social media platforms may actually detract from political engagement, leading to a paradox in which increased social media use does not necessarily correlate with higher political engagement.

Mustapha et al. (2023) delved into the changing political behaviours of youth in Kwara State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the impact of social media. By considering declining youth engagement, this research adopts the Civic Volunteerism Model and explores the transformative shift from traditional to digital media. This study identifies social media's significance as an alternative avenue for political participation, emphasizing the positive correlations between social media political campaigns, online engagement, and offline involvement. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of social media's democratic attributes and offers insights for nurturing participatory political cultures in democratic societies such as Nigeria. Akinyetun (2022) addressed the interplay between social media, political efficacy, and political participation within Nigeria. Through a web survey approach, the study reveals how social media influences political attitudes and engagement, particularly among young, educated, and often unemployed individuals, a demographic that mirrors global trends. This research highlights the empowering role of social media in enhancing political efficacy and facilitating

increased political engagement. This underscores the transformative potential of digital platforms in empowering individuals to voice their concerns, engage in political discourse, and mobilize for various reasons.

Furthermore, Akinyetun's (2021a) investigation explores the nexus between social media, youth civic participation, and activism in the context of Nigeria, exemplified by influential #Endsars protests. This study underlines how the rise of social media platforms has catalysed active civic engagement and advocacy among Nigerian youth. By analysing the #Endsars movement as a turning point, this research showcases the transformative role of social media in enabling dynamic and justice-oriented participation.

Table 1. Themes in the Literature

| Themes | Key Studies and Findings |
|--|--|
| Digitalization and Political Learning | Intyaswati et al. (2021): Digital tools can be a learning tool for political knowledge among Indonesian students. This study finds a positive correlation between the use of digital tools and political knowledge acquisition. This study suggests that educators can integrate digital tools into courses to enhance political learning. |
| Digitalization and Online Activism | Greijdanus et al. (2020): Digital tools can also be used for online activism. The study found that online tools can be used to document experiences, build communities, and mobilize individuals for offline protests. This study challenges the notion of slacktivism and shows that online activism can be effective in promoting social change. |
| Digitalization and Youth Engagement | Matthes (2022): Digital tools can mobilize and distract young adults from political engagement. This study analyzed data from multiple countries and found that the relationship between online tools use and voter turnout among young adults is complex. This study suggests that online tools can promote and hinder political engagement among young people. |
| Digitalization and Political Efficacy | Akinyetun (2022): Digital tools can enhance political efficacy. This study found that digital tools can make people feel more confident in their ability to influence political outcomes. This study suggests that online tools can motivate people to participate in political activities. |
| Digitalization and Political Movements | Akinyetun (2021a): Digital tools can be used to support political movements. The study found that social media was used to document the #Endsars movement in Nigeria and mobilize people to participate in protests. This study suggests that social media is a powerful tool for promoting social change. |
| Digitalization and Electoral Violence | Akinyetun, Odeyemi, & Alausa (2021): Social media can be used to promote electoral violence. This study found that social media was |

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| | used to spread misinformation and incite violence during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. This study suggests that social media platforms should take steps to prevent the use of their platforms for violence promotion. |
| Digitalization, Good Governance and Social Inclusion | Akinyetun (2021c): Digital tools can be used to promote good governance and social inclusion. Studies have found that online tools can be used to hold governments accountable, promote transparency, and empower marginalized groups. These studies suggest that digital technology is a powerful tool for improving democracy and social justice. |

Source: Author compilation

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Method

The research design employed in this study is quantitative, focusing on examining the relationships between engagement in online activism, political knowledge, and exposure to diverse online information sources among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections. The study engaged participants through an online survey conducted in 2023. The online approach was chosen because of its cost-effectiveness, wide accessibility, and capability of real-time data collection. The survey instrument was developed using Google Forms, ensuring compatibility across various devices for ease of participant response. To distribute the survey link, prominent social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were utilized. The research utilized a purposive sampling technique to select young and active social media users between the age bracket of 18 and 35 years on Facebook and Twitter. After identifying these individuals, snowball sampling was employed to recruit more participants with similar characteristics. In other words, the initial participants were encouraged to share the link with peers who met the same criteria, creating a ripple effect on involvement. Throughout this process, ethical considerations were of utmost importance to ensure that participation was entirely voluntary and devoid of any financial incentives or referral rewards. The data collection phase was carefully planned to span 6 weeks. This timeframe allowed participants to have ample opportunities to engage in the survey and provide their responses. Once the data collection period was concluded, the survey link was promptly deactivated to preserve data integrity and maintain a focused timeframe for analysis. A total of 409 participants successfully participated in this study. These cohorts span different regions in Nigeria, showing an acceptable level of geographical diversity required to capture the nuanced regional dynamics inherent in the intersection of online

activism, political knowledge, and the role of online information sources among Nigerian youth during the 2023 election.

