

THE ROLE OF WHATSAPP GROUP IN MOBILIZING YOUTH FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH-EAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the function of WhatsApp groups in mobilising young people for political engagement in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The research employed a descriptive survey approach, using structured questionnaires to gather data from a sample of 573 participants throughout the six states in the South-East area. The data analysis used simple statistics to show how often things happened and more complex methods to find relationships between different factors, including frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, Pearson correlation, and Chi-square tests. The study was based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Political Mobilisation Theory to elucidate the motives and results of youth political involvement using WhatsApp. The research revealed that the youth widely use WhatsApp, characterised by frequent political discourse, campaign advocacy, and election mobilisation within group conversations. More than 80% of participants recognised that WhatsApp had improved their political understanding and impacted their vote choices. A notable statistical correlation was identified between WhatsApp usage and political involvement among youths, indicating that the medium significantly influences political behaviour and participation in this demographic. The study indicates that WhatsApp has emerged as a significant tool for political mobilisation within Nigeria's democratic framework. It advises political stakeholders, civil society organisations, and electoral agencies to use the platform to promote inclusive, issue-oriented, and youth-centric political involvement. We recommend further research to explore alternative social media platforms and examine regional or national disparities.

Introduction

In the digital era, communication technologies have significantly altered political participation globally (Boulianne, 2015). WhatsApp has become a crucial instrument for political dialogue and mobilisation, especially in developing nations, such as Nigeria. The South-East geopolitical zone, which includes Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, has experienced a significant transformation in political involvement dynamics, particularly among the youth, attributed to the widespread use of WhatsApp. The South-East area is strategically significant in Nigeria's political landscape due to its large oil resources and varied ethnic mix. Historically, indifference, marginalisation, and restricted access to political venues have marked the engagement of young people in politics in this region (Arthing, 2010). Nonetheless, the emergence of digital communication technologies has started to alter this narrative, providing novel pathways for political engagement.

According to (Udenze et al. 2020), WhatsApp, a mobile messaging program, has achieved significant popularity in Nigeria owing to its cost-effectiveness, intuitive interface, and capacity to enable real-time communication. The group chat functionality enables users to establish teams focused on common interests, including political discussions. These groups function as forums for disseminating information, garnering support, and organising political activities. The 2019 general elections in Nigeria were a pivotal moment in the application of WhatsApp for political objectives. Political parties and politicians utilise the site to broadcast campaign messages, interact with followers, and refute opposing narratives. A study conducted by Michael et al. (2021) indicated that 91% of participants recognised the efficacy of Facebook and WhatsApp for mobilising Nigerian youth during the elections.

In the South-East area, WhatsApp groups have proven essential in facilitating political discourse, enhancing knowledge of governance matters, and coordinating grassroots initiatives. The accessibility and affordability of mobile internet in Nigeria have made WhatsApp a favoured medium for political conversation, especially among the youth. Ngoka et al. 2024. A 2022 study by the Nigerian Communications Commission indicates that Nigeria has over 100 million active internet users, a substantial number of whom depend on WhatsApp for communication and information dissemination. WhatsApp's function in political mobilisation is fraught with obstacles. The platform's encryption and closed-group structure render it vulnerable to the dissemination of disinformation and false news. Butler & Ecker (2023). In the 2019 elections, several false narratives proliferated on WhatsApp, impacting voter views and choices. Such occurrences underscore the necessity for procedures to authenticate the reliability of information disseminated on the platform. Furthermore, the insular nature of WhatsApp groups frequently fosters echo chambers, where members with similar beliefs reinforce their prejudices and dismiss divergent perspectives. This tendency constrains productive political discourse and fosters division. Notwithstanding these obstacles, WhatsApp continues to serve as a formidable instrument for political engagement, facilitating enhanced young involvement in the political arena (Karam, & Jiwani, 2021). The South-East geopolitical zone has had several youth-driven political movements enabled by WhatsApp. During the #EndSARS demonstrations in 2020, WhatsApp groups facilitated the coordination of actions, dissemination of information, and mobilisation of support around the area. The internet expertise exhibited by young Nigerians during these protests significantly contributed to its outreach, funding, coordination, and message consistency. Nigerian political parties have acknowledged WhatsApp's capacity to connect with and engage the youth generation. Nonetheless, the application of the platform differs among parties (Fitzpatrick & Thuermer, 2023). A comparative study of WhatsApp campaigning in Ghana and Nigeria revealed that Ghanaian political parties have established intricate and

