

## Political Participation among Youths: Examining the Effects of Personality Traits and Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

Youth has been on the forefront of political change in many African countries including Nigeria. Studies that have used different predictors of political participation among youths have produced different results. Therefore, the study examined personality traits and social media predicting political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. A cross-sectional survey design was utilized using purposive sampling technique to select the population. Validated questionnaires were adopted to conveniently collect data from 289 youths. Multiple regression analysis and independent samples t-test statistics were used to analyze data collected. The study tested two hypotheses which were accepted at  $p = .001$  level of significance. The result revealed that personality traits and social media jointly predicted political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State [ $R^2 = .083$ ,  $F(2, 287) = 7.413$ ,  $p = .001$ ]. Also, the result showed social media to independently predict political participation among study participants ( $\beta = .288$ ,  $t = 4.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) while personality traits did not independently predict political participation among study samples ( $\beta = -.103$ ,  $t = -.047$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Finally, gender was found to show a significant difference in political participation among study participants [ $t(289) = 7.24$ ,  $p = .001$ ]. The study concluded that social media and gender were more influential in motivating political participation than personality traits among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. It is recommended that both personality and political psychologists should profile and motivate youths to participate more in political activities than before in order to improve individuals and community well-being.

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## INTRODUCTION

Political participation has been described as an individual's engagement in the activities that contribute to the selection of representatives for effective administration of human and material resources of the local, state and federal government for a better society (Roberts et al., 2024). It is also conceptualized as the various strategies in which the public demonstrates their political views and display their influence on the political issues (Chatora, 2012). Put it differently, political participation involves citizens' engagement in the socio-political and economic issues which lead to selection and election of people to represent them. Political participations are diverse but could include voting during election, demonstrating when their representatives are not performing, contacting public officials, boycotting, attending party rallies, writing and posting blogs on current issues, volunteerism, mass protest, signing petitions on issues affecting government policies, suicide protests (Ogunka, 2022).

The motivation for youth participation in politics has been examined using different predictors. The first predictor is personality trait described as a consistent behavioural pattern of individuals over time (McCrae & Costa, 2015). It is what makes an individual different from each other. The McCrae and Costa's (2015) Big Five Personality Traits has been used as a working template to explain human personality traits. These are extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 2015). Extraversion describes an individual level of sociability, assertiveness and positive emotionality. Agreeableness describes an individual level of altruism, tender-mindedness, trust and modesty. Conscientiousness describes individuals who thinking before acting, who delays gratification, follow norms and rules, who planned, organized and prioritized tasks. The last one is openness to experience which describes the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life (McCrae & Costa, 2017; Pullmann, et al., 2006). Studies have consistently showed that individuals who are extraverts, agreeable and open to experience tend to participate more in political activities than individuals who are neurotic and conscientious (Pullmann et al., 2006; Gerber et al. 2011; Costa & McCrae, 2017).

In addition, social media is the second factor which is a computer-based communication platform used to disseminate information, messages, whether audio or visual to a target population to influence political participation (Roberts et al., 2024). The use of social media in political activities has changed the political discourse in Nigeria. Social media is considered participatory, interactive and cost-effective. Social media has become a veritable platform as far as political communication and participation are concerned in modern political engagement (Sule et al., 2017). Mano (2023) observed that social media is a major source of personal orientation, anonymous inter-activities and social community on a variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Obiesesan (2022) attributed the social media capacity of boosting participation to its connectedness and textual/audio-visual characteristics appeal. For example, the use of social media such as Facebook, X(Twitter), YouTube, the 2go, GSM-SMS/calls, blackberries services, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc, have made political participation

much easier, faster and even more cost effective than before now. Social media has been found to be a veritable tool in modern electioneering and individual participation (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020; Muntean, 2015). Nigeria had her first true test of social media use for political participation during the 2019 and 2023 general elections with the introduction of smartcard readers to capture voters' bio-data and used in voting and transmission of results online to the central servers for the announcement of the results. Researches have shown that individuals who scored high in social media use would score high in political participation (Shehu, 2014; Sule et al., 2017).

Finally, gender is another factor considered as likely to influence political participation among youths. That is, whether an individual is a male or a female would determine their willingness to participate in politics. Earlier, politics in Nigeria was a male-dominated activity with fewer female genders participating and holding political positions. This was what made it difficult for women to participate in politics. Studies have shown that gender affects the likelihood of youths participating in politics in Nigeria (Kotzé, 2021; Nwanesi & Wasudawan, 2020). However, studies have now found female genders to be more willing to participate in politics than their male genders (Clerk, 2020). One reason female youths are now interested in participating in politics is due to the process of socialization which refers to learning and adopting the values, norms, and behaviour of one's social group. Women are often more socialized and are more community-oriented and ready to participate in activities that promote the common good. This socialization influences their political participation (Nwanesi & Wasudawan, 2020).