3.2. Materials

This study used the development and deployment of a structured web-based questionnaire titled ‘Digital Activism, Online Information, and Political Knowledge Survey’ (DAOIPKS). The survey was divided into two distinct parts, labelled Part I and Part II. Part I sought to capture the essential demographic characteristics of the participants, including age group, gender, educational level, social media usage pattern, and the most frequently visited social media platform. This section aims to establish the contextual understanding of the respondents. Part II comprised items based on the variables central to the study: online activism, political knowledge, and the role of online information sources.

The study variables were operationalized and measured. Online activism is measured through questions that capture participants’ engagement in digital activities related to political participation and civic advocacy. Participants are prompted to indicate the frequency with which they participate in various online activism behaviours, including sharing political content on social media platforms, participating in online campaigns, and engaging in digital advocacy initiatives. This construct encompasses several forms of online activism. The responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 5 represents “strongly agree”. The aggregation of these responses provides a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ levels of engagement in online activism.

Political knowledge is operationalized through the prism of political efficacy, encompassing both internal and external dimensions. For internal political efficacy, participants were queried about their self-assessed abilities to express political opinions, influence political decisions, impact elections, and adhere to existing laws. Similarly, external political efficacy gauges participants’ perceptions of the government’s commitment to enabling the free expression of political opinions, sharing political information, accommodating diverse political perspectives, and addressing citizens’ lawful demands. Participants’ agreement levels are gauged using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies “strongly disagree” and 5 signifies “strongly agree”. By aggregating the responses, a comprehensive measurement of participants’ political efficacy and knowledge was obtained.

The mediating influence of diverse online information sources was examined by assessing the participants' exposure to digital platforms for political information. Participants were probed about their frequency of utilization of various sources, including social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as news websites. The measurement employs a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies "rarely or never" and 5 signifies "very frequently". This measurement enabled the identification of the extent to which participants relied on digital platforms for political information.

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the variables under investigation: online activism, political knowledge, and the role of online information sources. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the variables: 'Online Activism', 'Political Knowledge' and 'Online Information Sources' were .82, .75, and .79, respectively, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items. This coefficient value surpassed the widely accepted threshold of .70, confirming the reliability of the measurement. The data collected through the survey instruments were analysed, and the results are presented in the next section.

3.2. Results

Demographic data

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants

| Demographic Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 228 | 55.7% |
| Female | 181 | 44.3% |
| Age | | |
| 18-21 years | 82 | 20.1% |
| 22-25 years | 158 | 38.6% |
| 26-29 years | 100 | 24.5% |
| 30-35 years | 69 | 16.8% |
| Educational Background | | |
| Secondary School | 85 | 20.8% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 202 | 49.5% |
| Master's/Ph.D. Degree | 122 | 29.9% |

| Geographical Location | | |
|---|-----|-------|
| Urban Residence | 287 | 70.2% |
| Rural Residence | 122 | 29.8% |
| Socioeconomic Status | | |
| Low Income | 148 | 36.2% |
| Middle Income | 171 | 41.9% |
| High Income | 90 | 22.0% |
| Social Media Usage Patterns | | |
| Passive Users | 75 | 18.4% |
| Active Consumers | 182 | 44.5% |
| Engaged Contributors | 152 | 37.1% |
| Most Frequently Used Online Platform for Information | | |
| Facebook | 118 | 29.3% |
| Twitter | 89 | 22.1% |
| Instagram | 72 | 17.9% |
| Youtube | 34 | 8.4% |
| Other news websites | 96 | 23.8% |

Source: Survey, 2023

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the participants. Near gender parity among participants (55.7% male, 44.3% female) ensures a balanced perspective, enabling us to consider the dynamics of online activism and political knowledge across gender lines. The dominance of youth participation within the 22-29 age range (63.1%) underscores the study's alignment with the target demographic, Nigerian youth. The significant proportion of bachelor's degree holders (49.5%) highlights the intellectually engaged nature of the sample, attesting to their ability to critically process political information and meaningfully contribute to online activism. Urban residence dominance (70.2%) indicates the digital connectivity of urbanized youth, while 29.8% of rural participants provide a window into the experiences of those from less-urbanized backgrounds. Socioeconomic status breakdown underscores the diverse economic realities that shape participants' perspectives, demonstrating the varied impact of online activism on individuals from different income levels.

