



## CHALLENGES TO INFORMATION ACCESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS BY YOUTHS IN UNIVERSITIES IN NORTHWEST STATES, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by university youths in Nigeria's northwest states in accessing information and participating in socio-political discussions on social media platforms. It is guided by two research questions and one null hypothesis in the following order: what challenges youths encounter in accessing information on social media platforms for socio-political participation in Northwest States of Nigeria; what challenges youths encounter in participating in socio-political discussions on social media platforms in Northwest States of Nigeria and there is no significant relationship between male and female youths in the type of social media platform they utilised to access information for socio-political participation in Northwest States of Nigeria. Using a quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 338 respondents across four public universities: Ahmadu Bello University, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Kaduna State University, and Umaru Musa Yar'adua University. The data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC). Some of the findings revealed that the reliability of information content and fake news were the most pressing challenges in information access and engagement, respectively. Gender differences in platform use were also statistically significant, indicating variation in how male and female students engage with social media for political purposes. The study recommends integrating Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into university curricula, organising regular digital safety workshops, and developing gender-sensitive engagement strategies. These measures aim to promote critical information evaluation, protect users' digital rights, and ensure inclusive political participation across gender lines. By addressing these multifaceted challenges, stakeholders can enhance the role of social media as a democratic tool for youth engagement in Nigeria's political landscape.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Information Access, Socio-political discussion, Social Media, Youths

### Introduction

Youths in universities across Nigeria's Northwest states increasingly rely on social media platforms for socio-political engagement. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube serve as primary channels for accessing political information and participating in discussions. A study by Yusuf, Mohammed, and Umar (2024) highlights that these platforms are not only popular but also considered reliable sources for socio-political content among university students in the region. However, despite their widespread use, several challenges impede effective information access and engagement.

One significant challenge is the digital divide prevalent in Nigeria, particularly in the Northwest. Factors such as high costs of smartphones, limited internet connectivity, and inadequate digital literacy hinder many students from fully utilising social media for political discourse. This divide is more pronounced in rural areas, where infrastructural deficits further exacerbate the issue (Digital divide in Nigeria, 2025). Consequently, a substantial number of youths remain excluded from online political conversations, limiting the inclusivity and representativeness of such discussions. Misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms pose another significant barrier. The decentralised nature of these platforms allows for the rapid spread of unverified information, making it challenging for users to discern credible sources. This proliferation of false information can mislead youths, shaping their political opinions based on inaccuracies (Misinformation, 2025). The lack of

stringent content moderation further complicates efforts to maintain the integrity of information accessed by university students.

Additionally, online harassment and cyberbullying deter many youths from participating in socio-political discussions. A survey highlighted that a significant percentage of respondents faced challenges such as bullying, harassment, and trolling when expressing views online (Survey exposes challenges in Nigeria's digital politics space, 2024). Such hostile environments discourage open dialogue and can lead to self-censorship among students, thereby stifling democratic engagement.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is necessary. Improving digital infrastructure and affordability can bridge the access gap, enabling more youths to participate in online political discourse. Educational initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy will empower students to critically evaluate information sources. Furthermore, implementing robust policies to combat online harassment and misinformation can create a safer and more trustworthy environment for socio-political engagement among university youths in Nigeria's Northwest.

### **Problem Statement**

Social media have emerged as powerful tools for fostering socio-political participation, public discourse, opinion formation, surveys, campaigning, and information dissemination. In Nigeria, the first notable use of social media in political engagement occurred during the 2011 and 2015 general elections, marking a turning point in digital political activism. These platforms have since become central not only to information access but also to content creation by users (Omotola, 2024). While it has provided Nigerian youths with broader access to information and communication tools, it has also exposed them to complex challenges tied to digital literacy and social media manipulation. Bello and Ajao (2024) argue that although digital communication enables greater civic engagement, it can simultaneously threaten national cohesion when misused. The 2015 pre-election period in Nigeria exemplified this duality, as both traditional and social media platforms were exploited to circulate fake news and political propaganda (Folayan et al., 2024). Attempts by government institutions at federal, state, and local levels to curtail these issues through awareness and sensitisation campaigns yielded limited success, serving more as short-term deterrents than as long-term solutions (africanscholarpub.com). These dynamics underscore the need for focused academic inquiry into challenges youths in Nigerian universities encounter, particularly in the Northwest geopolitical zone, with social media in accessing information for socio-political discussion.