Studies on political participation have used different predictors resulting in varied results. Also study linking personality traits and social media on political participation among youths in Nigeria are scarce thus leaving gaps in knowledge to fill. Therefore, the study examined personality traits and social media as predictors of political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. The research questions raised to guide this study were: Would personality traits and social media jointly and independently contribute to political participation among study participants in Borokiri, Rivers State? Would there be gender differences in political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State?

The study would provide a fresh insight into how personality traits and social media predict political participation among youth population in Borokiri, Rivers State. Also, personality and political psychologists would find the results of this useful in profiling youths and designing programs for their full engagement in political activities at the grass root levels in their respective communities. Finally, social media consultants would use the results of this study to craft political contents that would capture the youth populations into the political activities in their domains.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical construct

Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz et al., 1973) was used to anchor this study. The theory postulates that individuals would actively seek out and engage with social media in order to fulfill their specific needs and desires. The theory explains that individuals are actively involved in the selection and

utilization of social media including mobile phones, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook, X, etc. When applied to this study, individuals employ social media as medium of obtaining information to participate in political activities going on in the country and in the immediate environment.

### Hypotheses

Hypotheses tested were:

**H1:** Personality traits and social media would jointly and independently contribute to political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State.

**H2:** There would be gender differences in political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State.

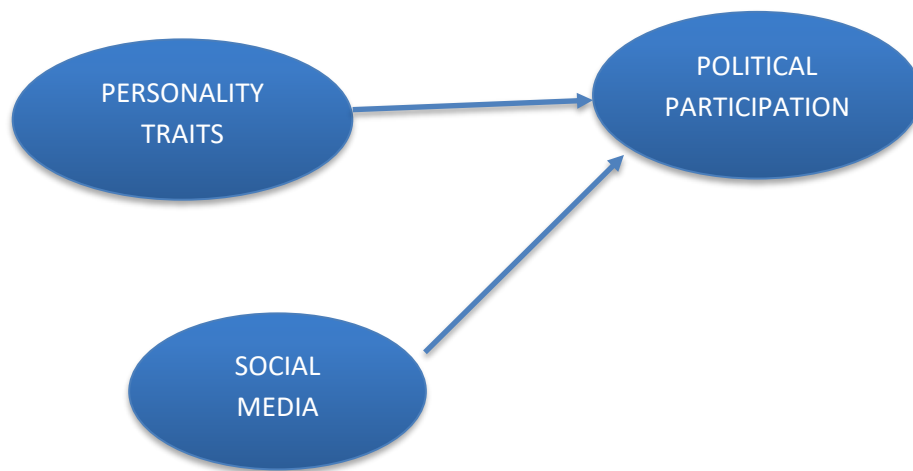


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework showing the predictability of personality traits and social media on political participation among youths in Port Harcourt, Rivers State

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

Cross-sectional survey design was used while validated questionnaires were utilized for data collection. Personality traits and social media were independent variables while political participation was the dependent variable. The study was carried out among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State.

### Sampling Techniques and size

Purposive sampling technique was selected to Borokiri in Port Harcourt, Rivers State and convenience sampling method to pick potential participants for questionnaires administration.

### Instruments

Data collection were achieved using:

*Problematic Social Networking Usage Scale* (PSNUS, Gonzalez-Nuevo et al., 2023) was used to measure social media. It is a 10-item scale presented on a 5-point Likert's format with responses of never, rarely, sometimes, often and always. Sample items include: "I use social media site to become more sociable" and "I use social media site for collaborative learning". The original author obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 while in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was obtained.

*EZ Yale Personality Questionnaire* was used to assess personality traits among participants. It is a 21-item scale rated on a 4-point Likert's format range from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Sample items include: "I tends to keep thought, feelings, or products to himself /herself" and "I likes to be given a lot of directions, observes what other are doing to guard himself / herself". The authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 and the current study obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

*Political Participation Questionnaire* (Jot form Company, 2006) was used to establish political participation among study participants. It is 12-item scales rated on a 5-point Likert's format range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Example of items are: "Government employee should be paid competitively with does in private sectors" and "Corporations should be barred from participating in political". Cronbach's alpha by authors was 0.97 and Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.91.

## **Procedure**

Letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo was used to identify the researchers. Potential participants were met at home, recreational centers, Mosques and Churches, street meetings and special events apart from political gatherings. They were approached by the researchers who introduced themselves to them one-on-one or in a group when found in a group. The purpose of the study was explained to them and asked for consent to participate in the study. They were duly informed of the voluntary nature of the study and that their responses would be treated confidentially. Based on their acceptance to participate, the research questionnaires were given to them to complete which took less than 16 minutes to fill and collected immediately. The total questionnaires distributed were 292, however, three questionnaires were not well-filled and were removed leaving 292 for the analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to test hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2 was tested using independent samples t-test. All hypotheses were accepted at a  $p = .001$  level of significance was used to accepted the hypothesis.