hierarchical social media communication frameworks, whereas Nigerian parties exhibit fewer coherent and stable organisational structures on WhatsApp. The finding illustrates the enduring influence of people and 'godfathers' in Nigerian politics, as well as the significance of informality within political frameworks.

Consequently, Fisher et al. (2023) assert that the incorporation of WhatsApp into political campaigns has resulted in the creation of new participants in the political sphere. Tech-savvy teenagers have initiated the creation and management of WhatsApp groups, providing these platforms to political parties to further their goals. These teenagers frequently function informally, with implicit support from parties, underscoring the changing dynamics of political activity in the internet era. Despite WhatsApp's increasing role in political mobilisation, empirical study of its effects in the South-East geopolitical zone remains scarce. Most current research has focused on national-level analysis, resulting in a deficiency in comprehending the regional dynamics of political involvement facilitated by WhatsApp. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the function of WhatsApp groups in mobilising young people for political participation in Nigeria's South-East area.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing significance of digital media in influencing political outcomes, there is a paucity of empirical study regarding the impact of WhatsApp, as a particular platform, on young political engagement at the local government level in Nigeria. Most current research primarily examines social media or national-level dynamics, which results in a deficiency in comprehending local grassroots mobilisation initiatives. Anecdotal data suggests that in Akwa Ibom, youth engage in political debate, voter education, and campaign methods through WhatsApp groups. Nonetheless, the degree to which these initiatives result in concrete political participation, including voter registration, turnout, civic education, and advocacy, has yet to be comprehensively evaluated. Additionally, there are apprehensions regarding the possible exploitation of WhatsApp for disseminating disinformation, propagating propaganda, or inciting political polarisation among young individuals (Akanbi & Bello, 2022). It is essential to examine both the beneficial and potentially disruptive functions of WhatsApp in the political mobilisation of young people.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of WhatsApp groups in mobilizing youth for political engagement in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the extent of youth participation in political discussions on WhatsApp groups.
2. Examine how WhatsApp groups are used to mobilize youths for political events and campaigns.
3. Identify the challenges and limitations associated with using WhatsApp for political mobilization.
4. Evaluate the impact of WhatsApp-based political mobilization on youth political behavior in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are youths in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria involved in political discussions through WhatsApp groups?
2. How do WhatsApp groups facilitate the organization of political activities among youths?
3. What are the major challenges encountered in using WhatsApp groups for political mobilization?
4. What is the perceived impact of WhatsApp political mobilization on youth political participation?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Political Engagement

Youth political participation includes several acts in which young persons partake in political processes, such as voting, campaigning, lobbying, and civic discourse. Youths in Nigeria represent a substantial segment of the population, rendering their political engagement essential for democratic advancement. Nonetheless, elements such as political indifference, disillusionment, and structural obstacles have traditionally constrained young engagement.

An electoral campaign encompasses any activities designed to motivate voters to support or oppose a candidate or party during an election. While electioneering can transpire at any moment, it is particularly pertinent within the framework of an election campaign, especially as defined by the term 'pre-election period' below, indicating electioneering within this specified timeframe Davor (2017). Campaigning denotes the endeavours of group members to advocate for their platform, performance, and accomplishments. When discussing campaigning, it is essential to differentiate between supplying information on political policies and platforms in answer to a query and proactively disseminating such material without any solicitation Burkell, & Regan, (2019). Furthermore, campaigning pertains to the promotion of awareness and the endeavour to educate or engage the public by galvanising their support on a certain topic, or to alter public perceptions. Electioneering campaigns encompass all actions undertaken by political parties to promote their agenda, particularly during election seasons, with the objective of persuading the voters to cast their votes in favour of the party. This may manifest in many formats such as rallies, interpersonal talks, conferences, and advertisements across radio, television, newspapers, magazines, the internet, billboards, and other media sources.

