Contributions of Social Media Platforms to Political Empowerment of Youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State

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Abstract. *This study investigates the contributions of social media platforms to political empowerment of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State. The study was guided by four research questions. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 964 youths from seven registered youth organizations in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area. The simple random sampling technique by balloting was used to sample 241 youths. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Contributions of Social Media Platforms to Political Empowerment of Youth Questionnaire (CSMPPEYQ). The instrument was face validated by three experts. The reliability coefficient values of 0.82, 0.84, 0.77 and 0.71 were generated for clusters A, B, C, and D. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that the extent the use of Instagram can contribute to political participation of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high; the extent to which the use of Facebook can contribute to freedom of expression of youth was high. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made, among which was that: community leaders and the government should collaborate to develop and implement community programmes that will help to educate youth about responsible and ethical use of Instagram. Educational institutions should incorporate Facebook platforms as tools for enhancing political education among the youths.*

Key words: *Social Media Platforms, Political Empowerment, Youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State.*

Introduction

The emergence of the internet has brought about significant changes and transformation in various aspects of the society such as communication, global connectivity, access to information, education, information dissemination, entertainment, innovation, entrepreneurship, access to services and politics among others. Robert and Dennis (2022) defined internet as a system architecture that has revolutionized communications and methods of commerce by allowing various computer networks around the world to interconnect. The internet gave rise to the advent of social media platforms.

Social media platform is an online space which gives people the opportunity to interact without physically meeting each other. Social media platform is defined as a platform to create profiles and connect with people using the same platform (Boyd & Ellison,2008). In the same way, Milakovich (2010) noted that social media is a tool for increasing citizens' participation, and empowerment in

any political environment. Social media is a means through which people receive political information that arouse their interest to take active participation in political process. Diamond (2010) stated that social media is a liberation technology that expands political, social and economic freedom. According to Davis (2016) social media platform refers to a group of interactive internet apps that enable the creation, duration, and sharing of user-generated content either individually or collaboratively. The nature of social media platforms makes it a vital instrument for political awareness, interaction and empowerment. Lua (2023) identified social media platforms to include: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, Sina Weibo, Q. Q, Telegram, Snapchat, Kuaishou, Qzone, Pinterest, Twitter, Reddit, LinkedIn, Quora, Discord, Twitch, Tumblr, and Mastodon. Although various other social media platforms were mentioned by the author, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (now X) and WhatsApp are relevant to this study because it is more popular with greater percentage of youths subscribing them.

Instagram is a free social networking site centered on the exchange of images and videos (Ben, 2021). It is essentially a condensed version of Facebook, (Moreau, 2021). Instagram focused on mobile use and visual sharing, people connect with users by following them, allowing others to follow them too, commenting, liking, tagging, and sending private messages, just like other social networks. Moreover, Instagram images can be saved. Instagram gives one the option to follow persons who interest one, just like the majority of social networking platforms. Kwon (2020) stated that Instagram is an avenue for youths to get diverse political information provided every day by politicians, political organizations, and news media, as well as friends, family, and acquaintances. This invariably accounts for its use in politics by youths; hence their political empowerment. In addition to Instagram is Facebook.

Facebook is a social media platform which can help in political empowerment of youths. According to Mark (2016), Facebook is a website that enables users to communicate with friends, coworkers, or strangers online after creating a free profile. It enables users to share their own ideas and opinions with as many people as they choose, as well as images, music, videos, and articles. Users submit friend requests to persons they may or may not know. Following acceptance, both users' profiles are linked, allowing them to see whatever the other user posts. "Facebookers" can enter private chat with other online pals and publish nearly anything to their "timeline," which shows what is happening in their social circle at any given moment. According to Harrah (2016), many young people perceive social media to be handy than their real surroundings for interacting with others and existing in the world. Rakshit (2015) added that Facebook users can submit photographs, movies, and messages to stay in touch with their loved ones. Youths in different Facebook groups share their different social and political opinions (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012). Facebook fosters political engagement and empowerment of youths by increasing opportunity for expression of opinions. Facebook empowers youth to participate in political activities, this enables the youths to draw attention of the government to specific issues and seek broader online support among other youths (Masiha, Habiba, Abbas, Saud, & Ariadi, 2018). Another social media platform which may be used for political empowerment of youths is Twitter (now X).

