

The Impact of Social Media on Political Participation and Public Opinion in Contemporary Societies

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of social media on political participation and public opinion among active social media users in Lagos State, Nigeria, against a rapidly evolving digital landscape shaped by generative artificial intelligence (AI), algorithmic deepfakes, and the 2025 withdrawal of third-party fact-checking by major social media platforms. Guided by the Spiral of Silence Theory, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design and collected data from 397 active social media users aged 18–45 years using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, Weighted Mean Score (WMS), and Simpson's Diversity Index to test the three stated hypotheses and assess the concentration or fragmentation of respondents' opinions. The findings revealed that social media is significantly associated with increased political participation ($\chi^2 = 49.44$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$), with 35.3% of respondents reporting greater involvement in political activities and a Weighted Mean Score of 2.84 indicating a positive engagement tendency. Social media was also found to significantly influence public opinion ($\chi^2 = 108.88$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$), with 50.4% of respondents believing that it disseminates more misleading than accurate political information. Furthermore, respondents identified misinformation (52.8%) and political polarization (25.2%) as the major challenges associated with political communication on social media ($\chi^2 = 191.71$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$), while a Simpson's Diversity Index of 0.63 indicated a moderately concentrated pattern of concern. Consequently, all three null hypotheses were rejected. Respondents identified stronger regulation, improved fact-checking mechanisms, and enhanced media literacy as the most effective strategies for mitigating these challenges. The study concludes that, among active social media users in Lagos State, social media remains an important platform for political engagement; however, its positive contribution can be sustained through greater platform transparency, effective regulatory oversight, and continuous investment in digital and media literacy, particularly in an era of AI-generated content and increasing online misinformation.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Public Opinion, Political Communication, Misinformation & Disinformation

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Introduction

In contemporary societies, social media has become a critical platform for political discourse, activism, and public engagement. It has transformed the traditional landscape of political communication by providing instant and global access to information, enabling citizens to engage in conversations, express opinions, and mobilize for political causes (Smith & Stewart, 2018). Unlike traditional media, which often follows hierarchical communication models, social media allows for peer-to-peer information exchange, fostering more interactive and decentralized political participation (Park & Lee, 2019).

Social media's influence on political participation is evident during elections and political campaigns, where platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play a significant role in shaping voter perceptions and decisions (Oliveira & Pinto, 2020). Additionally, political leaders leverage these platforms to connect directly with constituents, bypassing traditional media filters (Ahmed & Cho, 2019). This direct communication channel enhances transparency and fosters a more personalized political engagement experience for voters.

Moreover, the proliferation of social media has significantly impacted public opinion formation. Through algorithms that curate content based on user preferences, individuals are often exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, contributing to the formation of echo chambers and polarization (Nguyen & Doan, 2021). However, social media can also serve as a tool for cross-ideological dialogues, promoting diverse perspectives when effectively managed (Peterson & Allen, 2022).

Despite the positive aspects, concerns about misinformation and fake news have emerged as significant challenges in contemporary political communication. The rapid dissemination of false information on social media platforms can distort public opinion and undermine democratic processes (Khalid & Younis, 2023). Efforts to combat this issue through fact-checking and digital literacy campaigns are increasingly prioritized by governments and civil society organizations (Martinez & Rivera, 2023).

The growing importance of social media in political participation and public opinion underscores the need for further research to understand its impact in different sociopolitical contexts. Moreover, examining the effectiveness of regulatory measures and public awareness campaigns can help mitigate the negative effects while maximizing the positive outcomes of social media in political engagement.

Developments since 2024 have sharpened these concerns considerably. With more than sixty countries holding national elections in what was widely described as the biggest election year in history, researchers found that generative artificial intelligence was used to produce synthetic political content, including deepfakes, at an unprecedented scale across the UK, European Union, United States, Taiwan, and India, even though most rigorous post-election analyses found no evidence that AI-generated content altered any single election outcome (Pecile, Di Marco, Cinelli & Quattrocio, 2025; CETaS, 2024). Citizens themselves have grown noticeably more anxious about this shift: a cross-national study of the 2024 European Parliament elections found that concerns about generative AI and AI-driven disinformation were widespread even among respondents who reported low direct exposure to synthetic content (Farooq, van den Hoogen, Tulin & de Vreese, 2025). In Africa specifically, disinformation campaigns amplified by algorithms, bots, and increasingly generative tools have been documented across Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa between 2017 and 2023, deepening concerns about the resilience of democratic discourse on the continent (Alberts, 2025).

Platform governance itself has also shifted markedly. In January 2025, Meta announced it would end its third-party fact-checking programme in the United States, replacing it with a crowdsourced Community Notes model similar to that used by X, a change fully implemented by April 2025 (Meta, 2025). This move, alongside the continuing evolution of platform algorithms, has renewed scholarly debate over who bears responsibility for verifying political content online. Consistent with this, the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2025), drawing on nearly 100,000 respondents across 48 countries, found that social media and video platforms had overtaken television as a news

source in the United States for the first time, even as 58% of respondents globally said they found it increasingly difficult to distinguish credible information from falsehood online. At the same time, recent scholarship continues to affirm social media's mobilizing potential: a 2025 panel study of platform-specific effects found that political discussion and news use on social media remain meaningfully linked to offline and online political participation (Durotoye, Goyanes, Berganza & Gil de Zúñiga, 2025), while a 2025 Pew Research Center survey found that 42% of American social media users now consider the platforms personally important for civic and political involvement, a share notably higher among adults under 30 (Pew Research Center, 2025). These developments reinforce, rather than diminish, the continuing relevance of the present study.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal democratic society, social media should serve as a platform that fosters transparent communication, encourages civic engagement, and promotes the dissemination of accurate information. Citizens are expected to access diverse viewpoints, participate actively in political discussions, and make informed decisions that contribute to good governance. Political leaders, in turn, should use these platforms to communicate directly with the public, enhancing transparency and building trust. Ideally, social media should strengthen democratic processes by creating a space for meaningful and inclusive discourse.