Notwithstanding the peace agreement established by political parties to avoid actions that could misrepresent the electoral process, the conduct and statements of these parties and politicians raised significant doubts regarding the integrity of the Nigerian electoral system. In light of the prevalent abusive and contentious rhetoric employed by politicians during the 2015 presidential election, former Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka Anyaoku expressed concern, stating that we are observing increasingly hostile declarations from candidates and spokespersons of political parties. Anyaoku asserted that the current nature and intensity of the contestation necessitate the conclusion that without the consensus and execution of proactive measures by all involved parties, the level of violence, particularly following the election, will likely reach unprecedented levels (Anyaoku, 2015). Director of the Policy and Legal Advisory Centre, Nwankwo, expressed concern over the campaign's criteria, claiming that it fails to bolster the already tenuous faith in the nation's leaders. Nwankwo observes that personal assaults, falsehoods, fabricated narratives, and political defamation have not enhanced the discourse. Political parties in the country were perceived

as disinterested in conveying the genuine challenges that have impeded Nigeria's growth over the years; instead, it is lamentable that the political campaigns predominantly focus on disparagement. Olisa Agbakoba says that the observed pattern appears to reflect a personal conflict among politicians more than a substantive issue dispute. Similarly, former Minister of Information Walter Ofonagoro clearly said that it is regrettable that contemporary politicians are diverting focus from substantive concerns (Ofonagoro, 2015). He anticipated vigorous debates and discussions on matters pertinent to Nigeria's development and growth as a nation; but, the current situation is somewhat disheartening. We are constantly overwhelmed by accusations, obfuscations, misrepresentations, image exploitation, and image rehabilitation, all occurring within the permissive framework of electoral processes.

Social Media and Political Mobilization

Social media platforms have transformed political mobilisation by offering accessible avenues for information transmission, interaction, and organisation. Platforms like as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp facilitate the sharing of political material, event organisation, and conversation engagement, hence augmenting participatory democracy (Dagona et al., 2023). It is a valid assertion that social media possesses downsides as well. (Bennett, et.al 2013). study contended that it is essential to understand the drawbacks of new media in political communication and that we must safeguard political participation from this predicament rather than acquiesce to it. Mahmud and Amin (2017) examined the use of internet media in political engagement among university students. The study's findings indicate the correlation between online and offline political engagement; yet, in comparison to Facebook, email has a little impact on political discourse.

Social media offer interactive platforms that enable users to engage with one another, fostering social relationships and facilitating the exchange of shared information. These web-based communication systems provide users with capabilities that enable social interactions over the internet (Conroy et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2014). A recent survey revealed that social networks provide youngsters possibilities to engage in discussions about political concerns and related matters online. It further indicates that young individuals may engage with politics and government via their internet relationships. Therefore, we can confidently conclude that social media constitutes and encourages online social interactions among its diverse users (Abdul et al., 2017). In 2014, it was determined that Facebook had the largest user base among social media platforms worldwide (PEW, 2015). Thus, it most effectively exemplifies the rationale for its broad acceptability among youngsters. Political candidates during elections recognise the significant potential of internet platforms, use them to garner followership, enhance popularity, and solicit support. These thoughts align with the works of Adesote and Abimbola (2017), Ayeni (2019), and Bandpo (2016). Facebook has become as a prevalent online tool for engaging the politically active, socially media-savvy younger population, therefore achieving global popularity. Research indicates that young individuals are more predisposed to pursue internet information on political matters and engage in discussions about political viewpoints (Towner, 2013). Okoro and Tsegysu (2017) discovered that Facebook serves as an effective instrument for mobilising individuals who may have been marginalised or dissuaded from engaging in political activities.