The prevalence of active consumer engagement (44.5%) and engaged contributors (37.1%) on social media platforms accentuates the pivotal role of digital spaces in nurturing political dialogue and activism among Nigerian youths. The data on the most frequently used online platforms for information reveal noteworthy insights

into the preferred avenues through which Nigerian youth accessed political information during the 2023 elections. Among the social media platforms, Facebook emerged as the most prevalent choice, with 29.3% of the participants indicating its use. Twitter and Instagram accounted for 22.1% and 17.9%, respectively. These platforms demonstrate their significance in facilitating political engagement, with youths utilizing them as vehicles for staying informed and expressing their views.

The prominence of social media platforms as preferred sources of political information underscores their pivotal role in shaping political discourse and knowledge dissemination among Nigerian youth. Facebook's dominance is likely attributed to its extensive user base and diverse content-sharing capabilities, enabling users to access a variety of political content and engage in discussions. Twitter's popularity aligns with the rapid dissemination of real-time information, which is particularly relevant during elections. The significance of Instagram suggests the increasing use of visual content to convey political messages. Notably, a considerable portion of the participants (23.8%) relied on news websites for political information. This finding underscores the importance of traditional online news sources in political information consumption.

3.3. Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses proposed in this study explored whether engagement in online activism during the 2023 Nigerian elections is positively correlated with increased levels of political knowledge among Nigerian youth (H1) and whether the influence of engagement in online activism on political knowledge among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections is mediated by the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources (H2). The results are as follows.

H1

To test this hypothesis, the researcher employed Pearson's correlation analysis, which measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between engagement in online activism and political knowledge ($r = 0.512$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between these two variables. The positive correlation coefficient suggests that, as engagement in online activism increases, political knowledge among Nigerian youth also tends to increase.

Table 2 Pearson's Correlation Analysis Results

| Variables | Engagement in Online Activism | Political Knowledge |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Engagement in Online Activism | 1 | 0.512 |
| Political Knowledge | 0.512 | 1 |

Interpretation

The significant positive correlation between engagement in online activism and political knowledge supports our hypotheses. This finding implies that Nigerian youth, who actively engaged in online activism during the 2023 elections, possessed higher levels of political knowledge. As these individuals participate in digital advocacy activities and engage in political content online, they become exposed to diverse perspectives, information, and discussions that contribute to their political awareness and understanding.

H2

The researcher examined the potential mediation effect of diverse online information sources on the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections. Mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro for SPSS was conducted. The mediation analysis yielded compelling results, indicating that the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources significantly mediated the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge (indirect effect = 0.2562, 95% CI (0.1857, 0.3332)). This mediation effect suggests that some of the influence of engagement in online activism on political knowledge operates through the mediation of exposure to diverse online information sources.

Table 3 Mediation Analysis Results

| Path | Coefficient | Standard Error | p-value |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| Direct effect (c') | 0.4036 | 0.0713 | <0.001 |
| Indirect effect (ab) | 0.2562 | 0.0445 | <0.001 |
| Total effect (c) | 0.6598 | 0.0793 | <0.001 |

Interpretation

The significant mediation effect observed in this analysis highlights the important role of exposure to diverse online information sources in mediating the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge. This implies that the positive influence of engaging in online activism on political knowledge is further strengthened by the extent to which Nigerian youth are exposed to online information sources. The findings underscore the interconnectedness of engagement in online activism, exposure to digital information platforms, and the development of political knowledge among Nigerian youth. This provides empirical support for the assertion that online information sources act as key mechanisms through which engagement in online activism translates into increased political knowledge (Greijdanus et al., 2020).