## RESEARCH RESULT

### Participants

The preliminary analysis indicated that 156 (54%) of the study participants constituted males, 133(46%) constituted females. In terms of their age bracket, 94 (33%) of the participants fall between 20 and 24 years age bracket, 110 (38%) were between 25 and 29 years age old, 85 (29%) were 30 years and above. The educational qualifications showed that 101 (35%) were school certificate holders, 89 (31%) were diploma holders, 96(33%) were degree holders while 3(1%) did not state their educational qualifications.

**Table 1. Zero-order Correlation of Study Variables**

S/N	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1	Personality	81.00	9.90	-		
2	Social media use	33.97	3.42	.115	-	
3	Political participation	25.55	6.35	.031	.288*	-

N=289, \* Significant at p =.001

Table 1 shows zero-order correlations of the study variables. The result indicated that social media positively correlated with political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. However, personality traits did not correlate with political participation among study participants ( $r = .031$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

### Testing the Hypotheses...

**H1:** Personality traits and social media would jointly and independently contribute to political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Personality Traits and Social Media as Joint and Independent Predictors of Political Participation among Youths in Borokiri, Rivers State**

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F	B	β	t	p
<b>Model 1</b>	.288	.083	.076	7.413				
Personality traits					-.002	-.103	-.047	.214
Social media use					.534	.288	4.93	.001

N= 289,\* Significant at p = .001.

Table 2 presents multiple regression analysis of joint and independent predictors of political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. The result revealed that personality traits and social media jointly predicted political participation among study participants [ $R^2 = .083$ ,  $F(2, 287) = 7.413$ ,  $p = .001$ ]. This

accounted for 8.3% variance explained in the dependent variable. Furthermore, the result showed that social media independently predicted political participation among study participants ( $\beta = .288, t = 4.93, p < .05$ ) while personality traits did not independently predict political participation among study participants ( $\beta = -.103, t = -.047, p > .05$ ).

**H2:** There would be gender difference in political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. The hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test and the result is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Independent Samples T-test of Gender Differences on Political Participation among Youths in Borokiri, Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	156	27.42	6.49	7.24	.001
Female	133	25.68	6.21		

Table 3 shows the independent samples t-test of gender differences on political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. The result showed gender differences among study participants [ $t(289) = 7.24, p = .001$ ] such that male youths scored higher in political participation (Mean = 27.42, SD = 6.49) than their female counterparts (Mean = 25.68). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

## DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that personality traits and social media would jointly predict political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State was supported. This means the interaction of personality traits and the use of social media tend to influence individuals' participation in political activities. Individual personality traits seem to predict an individual political participation all the way. This finding lent credence to the results that personality trait and social media interaction contributed significantly to an individual involvement in political activities among different populations and samples (Pullmann et al., 2006; Gerber et al. 2011; Mondak et al., 2010). Also, social media was found to independently predict political participating among study participants. Youth uses social media for social interaction and to acquire information greatly influenced their participation in political activities. This corroborated with previous results that social media has become a veritable tool in political discourse and involvement among youths especially in emerging democracy such as Nigerian (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020; Obiesesan, 2022; Muntean, 2015).

Finally, the hypothesis that gender would influence political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State was supported. Male youths were found

to be more involved in political activities than their female counterparts. This finding supported other studies (Clerk, 2020;

Kotzé, 2021) that found more males in the general population being actively involved in political activities than their female gender.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study examined personality traits and social media as contributors of political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at  $p = .001$ . The study has empirically established personality traits and social media as joint predictors of political participation among youths in Borokiri, Rivers State. Also, male genders were found to be more involved in political activities than their female genders. However, personality traits did not independently predict political participation among study participant.

It is recommended that personality and political psychologists should work with the youths to harness their personality traits to increase their political participation in their communities and State. Also, social media content creators should craft political messages that would encourage youths to participate in political activities in their communities.

## **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

The study suffered some limitations which need to be addressed in further studies. To begin with, the study was a cross-sectional study where data were collected using self-reported questionnaires with inherent social bias. Further studies should incorporate group discussion and documentary evidence from election authority to triangulate data collected from self-reported questionnaires. In addition, only one Local Government Area (LGA) in Borokiri, Rivers State was purposively selected for the study which hindered generalization of the study findings. Further studies should include more LGAs in the State with increase sample size to enhance generalization of the study findings. Finally, only two independent variables were investigated in this study which was not exhaustive. Further studies should include political education, voter apathy and locus of control to explore political participation among youth populations.

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