Political mobilisation is a fundamental idea in political and social discourse, since it is essential to political involvement and social engineering. Nwoye (2009) defines political mobilisation as the process of engaging individuals in a specific political activity by addressing their most significant political demands and expectations. Political mobilisation is a collective endeavour aimed at enhancing political knowledge and consciousness towards a certain political objective. Political mobilisation is a goal-directed conduct aimed at a certain

objective. It is essential for all political activities aimed at achieving a certain objective or pursuing an ideology-driven agenda. This underscores its significant use as an instrument for social and political transformation. Political mobilisation is “the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups encourage others to engage in politics” to “secure electoral victories, enact legislation, amend rulings, and shape policies.” Political organisations may reach out to individuals and provide a distinct “opportunity for political engagement.” In most cases, mobilisation is an essential requirement for participation. Political mobilisation may be defined as the process of educating the population, enhancing their awareness, political consciousness, and the effectiveness of the latter. Political mobilisation may be defined as the deliberate act of emotionally uniting individuals and fostering the internalisation of shared social values, attitudes, and orientations to achieve certain holistic objectives. Social media may be perceived as both a technological platform and a venue for the expansion and maintenance of the networks upon which social movements rely. The Arab revolts illustrate how online social networks, enabled by social media, have become a crucial element of modern populist movements. Social media are not only neutral instruments utilised by social movements; they significantly impact the formation and development of these movements by activists Juris, (2012). WhatsApp's functionalities, including group conversations, broadcast lists, and end-to-end encryption, render it an effective instrument for political activity. Its extensive use in Nigeria facilitates swift information dissemination and coordination among young, especially during electoral seasons and political events.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The hypothesis originated in the 1970s, developed by Katz Elihu and further elaborated by his colleagues Blumler and Gurevitch. The idea posits that the audience is active, actively seeking the most effective means to engage with media in a manner that aligns with their preferences. This needed an understanding of why individuals select specific media formats that fulfil the social or psychological demands of societal members. This idea is also known as “utility theory.” This elucidates the roles of certain types of media material in a given context. Folarin (2005) contends that audience members deliberately determine which media material will impact them, as they fully assert their right to engage with any media messages that align with their needs, purposes, aims, beliefs, and preferences. Attention has now transitioned from the capabilities of the media concerning the audience to the purposes for which the audience utilises the media, hence emphasising media consumption. This indicates that the impact of media is now entirely contingent upon individuals' consent. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) assert that uses and gratifications theory seeks to comprehend the reasons audience members engage with media, rather than examining the effects of media on the audience. This approach examines the rationale for the selection of certain content while disregarding others. What motivates individuals to refrain from engaging with all media messages?

Empirical Studies

The research by Mohammed and Kirfi (2024) aims to investigate the influence of social media on the political mobilisation for the APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State from 2019 to 2023. Four research objectives were established to guide the study: the role of social media in political mobilisation, the impact of social media on political mobilisation, the enhancement of political mobilisation through social media, and solutions to the challenges encountered in utilising social media for the political mobilisation of the APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State. The study utilised a descriptive survey approach. The study

population would comprise the whole population of Gombe State, which is 2,365,040, as per the 2006 census. A sample size of 400 social mobilisers from the APC Gubernatorial Election in Gombe State was utilized for the study. A questionnaire was employed as the instrument for data collection. The acquired data were analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The findings indicated that mobilisation via Facebook attracts a larger audience to the party, social media posts on Facebook promote political mobilisation, and publishing on Facebook stimulates public interest in the party during the APC gubernatorial race in Gombe State. The study shows that advertising contestants on Instagram via videos reduces protest rates and significantly contributes to the political mobilisation of the APC gubernatorial election in Gombe State. The research advised that Facebook be utilised as an efficient instrument for the social media mobilisation of political activities.

Empirical Review

Udenze (2025) introduces the concept of “private activism,” where political participation is conducted within encrypted, semi-closed WhatsApp groups. His research finds that these private networks allow users to organize and deliberate with reduced fear of surveillance or reprisal, a point especially relevant in politically sensitive regions like Nigeria’s South-East. This aligns with earlier findings by Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2020), who observe that WhatsApp has effectively bypassed traditional political gatekeepers, thereby enabling horizontal communication flows and spontaneous mobilization. According to them, WhatsApp disrupts conventional political structures by facilitating encrypted group organizing and rumor propagation, often outside the control of political parties or government censors. The role of WhatsApp in youth political engagement has been widely validated. Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) found that Nigerian youths increasingly rely on digital platforms for political awareness, campaign interaction, and protest coordination. Their findings were echoed by Olley, Nwachukwu, and Agbo (2024), whose study reported that 89% of Nigerian university students credited social media particularly WhatsApp for influencing their political decisions during elections. This shows a strong causal link between social media exposure and real-world political engagement among youths.