Twitter (now X) is a social media platform which allow users to tweet a limited number of words at a time. Britannica (2017) stated that Twitter is an online microblogging site that disseminates brief messages with a maximum character count of 280, known as tweets, and that had a significant impact on politics and culture in the early twenty-first century. A user creates a tweet and transmits it to the Twitter server, which then forwards it to a list of other users (known as followers) who have subscribed to receive the sender's messages. In addition, Britannica stated that users can engage with one another through the use of mentions (using the @ sign; e.g., @ Twitter) and elect to track specific topics by clicking on hashtags (using the # sign; e.g., #movies). These features create a dialogue of sorts and push the number of followers in a given Twitter feed into the millions. John and Shannon (2019) stated that Twitter can be used for political empowerment of youths because it provides platform for political discussions. Twitter has caused major changes on how people engage politically. Followers regularly take actions that are requested in leaders' tweets, and, in many cases, leaders' tweets shape followers' political views more than friends and family. Another social media platform which may be instrumental to political empowerment of youths is WhatsApp.

WhatsApp is a social media chat platform which enable users to discuss in different WhatsApp groups as well as follow links to read messages in other platforms. Kamat (2022) stated that WhatsApp is one of the most popular social media platforms and instant messaging applications available today. The service allows users to save data by messaging over a computers internet connection. Typically, people use this app on mobile devices, but with the new Windows version, one can finally access chats straight from desktop messenger. WhatsApp in particular has become a primary network for sharing and discussing news (Newman, Levy, & Kleis, 2019). As a powerful tool for youths' political empowerment, Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) stated that WhatsApp enables users to share political content through links to online news items, images of newspaper articles, or videos of television programs. WhatsApp users cannot only access news anywhere and anytime through their phones, but also discussing issues they just read. Besides, WhatsApp have potential benefits for democracy, as youths are able to engage in vibrant political talks and discussions across political ideologies through it. Hence, WhatsApp is a veritable tool for political empowerment.

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity and relevance of something. Perkins and Zimmerman (2005) define empowerment as an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources; or a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment. This means that empowerment creates an avenue for improvement of people. Whitmore (2008) defined empowerment as an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live. Empowerment is in various form such as economic, social, academic and political, and politics among others. However, this study is on political empowerment.

Political empowerment is the creation of awareness on important political issues. It is the process of equipping people to learn how to take active part in political process. Budryte (2014) stated that political empowerment refers to the process of transferring various elements of power such as resources, capabilities, and positions to those who do not have it. Political empowerment requires inclusion in democratic decision-making processes. It includes giving access to various political offices, and positions in the government, to the members of disadvantaged populations. Furthermore, Sandler and Lane (2021) stated that political empowerment involves having the power, ability, critical awareness, and sense of group identity to take action in order to create change in a political system. Having a sense of group identity and collective group interest is a critical component of political empowerment. Contextually, political empowerment is the process of providing people with the knowledge, resources, and opportunities to engage in politics, express their opinions, and have a say in shaping public policies and governance. In this instance the people are referred to as the youths.

The term "youth" can be used to refer to anyone, from physically developing adolescents through adults. The youth, according to Heaven and Tubridy (2007), is a person whose identity and age lie somewhere between those of a kid and an adult. The United Nations (2011) defines youths as anyone between the ages of 15 and 24 inclusively, Ahn (2011) adds that the youth identity depicts those in their teens and 20s as participants in a common social experience that is different from that of other age or cultural groups. In Nigeria, a youth is someone from the age of 18-35 years. United Nations (2019) stated that youths are essential for a country's existence, survival, and socioeconomic progress since they are capable, young, and full of energy. It is understandable why people refer to them as "the leaders of tomorrow" or "the future of society". In this work, youth refer to people within the ages of 18-35, it represents a period of exploration, identity formation, and societal engagement. This is why greater number of youths involve in the use of social media platforms for political empowerment.

Social media platforms can empower the youths for political participation, freedom of expression, and participation in policy making, and enhancing their knowledge of voting right. Youths of Oji River Local Government Area, have identified this opportunity. However, the extent to which social

media platforms have contributed to political empowerment of Youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area has not been ascertained, hence, the need for the study.

Statement of the Problem

Social media platforms have been used by youths to commit different kinds of crimes both locally and internationally, such as cybercrime, account hacking, and advance fee fraud among others. Despite the ills of social media, the platforms have also served as a means of building powerful connections among people, holding of online classes, skill acquisition, promotion of political participation, freedom of expression, participation in policy making, and enhancing the knowledge of voting right.