However, the increasing reliance on social media for political communication has introduced significant challenges that threaten these ideals. Instead of fostering informed political engagement, these platforms have become breeding grounds for misinformation, fake news, and political propaganda. The algorithms that curate content often expose users to information that reinforces their biases, creating echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Furthermore, rather than empowering constructive political discourse, social media has sometimes fueled cyber harassment and political polarization, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to engage in meaningful conversations about political and social issues.

If these issues are not addressed, the consequences for democratic societies could be severe. The unchecked spread of misinformation may erode public trust in political institutions, leading to increased political apathy and disengagement. The entrenchment of echo chambers may further polarize societies, making consensus-building and effective governance more challenging. Moreover, the misuse of social media for political manipulation poses a significant threat to electoral integrity and democratic accountability, potentially destabilizing political systems. Addressing these issues is crucial to safeguarding democracy and fostering an informed and engaged citizenry.

Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the impact of social media on political participation and public opinion in contemporary societies. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. To examine the role of social media in enhancing political participation and engagement in contemporary societies.
- ii. To analyze the influence of social media on shaping public opinion regarding political issues and governance.
- iii. To identify the challenges and implications of social media usage in political communication and propose strategies for mitigating its negative effects.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions.

- i. How does social media influence the political participation and engagement of citizens in contemporary societies?

- ii. In what ways does social media shape public opinion on political issues and influence perceptions of governance?
- iii. What are the key challenges associated with the use of social media in political communication, and how can these challenges be addressed to promote more constructive discourse?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null form (H_0) guided this study

- i. There is no significant relationship between social media usage and political participation in contemporary societies.
- ii. Social media does not have a significant impact on shaping public opinion regarding political issues and governance.
- iii. There are no significant challenges associated with the use of social media in political communication that affect the quality of political discourse.

Significance of the Study

This study on the impact of social media on political participation and public opinion in contemporary societies offers valuable insights to various individuals and institutions, as outlined below:

- i. **Political Stakeholders:** Politicians, political parties, and campaign strategists can use the findings to understand how social media shapes political engagement. Insights from the study can help them develop more effective strategies for communicating with voters, addressing public concerns, and mobilizing supporters during elections.
- ii. **Government Institutions:** Public agencies can leverage the findings to enhance citizen engagement and build transparent communication channels. Understanding how social media shapes political discourse will assist in managing public perception, fostering dialogue, and ensuring that digital communication remains a vital part of governance.
- iii. **Policy Makers:** Legislators and regulatory bodies can gain insights into the influence of social media on democratic processes. The study provides a basis for crafting balanced regulations that promote healthy online discourse, protect free speech, and prevent the spread of misinformation.
- iv. **Academia and Researchers:** Scholars and students in political science, communication, and media studies can use the findings to expand their research on digital media's influence on political behavior. The study offers a foundation for future investigations into media-driven political dynamics.
- v. **Media Practitioners:** Journalists and media professionals can benefit from the findings by understanding the trends in online political conversations. This can enable them to produce more engaging, accurate, and impactful content that resonates with social media users while countering misinformation.
- vi. **Civil Society Organizations:** Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations can better understand how to use social media platforms for public awareness campaigns, political mobilization, and fostering civic engagement. The study highlights strategies for increasing participation in democratic processes.
- vii. **Social Media Platform Developers:** The findings can guide platform designers in creating features that encourage meaningful political discussions while curbing the spread of harmful content. Social media companies may also benefit from insights into content moderation and user engagement.
- viii. **General Public:** Citizens stand to benefit from increased awareness of how social media influences their political participation and opinion formation. The study encourages critical thinking and responsible online engagement, empowering individuals to make informed political decisions and contribute constructively to digital political spaces.

- ix. **Media Analysts and Communication Experts:** The findings of this study will help media analysts and communication experts understand the role of social media in shaping political communication and public discourse. This can assist them in crafting content that promotes healthy political engagement and counteracts misinformation.

Definition of Terms

The following terms operationalized the study:

- i. **Social Media:** Digital communication platforms, including Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where users interact by sharing text, images, videos, and audio. In this study, it encompasses the use of these platforms for political discussions, mobilization, advocacy, and information sharing, thereby influencing political participation and public opinion.
- ii. **Political Participation:** The active involvement of individuals in political processes, including voting in elections, attending political rallies, participating in political debates, sharing political opinions on social media, and contributing to discussions that shape political agendas. In this context, it highlights the role of digital platforms in fostering engagement in democratic processes.
- iii. **Public Opinion:** The collective attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals within a society concerning political leaders, issues, policies, or events. It is shaped through interpersonal interactions and increasingly through social media discussions, where trending topics and viral content significantly influence societal views and decision-making.
- iv. **Contemporary Societies:** Modern social environments characterized by advanced communication technologies, dynamic cultural exchanges, and evolving political landscapes. In this study, contemporary societies refer to communities where digital media platforms have become integral to daily life and play a pivotal role in political communication and public discourse.
- v. **Political Stakeholders:** Key players in the political ecosystem, including elected officials, political party members, campaign managers, policymakers, media personnel, and civil society organizations. These stakeholders use social media platforms to communicate with the public, gather feedback, and mobilize political support.
- vi. **Digital Engagement:** Active participation in online activities, including sharing, commenting, and creating content related to political issues on social media platforms. This engagement may involve political advocacy, discussions on governance, and interactions that influence political decision-making.
- vii. **Civic Engagement:** The participation of individuals or groups in activities aimed at influencing public policies or social issues. In this study, it focuses on the use of social media as a tool to foster civic consciousness, encourage political involvement, and mobilize collective action for societal development.
- viii. **Social Media Platforms:** Digital applications and websites that facilitate communication, content sharing, and networking. Examples include Facebook, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. These platforms serve as virtual spaces where political content is shared, public opinions are formed, and political mobilization occurs.
- ix. **Political Communication:** The process through which political information is exchanged between political actors, media organizations, and the public. In the context of this study, social media is a critical channel for political communication, enabling real-time interactions, debates, and dissemination of political messages.
- x. **Hashtag Activism:** The use of hashtags on social media to raise awareness, mobilize support, and advocate for political and social causes. In this study, it refers to campaigns such as #EndSARS, where hashtags become tools for collective action and political mobilization.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Concept of Political Engagement

Political engagement encompasses activities through which individuals participate in shaping public policies and governance (Evans and Monroe, 2019). It involves voting, attending political meetings, participating in protests, and engaging in political discussions both online and offline. Research has highlighted the increasing role of young people in political engagement, especially with the growing influence of social media in mobilizing political participation (Stevens & Akram, 2023).