3.4. Discussion of Findings

This study found that Nigerian youth who actively engaged in online activism during the 2023 elections possessed higher levels of political knowledge and that the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources significantly mediates the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge. The findings of this study are supported by those of Mustapha et al. (2023), who explored youth political engagement in Kwara State, Nigeria, focusing on the role of social media in shaping political behaviours. Mustapha et al. (2023) reported positive correlations between political campaigns on social media and both online and offline engagement, which resonates with the findings of the present study. This convergence of results highlights the potential of social media as a catalyst for political engagement among the youth. Akinyetun (2022) delved into the relationship between social media, political efficacy, and political participation in Nigeria. This study revealed that social media enhances political efficacy and subsequently increases political participation, reflecting the dynamics observed in our research. Our findings emphasize the transformative potential of online activism as a means to foster political knowledge and engagement, similar to the effects of social media on political attitudes and behaviour described by Akinyetun (2022).

Matthes (2022) contributed a significant perspective by highlighting the potential paradox of social media's influence on political engagement. Matthes theorizes that, while social media holds promise for enhancing democratic engagement among

young adults, the prevalence of non-political, entertainment-oriented content on these platforms might dampen political involvement. This assertion suggests that distractions caused by entertainment-oriented content could undermine the anticipated positive relationship between social media use and political engagement.

Akinyetun's (2021a) study examining the link between social media use, youth civic participation, and activism within Nigeria, particularly focusing on #Endsars protests, further supports our findings. This study highlights how increased social media utilization propels Nigerian youth into more active forms of civic engagement and advocacy, aligning with our assertion that online activism can be a conduit for fostering political awareness.

The findings of this study are corroborated by Akinyetun (2021c), who highlighted the transformative potential of digital platforms in enhancing political awareness, resonating with our observation of the mediating effect of exposure to diverse online information sources on the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge. The significant mediation effect that we identified is also in line with Akinyetun's (2021b) exploration of the correlation between youth political engagement, good governance, and social inclusion in Nigeria. Our research adds weight to the discourse on the transformative role of digital platforms, supporting the notion of utilizing online spaces to bridge the gap between youth and governance.

3.5. Limitations of the Study

In investigating the interplay between online activism, political knowledge, and online information sources among Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections, limitations must be acknowledged. Self-reported data introduce response bias, and snowball sampling could over-represent digitally connected individuals, thus limiting generalizability. Moreover, the context-specificity of the 2023 elections hampers broader applicability. Correlations showed associations, not causation. Online surveys can exclude those with limited digital access. Furthermore, a simplified mediation analysis may overlook these complexities. Cultural specificity affects generalizability. Despite these constraints, this study offers insights into this relationship and urges further research to refine our understanding.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide evidence that engagement in online activism during the 2023 Nigerian elections is positively correlated with heightened levels of political knowledge among Nigerian youth and that the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge is mediated by exposure to diverse online information sources. This discovery offers insights into the pathways through which youth develop political awareness in the context of an evolving digital landscape. This study makes notable contributions to the existing scholarly discourse on the nexus between online activism and political knowledge. By substantiating the relationships among engagement in online activism, exposure to online information sources, and political knowledge, the researcher advances the understanding of the mechanisms underlying political awareness enhancement among Nigerian youth. The findings highlight the importance of encouraging and facilitating engagement in online activism as a means of cultivating political knowledge among Nigerian youths. Moreover, recognizing the mediating role of diverse online information sources underscores the importance of guiding youth toward credible and diverse digital platforms for political information.

Based on these findings, educators should integrate digital literacy education into curricula and emphasize the importance of evaluating online information sources for credibility and bias. Encouraging critical engagement with digital content can empower youths to navigate the vast landscape of online information and discern accurate political information from misinformation. Policymakers and civic organizations should encourage ethical and responsible online activism among Nigerian youths. Platforms for digital advocacy and civic engagement should be promoted as spaces for constructive dialogue and the informed expression of opinions. This approach can help channel the positive energy of online activism toward productive political engagement, enhancing political knowledge, and civic participation.

Policymakers can collaborate with online platforms to curate reliable information hubs encompassing different political perspectives and issues. This would facilitate youth gaining a well-rounded understanding of political matters. Civic education programs should integrate online engagement as a component of their curriculum. Educators can design activities that require students to engage in online political content, critically evaluate sources, and engage in constructive discussions. By

actively participating in online advocacy and discussions, students can translate their theoretical knowledge into practical engagement.

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