In spite of these benefits, it is not certain as to whether the youths in Opobo/Nkoro have benefitted from social media platforms in terms of being politically empowered as majority of youths in the area expressed indifference in politics, and political processes. Therefore, the problem of this study is to ascertain the contributions of social media platforms to political empowerment of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to determine the extent of contributions of social media platforms to political empowerment of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Enugu State. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the extent to which the use of:

1. Instagram can contribute to political participation of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

2. Facebook can contribute to freedom of expression of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

3. Twitter can contribute to participation of youths in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

4. WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting right of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. To what extent can the use of Instagram contribute to political participation of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area?

2. To what extent can the use of Facebook contribute to freedom of expression of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

3. To what extent can the use of Twitter contribute to participation of youths in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

4. To what extent can the use of WhatsApp contribute to enhancing voting rights of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 964 youths from seven registered youth organizations in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area. Consisting of Inyi community youth organization 179, kpugo-Eze community youth organization 156, Achi-Uno community youth organization 91, Oji-River Urban organization 149, Uwuoba community youth organization 98, law community youth organization 127and Achi Agu community youth organization 164. The sample size adopted for this study was 241 youths, which is 25% of the entire population. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample. The reason for choosing simple random sampling technique by balloting was to give equal opportunity to

youths' organizations, and to ensure equal representation, and also to give every respondent an equal chance of being selected for the study in order to reduce biases.

A questionnaire titled Contributions of Social Media Platforms to Political Empowerment of Youth Questionnaire (CSMPPEYQ) was used as data collecting instrument for the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A was designed to collect relevant information about the respondents. While, section B dealt with items raised from the research questions. Cluster A elicited information on the extent the use of Instagram contributes to political participation of youth with eight items. Cluster elicited information on the extent the use of Facebook contributes to freedom of expression of youth with eight items. Cluster B elicited information on the extent the use of Twitter contributes to participation of youth in policy making with seven items. While, Cluster D elicited information on the extent the use of WhatsApp contributes to enhancing voting rights of youth with seven items. The response mode that was adopted for the study was a 4-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) 4-points High Extent (HE) 3-points Low Extent (D) 2-points and Very Low Extent (VLE) I-point. The instrument was validated by three experts. Two from the Department of Adult Education and Community Development and one from Curriculum Studies Department, all from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained a pilot test, which yielded a reliability co-efficient value of 0.82,0.84, 0.77 and 0.71 was generated for the four cluster respectively, using Cronbach Alpha Statistical Tool, which indicate that the instrument is reliable. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The criterion Mean of 2.50 was used for decision making. This means that Mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as high extent while below 2.50 was low extent.

Result

Research Questions 1: To what extent can the use of Instagram contribute to political participation of youths in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent the use of Instagram contributes to political participation of youths (n=241)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Providing youths with avenue for expressing their political views	3.08	.58	HE
2.	Engaging in civic discussion on matters that concerns	2.99	.75	HE
3.	Instagram allows youths to showcase their political perspectives using hashing	2.81	.55	HE
4.	Allowing youths to share images, and videos, that express their opinions on various political issues	3.55	.56	HE
5.	Instagram's visual format enables youths to communicate their political views	3.68	.53	HE
6.	Engaging with political content in a visually appealing and accessible manner	3.40	.67	HE
7.	Instagram's interactive features, like stories and live videos, enable youths to directly engage with political actors and campaigns	3.44	.64	HE
8.	Instagram facilitate the mobilization of youths around specific political events	3.23	.57	HE
	Grand Mean	**3.27**	**0.60**	**HE**

Table 1 showed the mean and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent the use of Instagram contributes to political participation of youth. Providing youths with new avenues for expressing their political views with a mean of high extent (3.08). Engaging in civic discussions on matters that concern them with a mean of high extent (2.99). Instagram allows youths to showcase their political perspectives using hashtags with a mean of high extent ((2.81). Allowing youths to share images, and videos, that express their opinions on various political issues with a mean of high extent (3.55).

Instagram's visual format enables youths to communicate their political views with a mean of high extent (3.68). Engaging with political content in a visually appealing and accessible manner with a mean of high extent (3.40). Instagram's interactive features, like stories and live videos, enable youths to directly engage with political actors and campaigns with a mean of high extent (3.44). Instagram facilitate the mobilization of youths around specific political events with a mean of high extent (3.23). Therefore, the grand mean score of (3.27) revealed that the extent the use of Instagram can contribute to political participation of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high.