In addition, Bassey (2024) provides a focused analysis of the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests, emphasizing the role of WhatsApp in amplifying youth voices. His study identifies WhatsApp not only as a coordination tool but also as a safe digital space where shared frustrations, cultural identities, and political ideologies are negotiated among peers. This aligns with Udenze’s (2025) thesis that encrypted networks create intimate counter-publics that are highly effective for peer-based mobilization. These insights are particularly relevant in the South-East, a region with a history of marginalization and secessionist sentiment, where youths often rely on informal networks to organize politically.

While WhatsApp has become indispensable for youth-led political engagement, it also presents significant challenges. Uwalaka and Nwala (2023) explore the architecture of WhatsApp compared to Twitter and note that WhatsApp’s structure built on private group chats and message forwarding creates echo chambers that are ripe for the spread of disinformation. They argue that political discourse on WhatsApp often lacks external accountability, which contributes to the unchecked spread of rumors and false narratives, especially during elections.

This concern is corroborated by Fisher, Hassan, and Omokaro (2023), who study how political party structures influence WhatsApp usage across West Africa. They found that strong party organizations often maintain tighter control over WhatsApp messaging, ensuring

consistent narratives. In contrast, in Nigeria, particularly among youth-led informal groups, there is less message discipline, making these spaces more susceptible to misinformation. Their work builds on the earlier theoretical proposition by Cheeseman et al. (2020), suggesting that WhatsApp enables both grassroots empowerment and institutional fragmentation.

Across the reviewed literature, there is a clear methodological shift between 2020 and 2025 from general studies of social media to more platform-specific investigations. Omotayo and Folorunso (2020), for instance, approached social media as a monolithic digital space, while recent studies like Udenze (2025) and Fisher et al. (2023) now examine the unique political dynamics within WhatsApp groups. This shift in focus reflects a growing scholarly recognition of platform-specific affordances and risks, including how private messaging apps differ structurally and functionally from open platforms like Facebook or Twitter.

Despite these developments, critical gaps remain. Few studies provide measurable indicators of how online activism on WhatsApp translates into offline political outcomes such as voter turnout, policy change, or sustained civic engagement. Moreover, while urban, educated youth dominate most sampled populations, the literature rarely examines digital exclusion among rural or female youth in the South-East. This represents a blind spot in current research, particularly as gender and geography continue to mediate access to digital tools (Uwalaka & Nwala, 2023).

Another major shortcoming lies in the lack of empirical data on the governance of WhatsApp by Meta. Although the platform claims to restrict misinformation through limited message forwarding and spam detection, few Nigerian studies critically evaluate the effectiveness of these measures. Given WhatsApp's closed nature, researchers face methodological barriers in accessing real-time group interactions, resulting in an overreliance on surveys and self-reported perceptions. In conclusion, the literature collectively demonstrates that WhatsApp plays a dual role in the political lives of Nigerian youths. In the South-East geopolitical zone, where political frustrations and aspirations intersect, WhatsApp groups have become both a political mobilization engine and a disinformation vector. The reviewed studies provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation, but also underscore the urgent need for platform-specific, ethnographic, and intersectional analyses that can better capture the nuances of youth political engagement in Nigeria's digital era.