### **Research Question**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What challenges do youths encounter in accessing information on social media platforms for socio-political participation in the Northwest States of Nigeria?
2. What challenges do youths encounter in participating in socio-political discussions on social media platforms in the Northwest States of Nigeria?

### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant relationship between male and female youths in the type of social media platform they utilised to access information for socio-political participation in the Northwest States of Nigeria.

### **Review of Literature**

In the conceptual discussions by Manning (2014), emphasis was placed on the metamorphological birth of social media in that it is the most used term to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation and often, the development of media was divided into two different ages: the broadcast age and the interactive age. In the broadcast age, media were almost exclusively centralised, where one entity, such as a radio or television station, newspaper company, or movie production studio, distributed messages to many people. Feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed, and impersonal. Mediated communication between individuals typically happened on a much smaller level, usually via personal letters, telephone calls, or

sometimes on a slightly larger scale through means such as photocopied family newsletters. With the rise of digital and mobile technologies, interaction on a large scale became easier for individuals than ever before, and as such, a new media age was born where interactivity was placed at the centre of new media functions. The low cost and accessibility of new technology also allowed more options for media consumption than ever before, and so, instead of only a few news outlets, individuals now can seek information from several sources and dialogue with others via message forums about the information posted. At the core of this ongoing revolution is social media. Manning further averred in his quest to understand social media, the importance of looking at the core characteristics, common forms, and common functions of social media in order to understand the categorisation and changing nature of social media's new features and services. These were made in the following ways:

(a) In terms of core characteristics, all social media involve some sort of digital platform, whether that be mobile or stationary. Not everything digital, however, is necessarily social media.

(b) Common forms of social media demonstrate, some are used primarily for recreation or personal connections, others for work or professional reasons, but most allow leeway for both.

Social media is rife with all sorts of misinformation, the veracity of which, to a large extent, is doubtful, scary, sceptical and most times damaging to unsuspecting users. Misinformation is a common challenge encountered when accessing information on social media for socio-political discussion (Homero & Hsuan, 2019). For instance, fake news has become a buzzword, especially during and after elections (Persily, 2017; Grinberg et al., 2019). The emergence of social media technologies and the fragmentation of information have encouraged the spread of misinformation and fake news. The spread of fake news could also be traced as far back as 1938, according to H. G wells' drama 'The War of the Worlds', which represents an instance of widespread misinformation. Facticity and deception have been used to provide typologies of fake news definitions for different types of information, such as negative advertising, propaganda, manipulation, fabrication, news satire and news parody (Bode & Vraga, 2015; Tandoc et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, continuing efforts at understanding fake news and its complex factors have contributed to the rise of misinformation; understanding how it affects youths and exploring how to address misinformation and elicit news credibility are all important tasks for scholars (Oeldorf-Hirsch & DeVoss, 2019). Privacy and convenience, legal risk, Level of language proficiency and Level of education attained affect the use of social media and networking sites. Trust and credibility have a significant influence on the use of social media, and these can be identified as barriers in using social media for information and socio-political discussion (Athukorala, 2018). Studies revealed that the main challenges of social media for political mobilisation are rumours, the spread of fake news and conspiracies. Currently, Political mobilisations are influenced by every story, whether true or not, that gets spread around social media. Nowadays, it's getting more and more difficult to identify real or actual news from fake news around social media, which makes this distinction especially confusing. The constant stream of memes, links, and rumours about political leaders and candidates is a mixture of truth, lies, satire and speculation. Some fake news sites simply exist to post clickbait stories or to troll readers who do not know how to verify information (Yalemsew & Desta, 2019).

University students in Nigeria face numerous challenges when accessing social media for socio-political discussions. These challenges range from technological limitations to security threats and content reliability issues. Below is a discussion of these challenges, supported by current literature and studies. Many students struggle with phone compatibility and the inability to afford the appropriate devices necessary for seamless social media use. A study highlighted that students often rely on outdated smartphones, limiting their ability to engage effectively on social platforms (Ahmed, 2017). Additionally, network fluctuations and the high cost of data subscriptions hinder consistent access to online discussions. The erratic power supply and poor internet services in remote areas exacerbate these issues, making it difficult for students to participate in digital dialogues (Springer, 2023).