The digital era has revolutionized how people engage politically. Social media platforms have become essential for disseminating information and facilitating political discussions. A study by (Harper and Lawson, 2021) found that digital platforms empower marginalized groups by amplifying their voices and mobilizing grassroots movements. This shift has made political engagement more inclusive, allowing broader participation in political processes.

Educational institutions also play a pivotal role in fostering political engagement. According to research by (Lincoln and Vickers, 2022), integrating civic education into school curricula significantly increases students' likelihood of engaging in political activities. This is particularly important in democratic societies where civic knowledge is essential for informed decision-making and participation in governance.

Despite these advancements, challenges such as declining voter turnout persist. Research by Taylor and Henderson (2020) indicates that socioeconomic disparities continue to hinder voter participation, with lower-income groups facing obstacles such as limited access to polling stations. Addressing these issues requires targeted policy interventions, including voter education and reforms to enhance accessibility.

Moreover, political engagement is influenced by perceptions of political polarization. observed that although media narratives often emphasize divisions, many individuals share common policy goals and civic values. Recognizing these shared interests can foster more constructive political discourse and encourage collaborative approaches to governance. Furthermore, sustained efforts to promote civic education and reform electoral processes can enhance political engagement and strengthen democratic participation.

Public Opinion Formation

Public opinion formation refers to the process through which individuals develop their perceptions and attitudes toward societal issues, political matters, or other collective interests. Various factors, including personal experiences, social interactions, and exposure to media, shape public opinion. Scholars argue that media remains one of the most significant influences, providing the public with the information needed to form opinions (Marin & Hughes, 2020).

The role of social media in shaping public opinion has become increasingly pronounced. Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram allow individuals to access diverse viewpoints and engage in discussions that influence their perceptions (Anderson & Moore, 2023). According to Chen and Rutherford (2019), social media can amplify minority opinions and create a dynamic environment where opinions rapidly evolve. However, echo chambers often reinforce pre-existing beliefs, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.

Family and peer groups also play a critical role in opinion formation. Conversations within social circles provide individuals with opportunities to discuss and evaluate societal issues. Research by Okafor and Adewale (2021) found that young adults are more likely to adopt political stances similar to their parents' beliefs. Additionally, peer influence was noted to be more significant when individuals lacked a strong initial opinion.

Educational institutions contribute to shaping public opinion by fostering critical thinking and awareness of societal issues. Kelechi and Osakwe (2022) emphasized that exposure to civic education helps students evaluate information more critically and form more informed opinions. This highlights the importance of integrating discussions on current affairs into educational curricula to promote active citizenship.

Moreover, public opinion is not static; it changes in response to events and shifting societal narratives. Governments and organizations often monitor public sentiment to inform policy decisions and marketing strategies. Further exploration of how media and educational institutions influence opinions is vital for enhancing civic engagement and political participation. Moreover, efforts to foster critical media literacy and open discussions are essential for nurturing a well-informed populace.

Social Media Influence

Social media influence refers to the impact social networking platforms have on shaping opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making patterns. These platforms provide spaces where information is shared quickly and widely, influencing both individual and societal perspectives. According to Ibeh and Okeke (2019), the immediacy and vast reach of social media have made it a dominant channel for public communication and engagement. Consequently, social media has become an essential tool for personal interactions and organizational communication.

Social media plays a critical role in political mobilization and activism. Platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) have been used to organize protests and share political content that shapes discourse and engagement. Research by Eze and Olorunfemi (2021) demonstrated that social media campaigns contributed significantly to voter turnout among young Nigerians. This underscores the power of these platforms in facilitating democratic processes and creating political awareness.

In the context of marketing and consumer behavior, social media has revolutionized brand-customer relationships. As noted by (Afolabi and Udeh, 2020), brands leverage influencers and social media campaigns to build trust and drive sales. The interactive nature of social media enables companies to receive immediate feedback from customers, fostering a collaborative market environment. This trend has reshaped traditional advertising and led to more personalized marketing strategies.

The spread of misinformation and cyberbullying are significant concerns associated with social media influence. The rapid dissemination of false information can damage reputations and mislead the public. (Akindele and Salawu, 2023) emphasized that implementing fact-checking mechanisms and promoting digital literacy can mitigate these challenges. It remains imperative for users to critically evaluate content and verify sources before sharing information.

Moreover, the influence of social media continues to evolve with emerging technologies and shifting societal dynamics. It has transformed how people communicate, engage politically, and make decisions regarding brands and products. Moreover, its pervasive nature underscores the need for responsible use, ethical standards, and regulatory frameworks to harness its positive impacts while mitigating the adverse effects.

The most consequential recent shift in social media's political influence has been the mainstreaming of generative artificial intelligence. During the 2024 global election cycle, AI tools were used to fabricate synthetic speeches, images, and videos of candidates, incite hatred against opponents, and blur the line between authentic and manufactured political content (CETaS, 2024). A comparative content analysis of Facebook activity by political parties and news outlets across Europe, Mexico, and India similarly found that AI-assisted content shaped the topics and engagement patterns of political discourse throughout the 2024 election cycle (Pecile, Di Marco, Cinelli & Quattrocchi, 2025). Encouragingly, evidence so far suggests that such content has tended to reinforce pre-existing beliefs rather than convert undecided voters, meaning its aggregate influence on election results remains

limited even as its potential for targeted harm, such as deepfake smears against individual candidates, has grown (CETaS, 2024; Farooq, van den Hoogen, Tulin & de Vreese, 2025).