Research Question 2: To what extent can the use of Facebook contribute to freedom of expression of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent the use of Facebook contribute to freedom of expression of youth (n=241)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
9.	Providing youths with a platform to share their ideas, opinion, and creative expression with a wide audience	3.66	.49	HE
10.	Enabling youth to freely express their thoughts, feeling, and experiences about political issues	3.15	.47	HE
11.	Allowing youths to create personalized profiles that reflect their identity discussions	3.29	.82	HE
12.	Enabling the youths to amplify their voices and participate in public discussion	3.04	.48	HE
13.	Expanding the diversity and inclusiveness of public discourse among the youths	3.49	.51	HE
14.	Allowing youths connect with others who share similar interests and engage in collective political activities	3.38	.52	HE
15.	Facebook has become a powerful tool for youth-led activism	3.46	.63	HE
16.	Allowing youths to mobilize support, raise awareness, and advocate for social change	3.76	.57	HE
	Grand Mean	**3.40**	**0.56**	**HE**

Table 2 showed the Mean and standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent the use of Facebook contributes to freedom of expression of youth. Providing youths with a platform to share their ideas, opinions, and creative expressions with a wide audience with a mean score of high extent (3.66). Enabling youth to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about political issues with a mean score of high extent (3.15). Allowing youths to create personalized profiles that reflect their identity and interests with a mean score of high extent (3.29). Enabling the youths to amplify their voices and participate in public discussions with a mean score of high extent (3.04). Expanding the diversity and inclusiveness of public discourse among the youths with a mean score of high extent (3.49). Allowing youths to connect with others who share similar interests and engage in collective political activities with a mean score of high extent (3.38). Facebook has become a powerful tool for youth-led activism with a mean score of high extent (3.46). Allowing youths to mobilize support, raise awareness, and advocate for social change with a mean score of high extent (3.76). Therefore, the grand mean score of (3.40) revealed that the extent to which the use of Facebook contribute to freedom of expression of youth was high.

Research Question 3: To what extent can the use of Twitter contribute to participation of youths in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent the use of Twitter can contribute to participation of youths in policy making (n=241)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
17.	Empowering youths to express their opinions, and participate in policy discussions	2.82	.37	HE
18.	Enabling the youths to reach out to many people with their policy-related opinions and ideas	2.82	.37	HE
19.	Through the use of hashtags and retweets, youth can share their views and contribute to policy debates	2.82	.37	HE
20.	Enabling youths to participate in discussions with a timely and informed perspectives	2.82	.37	HE
21.	Enabling youths to stay informed about policy developments in the country	2.98	.63	HE
22.	Through the use of mentions replies, and direct message, youths can connect with policymakers, and expects	3.08	.58	HE
23.	Allowing policymakers to hear the voices of youths firsthand	2.99	.75	HE
	Grand Mean	**2.90**	**0.49**	**HE**

Table 3 showed the Mean and Standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent the use of Twitter can contribute to participation of youth in policy making. Empowering youths to express their opinions, and participate in policy discussions with a mean score of high extent (2.82). Enabling the youths to reach out to many people with their policy-related opinions and ideas with a mean score of high extent (2.82). Through the use of hashtags and retweets, youth can share their views and contribute to policy debates with a mean score of high extent (2.82). Enabling youths to participate in discussions with a timely and informed perspectives with a mean score of high extent (2.82). Enabling youths to stay informed about policy developments in the country with a mean score of high extent (2.98). Through the use of mentions, replies, and direct messages, youths can connect with policymakers, and experts with a mean score of high extent (3.08). Allowing policymakers to hear the voices of youths firsthand with a mean score of high extent (2.99). Therefore, the grand mean score of (2.90) revealed that the extent to which the use of Twitter can contribute to participation of youth in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high.