The rise in hackers' activities, cybercriminal dubious activities, and scammers poses significant threats to students. Reports indicate that Nigerian university students have increasingly become involved in cybercrimes, partly due to economic hardships and the allure of quick financial gains (Olaigbe, 2021). Furthermore, platforms

like Instagram have witnessed a surge in sextortion scams, leading to the removal of thousands of fraudulent accounts linked to Nigerian networks (Reuters, 2024). Cyberbullying and online harassment are prevalent issues affecting students' mental well-being. Studies have shown that victims of cyberbullying often experience depression, anxiety, and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). The anonymity provided by social media platforms often emboldens bullies, making it challenging to hold perpetrators accountable.

Students frequently encounter challenges related to the reliability of information content and information privacy. The spread of propagandist agendas and unsubstantiated content on social media platforms can mislead students and distort their understanding of socio-political issues (Adams et al., 2023). Moreover, concerns about profile data/cookie tracking have raised alarms about personal data security, with many students unaware of how their information is collected and used (Eke et al., 2014). The information bombardment on social media can overwhelm students, making it difficult to discern credible sources from unreliable ones. This challenge is compounded by the lack of proper and reliable sources, leading to the spread of misinformation and hindering informed discussions (Yahaya & Ayodeji, 2019). The absence of effective content moderation further exacerbates this issue, allowing false information to proliferate unchecked.

**Methodology**

Quantitative methodology and cross cross-sectional survey were used to conduct this investigation. It was suitable because the study intended to collect numerical data to give an adequate and true response from the respondents. This granted the researcher the opportunity to draw balanced and in-depth conclusions and make adequate inferences from data from the respondents at a specified time and location. The total population of the study is 15 (201,062) Universities in the Northwest States of Nigeria. A simple random probability sampling technique and sample table were used to draw a sample size of 343 across four (4) universities, namely: Ahmadu Bello University, Usmanu Danfodiyyo University, Kaduna State University and Umaru Musa Yar'adua University. A self-designed questionnaire, which was subjected to face and content validation and with a reliability coefficient of 0.997, formed the backbone of this survey. The data collected were analysed using frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation and PPMC.

**Result**

**Challenges Youths Encountered in Accessing Information on Social Media Platforms for Socio-Political Participation in the Northwest States of Nigeria**

**Table 1: Challenges to Accessing Socio-Political Information on Social Media Platforms**

Options	ABU	BUK	UDUS	KASU	UMYU	Σ	μ	σ
Phone compatibility with social media	3(0.9%)	2(0.6%)	18(5.2%)	7(2.0%)	-	30	6	7.17
Hackers activities	101(29.4%)	80(23.3%)	53(15.5%)	50(14.6%)	18(5.2%)	302	60.4	31.5
Cybercriminal dubious activities	77(22.4%)	25(7.3%)	27(7.9%)	48(13.9%)	20(5.8%)	197	39.4	23.5
Bullies	37(10.8%)	14(4.1%)	27(7.9%)	20(5.8%)	3(0.9%)	101	20.2	12.8
Information Privacy Challenge	90(26.2%)	22(6.4%)	30(8.7%)	40(11.7%)	19(5.5%)	201	40.2	29.0
Network fluctuation	106(30.9%)	32(9.3%)	24(6.9%)	39(11.4%)	20(5.8%)	221	44.2	35.3
Challenge of Data Subscription	111(32.4%)	83(24.2%)	37(10.8%)	41(11.9%)	18(5.2%)	290	58	37.9
Inability to afford an appropriate phone/laptop for social media use	96(27.9%)	25(7.3%)	10(2.9%)	1(0.3%)	2(0.6%)	134	26.8	39.8
Reliability of information content	107(31.2%)	98(28.6%)	53(15.5%)	43(12.5%)	20(5.8%)	321	64.2	37.0
Anonymity issue	55(16.0%)	12(3.5%)	22(6.4%)	6(1.7%)	1(0.3%)	96	19.2	21.4
Substantiating content	3(0.9%)	14(4.1%)	24(6.9%)	1(0.3%)	2(0.6%)	44	8.8	9.9
Profile data/cookie	103(30.0%)	25(7.3%)	11(3.2%)	23(6.7%)	17(4.9%)	179	35.8	37.9
Propagandist agenda	45(13.1%)	36(10.5%)	28(8.2%)	10(2.9%)	0	119	23.8	18.5
Scammers	107(31.2%)	87(25.4%)	58(16.9%)	48(13.9%)	20(5.8%)	320	64	33.9
Restriction issues	85(24.8%)	91(26.5%)	51(14.9%)	37(10.8%)	20(5.8%)	284	56.8	30.5
Information bombardment	21(6.1%)	14(4.1%)	25(7.3%)	11(3.2%)	12(3.5%)	83	16.6	6.1
Others: Lack of a proper and reliable source	98(28.6%)	43(12.5%)	54(15.7%)	40(11.7%)	20(5.8%)	255	51	29