Digital Democracy

Digital democracy refers to the use of digital technologies and online platforms to facilitate political participation, enhance civic engagement, and promote transparency in governance. The widespread adoption of digital tools has transformed how citizens interact with governments and express their opinions. Recent studies indicate that online petitions, e-voting, and social media campaigns have significantly increased citizen involvement in democratic processes (Ahmed & Bello, 2019).

The role of social media in digital democracy is particularly noteworthy. Platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) have become essential spaces for political discussions and activism. (Adebayo and Ifeanyi, 2020) observed that these platforms empower marginalized voices and provide avenues for mass mobilization during protests. However, they also noted the challenge of disinformation, which can undermine the quality of democratic discourse.

Furthermore, the introduction of e-governance has improved government efficiency and accessibility. Digital portals now enable citizens to access government services, submit complaints, and participate in decision-making processes. According to (Onwudiwe and Okechukwu, 2022), such digital transformations have reduced bureaucratic bottlenecks and enhanced public trust in governance. However, the digital divide remains a critical issue, with limited access to technology hindering participation in some regions.

Data security and privacy concerns also affect digital democracy. As governments adopt digital solutions, the protection of citizen data becomes paramount. (Balogun and Abimbola, 2021) emphasized the importance of robust cybersecurity measures to safeguard personal information and ensure the integrity of democratic processes. They further highlighted the need for comprehensive legal frameworks to address these concerns.

Digital democracy continues to evolve, driven by technological advancements and changing political landscapes. Moreso, the successful integration of digital tools in democratic governance depends on promoting digital literacy, strengthening cybersecurity, and addressing issues of inclusivity and misinformation to ensure equitable participation and transparent governance.

The year 2024 has since been described as the largest test of digital democracy to date, with roughly half of the world's population eligible to vote in national elections held that year (Pecile, Di Marco, Cinelli & Quattrociochi, 2025). Editorial synthesis of the growing research agenda around social media and political participation continues to affirm that platforms remain the most accessible space for citizen voice and mobilization, even as algorithmic curation entrenches echo chambers and exposes users to coordinated propaganda (Nair, Eberwein & Sparkes-Vian, 2025). Similarly, a large-scale 2025 panel study distinguishing the effects of individual platforms, including Facebook, X, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Reddit, found that political discussion network ties formed through social media continue to meaningfully predict both online and offline political participation, reinforcing that digital democracy's promise remains substantively linked to how citizens use, and are exposed to, distinct platforms rather than "social media" as an undifferentiated whole (Durotoye, Goyanes, Berganza & Gil de Zúñiga, 2025).

Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information shared without the intent to deceive, while disinformation involves the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information to mislead audiences. The proliferation of digital platforms has accelerated the spread of both forms of content, undermining public trust in information sources. According to (Olayinka and Adewale, 2020), the widespread use of social media has made it easier for misinformation and disinformation to go viral, often influencing political, social, and economic narratives.

One key challenge in addressing misinformation is the lack of media literacy among users. Many individuals struggle to differentiate between credible and non-credible sources. (Eze and Chukwuma, 2019) highlighted that promoting media literacy is essential for equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate online content and make informed decisions. They further emphasized the importance of educational campaigns in mitigating the harmful effects of false information.

Disinformation is often strategically deployed during elections and political campaigns to manipulate public perception. An empirical study by (Yusuf and Hassan, 2022) found that coordinated disinformation campaigns in Nigeria significantly impacted voter behavior and electoral outcomes. These campaigns frequently exploit identity politics and societal divisions, making their impact particularly disruptive.

Efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation have led to the emergence of fact-checking organizations and technological solutions. Platforms such as FactCheck Nigeria have been instrumental in verifying the authenticity of viral claims. According to (Oladapo and Ibekwe, 2023), collaboration between social media companies, governments, and civil society is crucial for tackling the problem at its roots. They recommended stricter regulations and algorithmic adjustments to reduce the visibility of false content.

Moreover, as the digital landscape continues to evolve, combating misinformation and disinformation requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving education, policy, and technological advancements. Moreover, fostering a culture of accountability and responsible content sharing remains vital for ensuring accurate and reliable information in public discourse.

A significant recent test of this multi-stakeholder approach came in January 2025, when Meta announced it would end its third-party fact-checking programme, which had partnered with more than ninety certified organizations across over sixty languages since 2016, and replace it in the United States with a crowdsourced Community Notes model modelled on that used by X (Meta, 2025). The change, fully rolled out by April 2025, shifts the burden of verifying political content from professional fact-checkers to community contributors and has divided opinion between those who view it as a correction of perceived bias and those who warn it will widen the space for unchecked misinformation. Consistent with these concerns, the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2025) found that 58% of respondents across 48 countries said they now found it harder to tell real news from fake content online, alongside a marked rise in reliance on social media and video platforms, including in African markets such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, for news and political information. Within Africa, Alberts (2025) similarly found consistently high perceived exposure to disinformation and correspondingly low trust in social and national media across Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa between 2017 and 2023, underscoring that the misinformation challenge identified in earlier Nigerian studies (Olayinka & Adewale, 2020; Oladapo & Ibekwe, 2023) has persisted and, if anything, intensified.

Political Communication Strategies

Political communication strategies refer to the systematic methods used by political actors to convey messages and influence public perception. These strategies are crucial during election campaigns and in maintaining public trust. The advent of digital platforms has transformed traditional approaches to political communication. According to Okonkwo and Aliyu (2019), politicians increasingly use social media to engage directly with voters, bypassing conventional media gatekeepers and promoting personalized narratives.

Message framing is a vital component of political communication. Effective framing enables politicians to highlight specific aspects of an issue while downplaying others. (Adebayo and Omotayo, 2021) emphasized that framing techniques play a significant role in shaping voter attitudes and policy preferences. They further noted that narratives around economic growth and national security tend to resonate more with the electorate in developing countries.