Research Question 4: To what extent can the use of WhatsApp contribute to enhancing voting rights of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent to which the use of WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting rights. (n=241)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
24.	Empowering youths to access political information, engage in electoral processes	2.81	.55	HE
25.	Through individual and group charts, youth can share information on electoral procedures, and voting locations	3.55	.56	HE
26.	Providing platform for youths to receive more information on their preferred candidates, and political parties	3.68	.53	HE
27.	Fostering political awareness and encouraging youths to actively participate in political conversations	3.40	.67	HE
28.	Mobilizing youths and encouraging voter turnout	3.44	.64	HE
29.	Youths utilize WhatsApp to rally support for a political party or candidate of their choice	3.23	.57	HE

30.	30. WhatsApp can be used for voting education among the youths	3.66	.49	HE
	Grand Mean	**3.39**	**0.57**	**HE**

Table 4 revealed the Mean and standard deviation responses of the respondents on the extent to which the use of WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting rights. Empowering youths to access political information, and engage in electoral processes with a mean score of high extent (2.81). Through individual and group chats, youths can share information on electoral procedures, and voting locations with a mean score of high extent (3.55). Providing platform for youths to receive more information on their preferred candidates, and political parties with a mean score of high extent (3.68). Fostering political awareness and encouraging youths to actively participate in political conversations with a mean score of high extent (3.40). Mobilizing youths and encouraging voter turnout with a mean score of high extent (3.44). Youths utilize WhatsApp to rally support for a political party or candidate of their choice with a mean score of high extent (3.23). WhatsApp can be used for voting education among the youths with a mean score of high extent (3.66). Therefore, the grand mean score of (3.39) revealed that the extent to which the use of WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting rights of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high.

Discussion

Finding from research question one revealed that the extent the use of Instagram can contribute to political participation of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high. This is because it can provide the youths with new avenues for expressing their political views; and engaging in civic discussions on matters that concern them. This finding is in agreement with Kwon (2020) who stated that Instagram's visual format enables youths to communicate their political views and engage with political content in a visually appealing and accessible manner. Moreover, Instagram's features, such as stories and live videos, provide opportunities for youth to connect with political figures, organizations, and movements in real-time. Instagram allows youths to showcase their political perspectives using hashtags. It also allows youths to share images, and videos that express their opinions on various political issues. Instagram's interactive features, including stories and live videos, enable young individuals to directly engage with political actors and campaigns, fostering a sense of participation and influence. Hashtags have played a significant role in youth political participation on Instagram. They serve as organizing tools, allowing users to search and follow specific topics and campaigns.

In addition, Instagram's visual format enables youths to communicate their political views. It also gives opportunity to engage with political content in a visually appealing and accessible manner. It is important to note that while Instagram provides opportunities for political engagement, it also presents challenges such as filter bubbles and the potential for misinformation. Users may be exposed to a limited range of perspectives and content that aligns with their existing views Instagram's interactive features like stories and live videos, enable youths to directly engage with political actors and campaign. Instagram facilitate the mobilization of youths around specific political events.

Finding from research question two showed that the extent to which the use of Facebook can contribute to freedom of expression of youth was high. This is because it provides youths with a platform to share their ideas, opinions, and creative expressions with a wide audience. This finding agrees with the statement of Rakshit (2015) that, Facebook enables youth to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences through status updates, photos, videos, and other forms of multimedia content. It allows them to create personalized profiles that reflect their identity and interests, providing a space for self-expression. Facebook also enable youths to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about political issues, it allows youths to create personalized profiles that reflect their identity and interests. Facebook enables youth to amplify their voices and reach a broader audience. By sharing their perspectives, opinions, and creative works, young individuals can engage with their peers, communities, and even wider networks. This amplification of voices contributes to a more diverse and inclusive public discourse.

Facebook also enable the youths to amplify their voices and participate in public discussions, and expanding the diversity and inclusiveness of public discourse among the youths. Facebook facilitates the formation of online communities and networks based on shared interests, hobbies, and causes. Youth can join groups, pages, and events related to their passions, enabling them to connect with like-minded individuals and engage in discussions and collaborative activities. Facebook allows youths to connect with others who share similar interests and engage in collective political activities. Facebook has played a significant role in youth-led social movements and activism. It serves as a platform for organizing events, spreading awareness, and mobilizing support for various causes. Through Facebook, young individuals can raise their voices, build coalitions, and initiate social change (Budryte, 2014). Facebook has become a powerful tool for youth-led activism, allowing youths to mobilize support, raise awareness, and advocate for social change (Budryte, 2014). Facebook has become a powerful tool for youth-led activism. It also allows youths to mobilize support, raise awareness, and advocate for social change.