**Key: Σ =Total, μ =Mean, σ =Standard Deviation**

Table 1 shows the types of challenges encountered by youths in universities of the northwest states in accessing information on social media for their socio-political participation. In order of frequency, reliability of information content is the most pressing challenge, with a Mean score of 64.2( $\sigma$  =37.0), followed by the challenge of contending with scammers, with a Mean score of 64( $\sigma$  =33.9). The least challenge is phone compatibility with social media, with a Mean score of 6( $\sigma$  =7.17). Other significant challenges encountered are hackers’ activities, restriction issues, data subscription challenge, network fluctuation and information privacy challenge. Social media is not immune to malicious activities of scammers, hackers, information privacy and technological instability. Perhaps it suffices to say that those are the negative sides of social media, and the positive sides are the simplification and ease of access to information. However, youths in universities of Northwest States, Nigeria must devise means of safety from the challenges associated with social media.

**Challenges Youths Encountered in Participating in Socio-Political Discussions on Social Media Platforms in the Northwest States of Nigeria**

**Table 2: Challenges Encountered in Participating in Socio-Political Discussion on Social Media Platforms**

Options	ABU	BUK	UDUS	KASU	UMYU	$\Sigma$	$\mu$	$\sigma$
Misinformation	89(25.9%)	78(22.7%)	46(13.4%)	38(11.1%)	20(5.8%)	271	54.2	28.6
Sceptic about information on social media	93(27.1%)	87(25.4%)	58(16.9%)	30(8.7%)	17(4.9%)	285	57	33.6
Fake news	112(32.7%)	97(28.3%)	58(16.9%)	48(13.9%)	20(5.8%)	335	67	37.3
Rumours mongering	76(22.2%)	45(13.1%)	52(15.2%)	35(10.2%)	20(5.8%)	228	45.6	20.8
Lack of interest	41(11.9%)	23(6.7%)	36(10.5%)	21(6.1%)	2(0.6%)	123	24.6	15.2
Financial constraint	24(6.9%)	18(5.2%)	22(6.4%)	37(10.8%)	14(4.1%)	115	23	8.7
Manipulation	60(17.5%)	16(4.7%)	7(2.0%)	9(2.6%)	18(5.2%)	110	22	21.7
Domination	60(17.5%)	23(6.7%)	9(2.6%)	3(0.9%)	-	95	19	24.5
Unsolicited campaign	12(3.5%)	13(3.8%)	9(2.6%)	31(9.0%)	-	65	13	11.2
Network fluctuation	77(22.4%)	85(24.8%)	52(15.2%)	43(12.5%)	18(5.2%)	275	55	26.9
Language proficiency	25(7.3%)	28(8.2%)	11(3.2%)	-	-	64	12.8	13.3
Privacy issues	95(27.7%)	87(25.4%)	50(14.6%)	44(12.8%)	17(4.9%)	293	58.6	32.2
Legal risk to delicate political issues	48(13.9%)	87(25.4%)	32(9.3%)	26(7.6%)	10(2.9%)	203	40.6	29.2
Level of education	63(27.1%)	77(22.4%)	25(7.3%)	-	-	165	33	35.6
Bait stories to incitement	15(4.4%)	1(0.3%)	-	-	8(2.3%)	24	4.8	6.6

Key:  $\Sigma$  =Total,  $\mu$  =Mean,  $\sigma$  =Standard Deviation

Table 2 reveals the challenges encountered by youths in universities of the northwest states participating in socio-political discussion on social media. The major they face is fake news with a Mean score of 67( $\sigma$  =37.3), followed by privacy issues with a Mean score of 58.6( $\sigma$  =32.2). The least challenge they encounter is bait stories to incitement, with a Mean score of 4.8( $\sigma$  =6.6). Other challenges encountered are network fluctuation, rumour mongering, legal risk to delicate political issues, misinformation and being skeptic of information on social media. This implies that socio-political participation on social media requires constant verification of information and a conscious of fake news, bait and propaganda.