Targeted advertising is another essential political communication strategy. With advancements in data analytics, political campaigns can segment audiences and deliver tailored messages. A study by (Ezeocha and Nwankwo, 2022) revealed that data-driven political advertising significantly influenced voting patterns in Nigeria. The authors highlighted that campaigns leveraging digital analytics achieved higher voter engagement rates.

Moreover, crisis communication strategies are critical for managing political scandals and controversies. (Ogundipe and Hassan, 2023) argued that swift and transparent communication during crises can mitigate reputational damage and restore public trust. They recommended that political actors adopt proactive media engagement and consistent messaging during crisis periods to maintain credibility. Political communication strategies continue to evolve with technological advancements and changing voter expectations. Moreso, collaboration between political communication experts, data analysts, and media professionals is essential to developing innovative and effective campaign approaches that resonate with diverse audience segments

Theoretical Review

This study was theoretically underpinned on the Spiral of Silence Theory

The Spiral of Silence Theory

The Spiral of Silence Theory, proposed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, posits that individuals are less likely to express their opinions if they perceive that their views are in the minority or not widely supported. This fear of social isolation leads to a "spiral" where the dominant opinion becomes increasingly amplified, while minority opinions are silenced. The theory suggests that media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion by influencing individuals' perceptions of the majority view and, consequently, their willingness to engage in public discourse.

Relevance to the Study

- i. **Influence of Social Media on Political Participation:** Social media can create an environment where certain political opinions become amplified due to algorithmic filtering and user behavior. Individuals may be reluctant to share opposing or minority political views, fearing social isolation or backlash from their online communities. The Spiral of Silence Theory helps explain why people may refrain from engaging in political discourse or activism, despite being active on social media.
- ii. **Shaping of Public Opinion:** Social media platforms, driven by algorithms, tend to prioritize content that aligns with users' pre-existing beliefs and preferences. This can create an illusion of consensus, where individuals feel their opinions are in line with the majority. As a result, those with differing views may feel discouraged from expressing themselves, reinforcing the dominance of popular political opinions. The Spiral of Silence Theory is crucial in understanding how social media may shape and limit the diversity of public opinion on political issues.
- iii. **Political Polarization and Echo Chambers:** Social media can create echo chambers where users are exposed primarily to views that reinforce their existing beliefs. The Spiral of Silence Theory is useful in explaining how this selective exposure can further entrench political polarization. Users who feel their political views are unpopular or contrary to the majority may choose to remain silent, deepening divides and inhibiting productive political discourse.
- iv. **Civic Engagement and Disengagement:** The theory highlights the importance of perceived social support in motivating individuals to participate in public discussions. In the context of social media, if users perceive that their political views are unpopular or that they risk social rejection, they may opt out of political engagement entirely. This theory is valuable in understanding why certain individuals may feel alienated from political participation, leading to lower levels of civic engagement.

Empirical Review

Alodat, Al-Qora'n, and Hamoud (2023) employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to analyze survey data from 334 Jordanian youth. The study found that social media positively influences political participation. Gender was identified as a moderating factor, positively affecting the relationship between the frequency of social media use and political engagement while negatively moderating the relationship between the purpose of social media usage and political participation.

Sjoraida, Guna, Nungraha, Amri, Santosa, and Suar (2024) conducted a qualitative literature review by analyzing previous studies on social media and political participation. The findings revealed that social media significantly enhances political engagement by expanding access to political information and mobilizing public participation. However, challenges such as the digital divide and imbalances in social media usage were also identified.

Aina and Afolaranmi (2025) used a questionnaire distributed through Qualtrics to a convenience sample of 500 Facebook users in Nigeria. Data were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, and Linear Regression. The findings revealed that social media significantly influenced political discourse, public opinion, and political expression during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, contributing to political polarization and propaganda without increasing the spread of misinformation.

Kim (2023) conducted a secondary analysis of survey data from a representative sample of 5,010 South Koreans collected by the Korea Press Foundation. The study found that different types of social media news usage were associated with participatory behaviors. Informational use was not significantly related, while relational and expressive use positively influenced civic and political engagement. Additionally, online video platforms were identified as the most beneficial for fostering engagement.

Guanah (2025) conducted a survey of 500 participants from Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. The study found that social media significantly influence political participation, with citizens engaging in discussions, sharing information, and social advocacy. Various social media platforms were used for political participation, highlighting the need for online civic education and awareness on using social media for political activities.

Durotoye, Goyanes, Berganza, and Gil de Zúñiga (2025) used US panel data and a combination of ordinary least squares causal autoregressive regression and autoregressive structural equation modelling to examine how news use on seven distinct platforms, including Facebook, X, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Reddit, relates to political discussion and participation over time. The study found that platform effects are not uniform: some platforms more strongly predicted discussion with weak-tie networks, while others were more closely linked to participation carried out directly within social media itself, challenging the tendency in earlier research to treat "social media use" as a single undifferentiated variable.

Chukwu (2025) conducted a comparative review of social media's role in Nigeria's 2015, 2019, and 2023 election campaigns. The study found that while social media consistently enhanced voter engagement and awareness across all three election cycles, it also increasingly facilitated the spread of misleading content, recommending digital literacy programmes and clearer regulatory frameworks as the electoral cycles progressed.

Alberts (2025) examined social media disinformation campaigns and voter behaviour across Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa between 2017 and 2023, drawing on data concerning political marketing, propaganda, and computational tools such as algorithms, bots, and deepfakes. The study found that the digital revolution has amplified the scale and sophistication of disinformation across all three countries, though the specific vulnerabilities and levels of media trust varied by national context.

Farooq, van den Hoogen, Tulin, and de Vreese (2025) surveyed citizens in the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland around the 2024 European Parliament elections to assess perceptions of generative AI and AI-driven disinformation. The study found that concern about generative AI was widespread and did not always correspond directly to self-

reported exposure, with country-specific factors, including prior high-profile deepfake incidents, shaping how citizens perceived the threat.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a survey research design to examine the impact of social media on political participation and public opinion in contemporary societies. The survey method is suited for this study due to its ability to gather a large amount of data from a broad spectrum of respondents, ensuring representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria, the country's commercial and economic hub, renowned for its large, diverse population and one of the highest rates of internet and social media usage in the country. The state provides a dynamic socio-political environment where citizens actively engage with political information, public discourse, and civic activities through digital platforms. Lagos State was selected because its high level of internet penetration and widespread adoption of social media make it an appropriate setting for examining the influence of social media on political participation and public opinion among active users..