Omotayo, & Folorunso, (2020) Mobilising Nigerian youth for active political participation via social media: The study assessed the accuracy of Facebook and WhatsApp during the 2019 general elections. A survey approach was employed, with a sample of 385 drawn from the official count of eligible voters in Lagos for the 2019 election. The questionnaire served as the principal tool for eliciting responses from participants. The findings indicated that both Facebook and WhatsApp were extensively utilised during the 2019 general election, with a significant proportion of youths encountering diverse messages throughout the electoral period, resulting in 91% of respondents affirming that Facebook and WhatsApp served as effective instruments for youth mobilisation. The hypothesis testing revealed a Pearson Chi-square value of 0.000 (at $P < 0.05$ significance level), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming the relevance of utilising social media to mobilise young during elections. The political destiny of Nigeria unequivocally depends on its youth; only by their active participation in political and electoral processes will the nation genuinely attain authentic democracy.

The research conducted by John, Ibe, and Ekuma (2020) on Social Media and Political Mobilisation aimed to investigate the mobilisation of electorates using social media during

the 2019 Presidential election in Cross River State. The study was directed by five objectives and five research questions. The research was based on Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory, which posits that technology influences individuals' thoughts, emotions, actions, and societal functioning. The thesis posits that technology propels progress inside every culture. The survey approach was employed. A sample size of 384 was extracted from a research population of 227,255. The research included a closed-ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews as data collection methods. The primary findings of the study indicated that social media, specifically Facebook, functions as the principal medium for political mobilisation in contemporary democratic societies. The electorates depended on social media as their primary source of information and the foundation for their opinions and voting decisions. Effective mobilisation and education of the populace facilitated their full participation in the political process. Subsequent studies indicated that social media may be used by desperate individuals inside the political arena. The study advocated, among other measures, an augmented utilisation of social media throughout all electoral processes. Social media should be utilised for many types of popular mobilisation, rather than being restricted to political campaigns alone. The government should establish comprehensive standards (regulatory framework) governing the use of internet media networks by political parties for election campaigns and other political activities to mitigate the detrimental use of these platforms for self-serving purposes.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for studies that seek to collect data from a specific population to describe existing conditions, opinions, practices, or characteristics. The rationale for using the descriptive survey design stems from its effectiveness in capturing attitudes and behaviors of a large population at a specific point in time (Creswell, 2014). This design enables the researcher to gather information from a representative sample of youths using WhatsApp for political engagement.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises youths aged 18–35 years residing in the six states of the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria: Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi States. This age group is considered youth based on the Nigerian National Youth Policy (2019). These individuals must be active WhatsApp users and participants in at least one politically inclined WhatsApp group.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Given the wide geographical coverage and large population size, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed.

1. Stage One – State Selection: All six states in the South-East region were included to ensure representativeness.
2. Stage Two – Local Government Selection: Two local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from each state, totaling 12 LGAs.
3. Stage Three – Respondent Selection: From each LGA, 50 youths who use WhatsApp and belong to politically active groups were purposively selected, resulting in a sample size of 600 respondents.

The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting participants who meet the inclusion criteria: being active WhatsApp users and members of politically inclined groups.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: “WhatsApp Political Engagement Questionnaire (WPEQ)”. The questionnaire was divided into five sections, Section A: Demographic information (age, gender, education level, location, political affiliation), Section B: Extent and frequency of WhatsApp usage, Section C: Types of political content consumed and shared, Section D: Level of political awareness and engagement influenced by WhatsApp groups, Section E: Perceptions of the effectiveness and limitations of WhatsApp for political mobilization.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review. Three experts in Political Science, Mass Communication, and Educational Measurement reviewed the instrument for relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness. Their suggestions were incorporated to refine the questionnaire items. The pilot study feedback further contributed to the final revision of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents from a different LGA (not included in the main study sample) in Abia State. The internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86, indicating a high level of reliability.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through the online survey was distributed via WhatsApp using Google Forms to politically active WhatsApp groups. Respondents were given one week to complete and return the questionnaire. Ethical procedures, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic data and general responses.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

Out of 600 questionnaires distributed, 573 were returned and found valid for analysis, giving a response rate of 95.5%, which is considered adequate for generalization.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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18–22	104	18.2
23–27	167	29.1
28–32	185	32.3
33–35	117	20.4
Total	573	100.0

The majority of respondents (32.3%) were between 28 and 32 years old, indicating that the sample is largely composed of mature youth who are likely to be politically aware.