**Ho- There is no significant relationship between male and female youths in the type of social media platform they utilised to access information for socio-political participation in the Northwest States of Nigeria.**

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, a parametric statistic, is used to test for a relationship in the hypothesis. Table 3 is the result of the hypothesis tested.

**Table 3: Test for significant Relationship between Male and Female Youths in the Type of Social Media Platform Utilise to Access Information for Socio-Political Participation**

Male and Female Youths	Mean	Std. Deviation	Male and Female Youths	Sig.
Male and Female	Pearson Correlation 10.6500	6.30184	1	.128
Youths	Sig. (2-tailed) 8.9000	5.97275		.592
	N 20	20	20	20

Table 3 shows the result of the hypothesis tested against an alpha value of 0.5. From the table significant value of .592 is >0.5. Therefore, the null hypothesis that “there is no significant relationship between male and female

youths in the type of social media platform they use to access information for socio-political participation in the northwest states of Nigeria” is rejected. This implies that there is a correlation in the types of social media use to access information for socio-political reasons between male and female youths in the Universities of Northwest States, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

Table 1 provides a quantitative representation of the various challenges encountered by youths in universities across Northwest Nigeria when accessing information on social media for socio-political participation. The most pressing issue identified is the reliability of information content, which recorded the highest mean score of 64.2 ( $\sigma = 37.0$ ). This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation on social media, which misleads users and distorts political discourse (Awopetu et al., 2024; Okereke & Oghenetega, 2014). The challenge of scammers, closely followed by a mean score of 64 ( $\sigma = 33.9$ ), reflects the growing concern over fraudulent activities targeting social media users, especially young people with limited digital security awareness (Olaigbe, 2021).

Other significant challenges reported include hackers’ activities, restriction issues, high data subscription costs, network fluctuations, and information privacy concerns. These reflect the broader infrastructural and digital security limitations prevalent in Nigerian higher education institutions. For example, hackers and cybercriminals exploit the digital naivety of students, compromising their personal data and sometimes manipulating political opinions (Egbunike, 2019). Similarly, fluctuating internet connectivity and the high cost of data restrict students’ ability to engage in sustained socio-political interactions online (Mangden & Diyoshak, 2023).

Notably, information privacy challenges remain critical, as many youths are unaware of how their personal data is harvested and utilised by social media platforms. The lack of robust privacy regulations and the tendency to overshare online contribute to increased vulnerability (Wikipedia, 2024). In contrast, phone compatibility with social media was reported as the least challenge, with a mean score of 6 ( $\sigma = 7.17$ ), likely due to increasing smartphone penetration in urban university settings (Awopetu et al., 2024).

Despite the numerous drawbacks, social media continues to serve as a powerful tool for socio-political awareness and activism among Nigerian youths. Its ability to simplify information access and enhance civic engagement cannot be overstated (Okereke & Oghenetega, 2014). However, without deliberate strategies such as digital literacy education, fact-checking awareness, and secure online practices, the negative consequences may overshadow its potential benefits.

It is imperative that students, educators, and policymakers collaborate to develop effective interventions. This includes integrating media literacy into university curricula, enforcing cybersecurity protocols, and sensitising students on how to critically evaluate content and safeguard their digital identities.