Furthermore, finding from research question three revealed that the extent to which the use of Twitter can contribute to participation of youth in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high. This is because twitter empowers the youths to express their opinions, and participate in policy discussions. Lua (2023) stated that twitter allows youths to amplify their voices and reach a broader audience with their policy-related opinions and ideas. Through the use of hashtags and retweets, youth can share their views and contribute to policy debates, potentially gaining visibility and influencing public discourse. Continuing, Lua (2023) noted that twitter enables youth to amplify their voices and participate in policy discussions, potentially reaching a wider audience and influencing public discourse. It also enables the youths to reach out to many people with their policy-related opinions and ideas. Through the use of hashtags and retweets, youth can share their views and contribute to policy debates. Twitter provides real-time information and awareness to youth, enabling them to stay informed about policy developments and engage in timely discussions. Twitter facilitates networking and collaboration among youth interested in policy making. Through the use of mentions, replies, and direct messages, young individuals can connect with policymakers, experts, and other like-minded individuals. This networking can lead to collaborations, knowledge sharing, and joint efforts in advocating for policy changes or addressing societal challenges.

In addition, twitter enables youths to participate in discussions with a timely and informed perspectives. It also enables youths to stay informed about policy developments in the country. Twitter enables youth to network and collaborate with policymakers and other stakeholders, fostering collective efforts in policy advocacy and addressing societal challenges. Furthermore, twitter provides a direct channel for youth to engage with policymakers and government agencies. By mentioning or tagging policymakers in their tweets, young individuals can ask questions, express concerns, and seek clarifications on policy issues. This direct engagement fosters a sense of inclusion and allows policymakers to hear the voices of youth firsthand. Through the use of mentions, replies, and direct messages, youths can connect with policy makers, and experts. Again, it allows policymakers to hear the voices of youths first and furthermore, finding from research question four revealed that the extent to which the use of WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting rights of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high. This is because WhatsApp has the capacity of empowering youths to access political information, and engage in electoral processes.

Kamat (2022) stated that WhatsApp allows youths to access political information, including news, policy updates, and electoral information, in real-time. Through individual and group chats, youths can receive and share information on candidates, political parties, electoral procedures, and voting locations, enabling them to make informed decisions and actively participate in the electoral process WhatsApp provides young individuals with real-time access to political information, allowing them to stay informed about candidates, policies, and electoral procedures. Again, through individual and group chats, youths can share information on electoral procedures, and voting locations. Providing platform for youths to receive more information on their preferred candidates, and political parties. Newman, Levy and Kleis (2019) noted that WhatsApp facilitates political discussions among youths enabling them to engage with their peers, share opinions, and exchange ideas on political issues. Group chats on WhatsApp serve as virtual spaces for deliberation, fostering political awareness and

encouraging youth to actively participate in political conversations. WhatsApp group chats encourage political discussions among young individuals, fostering political awareness and promoting civic engagement.

More so, WhatsApp has the capacity of fostering political awareness and encouraging youths to actively participate in political conversations, and mobilizing youths and encouraging voter turnout. John and Shannon (2019) observed that WhatsApp has been instrumental in mobilizing youths and encouraging voter turnout. Political campaigns, activists, and organizations leverage the platform to disseminate messages, rally support, and organize get-out-the-vote efforts. Through targeted messages, campaign updates, and reminders, WhatsApp helps motivate young individuals to exercise their voting rights. Youths utilize WhatsApp to rally support for a political party or candidate of their choice. It can also be used for voting education among the youths.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the extent the use of Instagram can contribute to political participation of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high. The extent to which the use of Facebook can contribute to freedom of expression of youth was high. The extent to which the use of Twitter can contribute to participation of youth in policy making in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high, and the extent to which the use of WhatsApp can contribute to enhancing voting rights of youth in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area was high.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Community leaders and the government should collaborate to develop and implement community programmes that will help to educate youths about responsible and ethical use of Instagram.

2. Educational institutions should incorporate Facebook platforms as tools for enhancing political education. Educators can use Facebook to facilitate discussions, share relevant news and information, and encourage youths to participate in online conversations about local governance, policies, and political issues.

3. Community leaders should initiate and promote media literacy training to youth to empower them to critically evaluate information shared on twitter. This training should equip them with the skills to identify misinformation, distinguish between credible and unreliable sources, and understand how twitter messages can influence public perception.

4. Community leaders and the local government authority should encourage the use of WhatsApp platforms among the youths. This will help to maintain strong political participation among the youths.

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