Table 2: Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SSCE	57	9.9
OND/NCE	111	19.4
Bachelor's Degree/HND	312	54.5
Postgraduate Degree	93	16.2
Total	573	100.0

Over half of the respondents (54.5%) have a bachelor's degree or HND, which suggests that most respondents are well-educated and potentially more engaged in political discourse.

Table 4.3: Frequency of WhatsApp Usage

Frequency of Use	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Several times daily	398	69.5
Once daily	107	18.7
Few times per week	45	7.8
Rarely	23	4.0
Total	573	100.0

A significant number of youths (69.5%) use WhatsApp several times a day, indicating high exposure to content shared via the platform.

Table 4.4: Membership in Politically Inclined WhatsApp Groups

Membership Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	487	85.0
No	86	15.0
Total	573	100.0

A large majority (85%) of the respondents are members of political WhatsApp groups, confirming the relevance of WhatsApp as a tool for political discourse among youths.

Table 4.5: Types of Political Engagement via WhatsApp

Political Activity	Yes (%)	No (%)
Sharing political messages	82.3	17.7
Participating in online political debates	64.2	35.8
Following political group discussions	71.8	28.2
Campaigning for candidates	55.6	44.4
Mobilizing others to vote	60.9	39.1

The most common activities include sharing political messages (82.3%) and participating in group discussions (71.8%), indicating active engagement.

Table 4.6: Youth Perception of WhatsApp's Influence

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
WhatsApp increases my political awareness	45.3%	32.7%	10.3%	7.9%	3.8%
WhatsApp motivates me to vote or participate in rallies	38.2%	34.6%	12.0%	10.8%	4.4%
Political discussions on WhatsApp are informative	50.5%	29.8%	10.0%	6.4%	3.3%
WhatsApp helps me connect with like-minded youths	43.1%	36.4%	11.0%	6.2%	3.3%

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that WhatsApp positively influences their political awareness and participation.

Summary of Findings

- Most youths in the South-East region frequently use WhatsApp, with a majority involved in political groups.
- The platform serves as a significant avenue for political discussions, mobilization, and awareness creation.
- Statistical analyses show a strong relationship between WhatsApp usage and youth political engagement.
- Political participation includes campaigning, voting mobilization, and public opinion formation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with previous studies (Oyenuga, 2021) that found social media to be instrumental in political mobilization. WhatsApp, in particular, has emerged as a preferred platform due to its group messaging capability, affordability, and end-to-end encryption. The study confirms the growing digital political consciousness among Nigerian youths, validating theories such as the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Political Mobilization Theory, which emphasize media utility and civic activation.

Conclusion

The research shows that WhatsApp groups significantly influence the political activity of young in Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone. The platform has transformed from personal communication to a vital arena for civic engagement, activism, and political dialogue. It facilitates instantaneous dissemination of political information, enhances knowledge of national matters, and impacts political conduct, including voting, campaigning, and advocacy. Moreover, the results corroborate media and communication theories, notably the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively engage with media to satisfy several needs, including civic and political involvement. The Political Mobilisation Theory is pertinent, since it posits that media may stimulate political interest and engagement, particularly among those historically marginalised from conventional political frameworks. As Nigeria's democracy matures and digital inclusion broadens, platforms such as WhatsApp will progressively influence the political landscape. Comprehending their impact is essential for stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organisations, and policymakers, who seek to engage the youth demographic effectively.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the subsequent recommendations are proposed:

- Political parties and candidates ought to employ WhatsApp groups more strategically for campaign distribution, issue-oriented conversations, and mobilisation efforts aimed at young.
- Advocates must guarantee that political content sent via WhatsApp is accurate, informative, and free from misinformation or hate speech, since they might erode democratic principles.
- Young organisations ought to utilise WhatsApp as a medium to advance civic education, enhance political literacy, and facilitate young voter registration initiatives.

Civil society need to promote WhatsApp-based dialogues that foster political tolerance, issue-oriented debates, and peaceful political participation.

□

Governments and electoral organisations, like as INEC, have to allocate resources to digital literacy initiatives that educate youth on the proper use of WhatsApp and other social media platforms for political participation.

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