Population of the study

The target population for this study comprised active social media users aged 18–45 years residing in Lagos State, Nigeria. This age group was selected because it constitutes the segment of the population that is most actively engaged with social media platforms and is more likely to participate in online political discussions and civic engagement. Nigeria recorded over 103 million internet users and approximately 36.2 million social media users in early 2024, with Lagos State accounting for a substantial proportion of these users owing to its high population density, urbanization, and internet penetration. For the purpose of this study, the accessible population was estimated at approximately 50,000 active social media users within the selected study area in Lagos State, from which the study sample was drawn.

Sample Size

To determine the appropriate sample size, Taro Yamane's formula was used. The formula for calculating the sample size is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = total population

e = margin of error (0.05)

Using a population size of 50,000 and a margin of error of 0.05, the sample size calculation is:

$$n = \frac{50,000}{1+50,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{50,000}{1+50,000(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{50,000}{1+125}$$

$$n = \frac{50,000}{126}$$
$$N = 397$$

Thus, the sample size required for the study was **397** individuals.

Sampling Techniques

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure that different subgroups within the population were represented. The population was first divided into subgroups based on factors such as age, gender, and level of social media engagement. A random sample was then drawn from each subgroup to achieve a representative sample that reflected the diversity of the target population.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to capture the impact of social media on political participation and public opinion. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions, focusing on respondents' frequency of social media use, their political engagement, and their views on the influence of social media on political processes.

Validity of Instrument

The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through content validity. Experts in the field of political science and communication reviewed the instrument to confirm that the questions were relevant to the research objectives and accurately measured the intended constructs. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to improve clarity and alignment with the study's goals.

Reliability of Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 50 respondents, and the results yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.85, indicating high reliability.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected through both surveys and interviews. The survey was administered online to the selected sample of 397 individuals, with responses collected via Google Forms. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a smaller subset of 20 participants who had expressed a strong interest in the topic. These interviews allowed for a more detailed exploration of the issues raised in the survey and provided qualitative insights into the respondents' perspectives on social media's influence on political participation and public opinion.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics, namely frequency counts and simple percentages, were used to summarize the distribution of responses for each survey question, consistent with prior studies in this area. Second, and going beyond a purely descriptive treatment, inferential and diagnostic analytical tools were applied to test the three stated null hypotheses and to characterize the underlying structure of the opinion data more rigorously:

- i. **Chi-square (χ^2) Goodness-of-Fit Test:** For each survey item linked to a hypothesis, a one-sample Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was computed to determine whether the observed distribution of responses departed significantly from an equal (uniform) distribution across response categories. A significant χ^2 value ($p < .05$) indicates that respondents' views are not randomly or evenly spread across options, supporting rejection of the corresponding null hypothesis.

- ii. **Weighted Mean Score (WMS):** For ordinal scaled items (Tables 1-3), response categories were assigned descending weights (4, 3, 2, 1) and a weighted mean was computed as $\Sigma(f \times w) / n$. A WMS above the midpoint of 2.50 indicates a net tendency toward the more favourable or frequent end of the scale, while a WMS below 2.50 indicates the reverse.
- iii. **Simpson's Diversity Index (D):** To assess how concentrated or fragmented respondent opinion was on each item, Simpson's Index, $D = 1 - \Sigma p_i^2$, was computed from the response proportions. Values closer to 1 indicate opinion is broadly dispersed across options (fragmentation), while values closer to 0 indicate opinion is concentrated around one dominant response.

These tools were computed directly from the survey's own frequency distributions and required no additional data collection. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis, which helped to complement and contextualize the statistical findings from the survey data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: How often do you engage with political content (e.g., news, debates, campaigns) on social media?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Daily	150	37.8%
Weekly	100	25.2%
Occasionally	95	23.9%
Never	52	13.1%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on how frequently they engage with political content on social media. A significant portion of the respondents, 37.8%, reported engaging with political content daily, indicating a high level of engagement with political discussions and issues on social media platforms. Following this, 25.2% of respondents engage with political content on a weekly basis, while 23.9% reported occasional engagement. A smaller group, 13.1%, indicated that they never engage with political content on social media. This suggests that while social media serves as an important tool for political participation, a considerable portion of the population either engages infrequently or not at all, which could have implications for the reach and influence of political messages.

Table 2: Has your political participation (e.g., voting, attending rallies, online discussions) increased due to social media engagement?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes, significantly	120	30.2%
Yes, to some extent	140	35.3%
No change	90	22.7%
No, it has decreased	47	11.8%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on whether their political participation has increased due to social media engagement. A notable 35.3% of respondents reported that their political participation had increased to some extent because of social media, indicating that these platforms have played a role in engaging individuals in political activities. Furthermore, 30.2% of respondents indicated a significant increase in their political participation due to social media, underscoring the powerful influence these platforms have on encouraging involvement in political processes. On the other hand, 22.7% of respondents felt no change in their political participation, suggesting that social media has not had an impact for some individuals. Lastly, 11.8% of respondents reported that their political participation has decreased due to social media, possibly reflecting the negative effects or disengagement some users may experience from online political content.

Table 3: To what extent do you believe social media influences your opinions on political issues?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Strongly influences	160	40.3%
Moderately influences	130	32.8%
Slightly influences	85	21.4%
Does not influence	22	5.6%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the extent to which social media influences their opinions on political issues. A significant 40.3% of respondents stated that social media strongly influences their political opinions, reflecting the significant role social media plays in shaping political perspectives. Additionally, 32.8% of respondents felt that social media moderately influences their political views, further highlighting its impact on public opinion. A smaller portion, 21.4%, indicated that social media only slightly influences their opinions, while only 5.6% of respondents reported that social media does not influence their political views at all. This suggests that, overall, social media is an important tool in shaping political opinions, though its influence may vary among individuals.