Table 2 highlights the challenges university youths in Northwest Nigeria face when engaging in socio-political discussions via social media. The most prominent issue identified is fake news, which recorded a high mean score of 67 ( $\sigma = 37.3$ ). This aligns with existing literature pointing to the significant role fake news plays in distorting political understanding and polarising public opinion, especially during elections and socio-political movements (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Iwuoha & Jude-Onoabedje, 2021). Fake news is often designed to manipulate users emotionally and ideologically, leading to poor decision-making and misguided civic actions among youths (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Following closely is the challenge of privacy issues, with a mean score of 58.6 ( $\sigma = 32.2$ ). Many youths are unaware of how their data is harvested, shared, or even sold by social media platforms, making them vulnerable to breaches and surveillance (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Privacy violations can deter students from participating freely in political discourse, especially in politically tense regions. This concern is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where data protection laws are still evolving, and public understanding of online privacy is limited (Wikipedia, 2024).

Bait stories to incitement, with the lowest mean score of 4.8 ( $\sigma = 6.6$ ), indicate that while less frequently encountered, such content still poses risks. These are often sensationalised or emotionally provocative narratives

intended to manipulate users or stir unrest. Though less common, their impact can be severe when they do surface, contributing to hate speech, violence, or communal tension (Ibraheem & Garba, 2020).

Other notable challenges include network fluctuation, rumour mongering, legal risks when addressing sensitive political issues, misinformation, and scepticism of information encountered online. Network instability, especially in rural areas, continues to limit students' consistent access to social platforms (Mangden & Diyoshak, 2023). Meanwhile, the spread of rumours and misinformation can blur the line between truth and fiction, reinforcing the need for constant information verification. As a result, many students approach online content with scepticism, uncertain of its authenticity (Awopetu et al., 2024).

This underscores the necessity for media and information literacy, particularly among university students engaging in civic matters online. To effectively participate in socio-political discourse, students must develop the skills to fact-check, verify sources, and critically assess the intent and authenticity of the information they consume and share (UNESCO, 2017). Without these skills, their political engagement risks being shaped by propaganda, falsehoods, or manipulation.

Table 3 presents the outcome of a hypothesis test conducted to examine gender differences in the types of social media platforms used by youths in universities across Northwest Nigeria for socio-political participation. The hypothesis was tested against an alpha value ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.5. The result showed a significant value of 0.592, which is greater than 0.5. Based on this result, the null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant relationship between male and female youths in the type of social media platform they use to access information for socio-political participation" is rejected. This outcome suggests that there is a correlation between gender and the types of social media platforms accessed for socio-political engagement among university youths in the region.

This finding aligns with prior research indicating that gender influences online behaviour, particularly in how men and women use social media for political expression, news consumption, and civic engagement. Studies have shown that male youths tend to prefer platforms like Twitter and YouTube, which are often used for real-time political discussions and video-based political commentary. On the other hand, female youths are more inclined toward platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, which support interpersonal communication and community-based discussions (Brandtzaeg, 2017; Duggan & Smith, 2013). These differences often reflect not just preferences, but also social norms and access-related factors.

Furthermore, gendered patterns of social media use may affect the type and depth of political content youths engage with. According to Olorunnisola and Martin (2020), while both male and female youths actively use social media for political purposes, men are more likely to engage in open political debate, while women often prefer closed-group discussions or private messaging due to concerns about privacy, harassment, or cultural constraints.

The implication of this result is significant for policymakers, educators, and civic organisations targeting youth political participation through digital platforms. Recognising these gendered preferences in social media use can help in designing inclusive and tailored media literacy programs that promote equitable access to political information and ensure balanced representation in online political discourse (UNESCO, 2017).

Thus, while social media offers a shared platform for civic engagement, its usage is not uniform across genders, and understanding these differences is crucial for enhancing youth participation in socio-political processes, especially in culturally diverse and sensitive regions like Northwest Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made according to the findings and discussion of the study:

1. Given the high prevalence of fake news, misinformation, and challenges related to the reliability of information content, universities should incorporate Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into their general studies curriculum. This will equip students with critical thinking skills, the ability to verify online content, identify propaganda, and responsibly engage in political discourse online.

2. Targeted sensitisation campaigns and workshops should be organised regularly on digital safety practices, privacy settings, recognising phishing attempts, and the ethical use of personal data. University ICT departments and digital rights organisations should lead this initiative.
3. There is a need for gender-sensitive strategies that promote inclusive online civic participation. Educational stakeholders and civil society groups should design tailored interventions, such as female-led political discourse forums on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, and open debates via Twitter to accommodate the digital behaviour and preferences of both male and female students.

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