Table 4: Do you think social media platforms contribute to spreading accurate or misleading information about political matters?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Mostly accurate information	70	17.6%
Mostly misleading information	200	50.4%
Both equally	95	23.9%
Neither, it's neutral	32	8.1%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on whether social media platforms contribute to spreading accurate or misleading information about political matters. A majority, 50.4%, of respondents believed that social media platforms primarily spread misleading information about political issues, indicating concerns about the credibility and accuracy of political content on these platforms. Additionally, 23.9% of respondents felt that social media disseminates both accurate and misleading information equally, highlighting the mixed nature of content on these platforms. A smaller proportion, 17.6%, thought that social media mostly provides accurate information, while 8.1% of respondents viewed social media as neutral in its contribution to political information. This suggests that while social media is a crucial source of political information, it is also perceived by many as a platform that can propagate misinformation, which raises concerns about its role in political communication.

Table 5: What do you think is the biggest challenge posed by social media in political communication?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Spread of misinformation	210	52.8%
Polarization of opinions	100	25.2%
Manipulation of public opinion	60	15.1%
Privacy concerns	27	6.8%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the biggest challenge posed by social media in political communication. A significant majority, 52.8%, identified the spread of misinformation as the greatest challenge, reflecting widespread concerns about the accuracy and trustworthiness of political content on social media platforms. The second most common challenge, cited by 25.2% of respondents, was the polarization of opinions, suggesting that social media may contribute to divisions and the intensification of political ideologies. Furthermore,

15.1% of respondents highlighted the manipulation of public opinion as a major concern, pointing to the potential for external actors to sway political views through targeted campaigns. Lastly, 6.8% of respondents viewed privacy concerns as the biggest challenge, emphasizing the risks associated with the collection and use of personal data in the context of political communication. These results underscore the complex issues surrounding social media's role in politics and highlight the need for effective strategies to address these challenges.

Table 6: What strategy do you believe would most effectively address the negative effects of social media in political discourse?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency (n=397)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Increased regulation and fact-checking	180	45.3%
Encouraging media literacy and critical thinking	130	32.8%
Strengthening privacy laws	50	12.6%
Limiting the use of social media during elections	37	9.3%
Total	397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the most effective strategy for addressing the negative effects of social media in political discourse. The majority of respondents, 45.3%, believed that increased regulation and fact-checking would be the most effective approach, suggesting that ensuring the accuracy of information on social media platforms is a priority. Following this, 32.8% of respondents advocated for encouraging media literacy and critical thinking as a means to help individuals better navigate political content online. A smaller proportion, 12.6%, felt that strengthening privacy laws would help mitigate negative effects, emphasizing the importance of protecting personal data in the political context. Lastly, 9.3% of respondents supported limiting the use of social media during elections, possibly to reduce the risk of misinformation and manipulation during sensitive political periods. These results highlight a strong preference for regulatory and educational measures to address the challenges posed by social media in political communication.

Test of Hypotheses

Beyond the descriptive picture presented above, the three null hypotheses guiding this study were formally tested using the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test, and the underlying response patterns were further characterized using Weighted Mean Scores (for ordinal items) and Simpson's Diversity Index. For each hypothesis, the critical Chi-square value at 3 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 significance level is 7.815; an observed χ^2 greater than this value leads to rejection of the null hypothesis.

Table 7: Summary of Chi-square Goodness-of-Fit Tests

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Table</i>	<i>χ^2</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Decision</i>
H0-1: No significant relationship between SM usage and political participation	1	48.63	3	< .001	Rejected
H0-1 (continued)	2	49.44	3	< .001	Rejected
H0-2: SM has no significant impact on shaping public opinion	3	108.88	3	< .001	Rejected
H0-2 (continued)	4	156.64	3	< .001	Rejected
H0-3: No significant challenges from SM use in political communication	5	191.71	3	< .001	Rejected
H0-3 (continued)	6	138.71	3	< .001	Rejected

Source: Computed from Field Survey data, 2026

In every case, the computed χ^2 statistic far exceeds the critical value of 7.815, and the associated p-values are well below the conventional 0.05 threshold. All three null hypotheses are therefore rejected, indicating that respondents' views are not randomly distributed across response options but instead cluster in statistically significant, non-random patterns. This provides stronger, formally tested evidence for the study's central claims than descriptive

percentages alone: social media usage is significantly related to political participation, significantly shapes public opinion, and presents statistically significant, non-trivial challenges in political communication.

Table 8: Weighted Mean Score and Simpson's Diversity Index Analysis

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>WMS</i>	<i>Simpson's D</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Table 1: Frequency of political engagement	2.88	0.72	Above midpoint; dispersed
Table 2: Increase in political participation	2.84	0.72	Above midpoint; dispersed
Table 3: Extent of influence on opinion	3.08	0.68	Above midpoint; moderate dispersion
Table 4: Perceived accuracy of information	–	0.65	Concentrated (misleading dominant)
Table 5: Biggest challenge posed by SM	–	0.63	Concentrated (misinformation dominant)
Table 6: Most effective mitigation strategy	–	0.66	Concentrated (regulation dominant)

Source: Computed from Field Survey data, 2026

The Weighted Mean Scores for Tables 1 to 3 all exceed the theoretical midpoint of 2.50, confirming a net positive tendency toward frequent engagement, perceived increases in participation, and a strong perceived influence on opinion, respectively. Simpson's Diversity Index values across all six items range from 0.63 to 0.72, indicating that while respondent opinion is not perfectly uniform, it is also not dominated by a single overwhelming response; rather, opinion is moderately concentrated around one or two leading options (for instance, "mostly misleading information" in Table 4 and "spread of misinformation" in Table 5) while still reflecting meaningful diversity of experience. This pattern is consistent with, and lends empirical support to, the Spiral of Silence Theory underpinning this study: dominant perceptions (for example, that social media spreads more misleading than accurate information) appear to crowd out, without fully eliminating, minority viewpoints.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the key findings:

- i. The findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in political engagement, with a large proportion of respondents (37.8%) engaging with political content daily. A considerable number (35.3%) reported that their political participation had increased due to social media, highlighting the platforms' influence in fostering political involvement. However, there remains a section of the population (22.7%) who feels that their participation has not been impacted, and a smaller group (11.8%) believes their participation has decreased due to social media.
- ii. The study reveals that social media strongly influences public opinion on political matters, with 40.3% of respondents stating that their views are strongly shaped by online political content. Additionally, a majority (50.4%) believed that social media platforms spread more misleading information than accurate content. This reflects concerns over the reliability and credibility of political messages on these platforms, which can contribute to misinformation and confusion in political discourse.
- iii. The findings highlight that misinformation (52.8%) is perceived as the biggest challenge posed by social media in political communication, followed by the polarization of opinions (25.2%). To address these issues, the majority of respondents (45.3%) supported the idea of increasing regulation and fact-checking on social media platforms. Additionally, 32.8% emphasized the need for promoting media literacy and critical thinking, while 12.6% suggested strengthening privacy laws. These results emphasize the importance of both regulatory measures and educational initiatives to combat the negative effects of social media on political discourse.
- iv. Chi-square goodness-of-fit testing confirmed that the patterns observed above are statistically significant rather than attributable to chance: all three null hypotheses were rejected (Table 1: $\chi^2 = 48.63$; Table 2: $\chi^2 = 49.44$; Table 3: $\chi^2 = 108.88$; Table 4: $\chi^2 = 156.64$; Table 5: $\chi^2 = 191.71$; Table 6: $\chi^2 = 138.71$; all $p < .001$). Weighted Mean Score analysis further confirmed a net positive tendency toward political engagement and

participation (WMS = 2.88 and 2.84 respectively) and a strong perceived influence on opinion (WMS = 3.08), while Simpson's Diversity Index values of 0.63 to 0.72 indicate that respondent opinion, though not uniform, is moderately concentrated around dominant concerns such as misinformation and polarization rather than evenly dispersed.

- v. These findings sit within a rapidly evolving external environment. The emergence of generative AI-enabled disinformation during the 2024 global election cycle (Pecile, Di Marco, Cinelli & Quattrociocchi, 2025; CETaS, 2024) and Meta's 2025 shift away from third-party fact-checking toward a crowdsourced Community Notes model (Meta, 2025) mean that the misinformation concerns identified in this study are, if anything, more urgent today than when the underlying survey data were collected.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant role social media plays in political participation and shaping public opinion in contemporary societies. Many respondents reported increased engagement with political content on social media, reflecting the platforms' influence in boosting political awareness and involvement. However, not all respondents felt the same impact, with some reporting little to no change in their political participation, and others even feeling less engaged. This variation suggests that while social media can enhance political participation for some individuals, its effect can differ based on personal preferences and experiences.

The study also draws attention to concerns about the spread of misinformation and misleading content on social media. A large proportion of respondents expressed doubt about the accuracy of political information shared on these platforms, which can contribute to shaping public opinion in ways that may not be fully reliable. The rapid spread of information, coupled with the potential for misinformation, raises concerns about the credibility of political discourse. Additionally, the study points to the role social media plays in deepening political polarization, which further complicates the public's ability to engage in balanced political discussions.

To address these challenges, respondents suggested several strategies aimed at improving the quality of political communication on social media. Among the top suggestions were stronger regulation and fact-checking, as well as promoting media literacy to help users better assess the accuracy of the information they encounter. These recommendations reflect a growing recognition of the need for a balanced approach, where the benefits of social media as a platform for political engagement are preserved, but safeguards are also put in place to ensure that political communication remains accurate and constructive.

Importantly, the Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests conducted in this study confirm that these patterns are not artefacts of chance but statistically robust features of how respondents engage with, and perceive, social media in the political sphere (all $p < .001$ across the three hypotheses). This lends firmer empirical weight to the study's conclusions than descriptive percentages alone could provide. These conclusions also gain new urgency in light of developments since 2024: the proliferation of generative AI-enabled political content during that year's unprecedented global election cycle, and Meta's 2025 decision to end third-party fact-checking on its platforms in favour of a crowdsourced Community Notes model, both suggest that the verification infrastructure surrounding political information online is, at present, weaker rather than stronger than when this study's data were collected. Sustaining social media's positive contribution to political participation, this study concludes, will depend on whether regulators, platforms, and citizens themselves can adapt their safeguards at the same pace as the technology reshaping the information environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. To combat the spread of misinformation, it is crucial to implement stronger regulatory frameworks and fact-checking systems on social media platforms. Social media companies should invest in technologies and partnerships with independent fact-checking organizations to verify political content before it goes viral. This could significantly reduce the distribution of false or misleading information, ensuring that users are exposed to more accurate and reliable political discourse.
- ii. Given the concerns about misinformation and polarization, there is a pressing need to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills among social media users. Educational campaigns should focus on helping individuals identify credible sources, understand the importance of verifying information, and engage critically with political content online. Schools, universities, and community organizations can play a vital role in equipping citizens with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of political communication in the digital age.
- iii. To address concerns about manipulation and the polarization of political views, social media platforms should enforce greater transparency in political advertising. This includes providing clear disclosures about who is funding political ads and how targeting algorithms work. By ensuring that users are aware of the intent and origin of political advertisements, social media platforms can help mitigate the risk of external influence on public opinion and promote more informed political participation.
- iv. Given the demonstrated use of generative AI to produce synthetic political content, including deepfakes, during the 2024 global election cycle, platforms and regulators should mandate clear labelling of AI-generated or AI-altered political media and invest in detection infrastructure capable of flagging such content before it goes viral. This is particularly urgent following Meta's 2025 withdrawal from third-party fact-checking, which shifts a greater share of verification responsibility onto crowdsourced Community Notes contributors and, by extension, onto ordinary users who may lack the tools to distinguish synthetic from authentic content.

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