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# Influence of Twitter (X) Political Campaign Messages on the Students of Kwara State University

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## Abstract
This study was conducted to determine the influence of Twitter (X) political campaign messages on the political behaviour of the students of Kwara State University, Nigeria. The research is anchored on the theoretical premises of agenda setting and uses and gratifications. The researcher adopted a quantitative survey-based approach and an online questionnaire for data gathering. The finding of this study revealed that a substantial number of the students have access to the internet and are actively engaged in political participation on Twitter. Political campaign messages on Twitter were found to significantly influence students' political opinions and decisions, as well as their involvement in offline political actions, such as voting or attending rallies. However, the researcher also found that challenges such as the digital divide, media illiteracy, algorithmic manipulation and cyber security concerns hinder full participation in online political activities. Thus, the researchers recommended addressing these issues to optimise the potential for the young generation participation in politics through digital and offline platforms.

**Keywords:** Influence, Political Campaign Messages, Twitter(X), Young Generation, Kwara State University Students

## Introduction
Among all generations, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012), who were raised amidst rapid advancements in digital technology, are widely considered to have the easiest and fastest access to information (Kozen, 2021). This generation, accustomed to a constant flow of diverse content, has developed broad perspectives and aspirations, driven by a world that offers endless opportunities and challenges. Their views on politics, politicians and public life are shaped by the digital landscape in which they have grown up, where access to real-time information, social media platforms and interactive technologies has profoundly influenced their perceptions. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is more inclined to support politicians who make concrete promises about the future, rather than those who focus on past achievements or failures. This shift in political engagement has prompted politicians to adapt their communication strategies, utilising new digital tools and evolving their messaging to meet the expectations of a younger, more tech-savvy electorate.

Twitter provides young people with an interactive space to discuss political issues, challenge ideas and participate in public debates. This accessibility and immediacy have significantly impacted how young people are often at the forefront of social and political activism (Ağırdır, 2020). The platform's interactive nature allows for immediate dialogue and feedback, as well as, make people who are often leaders in social and political movements, exhibit a heightened level of political engagement, making the platform an essential tool for understanding how people interact with political campaigns (Theocharis & Lowe, 2015).

With the increasing prominence of Twitter as a tool for political communication, understanding its impact on young people engagement is crucial to assessing the broader role of digital platforms in shaping political attitudes and actions among the younger generation. This research investigated how political messages on Twitter influence students' perceptions of candidates, their political participation and their involvement in real-life political activities.

**Statement of the Problem**

The development of modern political communication methods has played a crucial role in the evolution of democratic systems. As Habermas (2022) emphasises, political communication is a two-way, dynamic process that facilitates the development of effective relationships between citizens and their governments. This interaction is essential for promoting social stability and reinforcing democratic principles. In new and transitioning democracies, it is essential to involve young people in the political process. Young people engagement in politics can help sustain democratic ideals and prevent the return of authoritarianism. When young people are marginalised from formal political channels, especially in countries where they have historically been at the forefront of challenging autocratic rule, it can lead to disenchantment. This detachment may undermine the stability of democracy, escalate conflicts and erode political representation, leaving a significant portion of the population without a voice in key decisions that affect their lives. In view of this, the study aims to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the influence of Twitter political campaign messages on students of Kwara State University.

**Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out how students of Kwara State University utilise Twitter (X) for political purposes.
2. Determine the influence of Twitter (X) political campaign messages on students' political engagement.
3. Ascertain the challenges encountered by students of Kwara State University in the course of adopting Twitter (X) for accessing political campaign messages and political participation.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Twitter, now known as X, is widely recognised as one of the most influential social media platforms across the globe. It has become a significant space for public dialogue, political campaigning, and the exchange of information, particularly in the realm of political communication. Twitter has become an essential tool for the rapid exchange of information, making it highly effective for sharing news and updates. Kwak *et al* (2010) describe Twitter as functioning more like an "information network" than a conventional social network, with users primarily following accounts for news rather than personal connections. Hermida (2010) introduces the concept of "ambient journalism," where Twitter keeps users informed about ongoing events in real-time.

Businesses and brands also leverage Twitter for engaging with customers and promoting their services or products. Lovejoy *et al* (2012) explain that organisations utilise Twitter for three key activities: sharing information, fostering community connections and encouraging action. Its ability to provide instant responses makes it an effective medium for managing customer service and addressing crises. In academic and professional spheres, Twitter facilitates the sharing of ideas, networking and collaboration. Veletsianos (2012) points out its significant role in spreading academic knowledge and creating professional communities. Moreover, the platform is deeply ingrained in popular culture, with its real-time features fostering the exchange of trends, memes, and cultural phenomena.

In the political arena, Twitter acts as a catalyst for engagement and discourse. Boulianne (2015) identifies Twitter as a "powerful tool for political participation," especially for younger audiences. It provides a space where political ideas and opinions are shared, influencing public attitudes and behaviors. Jungherr (2016) highlights Twitter's function as a platform for public communication, allowing users to broadcast brief messages (tweets) to a global audience. Twitter plays an equally important function in advocating for political involvement offline. Advocacy groups and activists employ the platform and real life human mobilisation to increase public awareness of particular problems, galvanise followers and impact decisions regarding political engagement. These groups can bring attention to under-represented concerns and put pressure on political participation makers to address them by utilising hashtags, viral campaigns, and targeted messaging. For instance, social movements like as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have leveraged Twitter to spread their messages and encourage meaningful political engagement and societal transformations (Yang, 2016; Jackson, 2020).

In order to better understand how Twitter usage impacts political engagement among university students and the relationship between Twitter activity and students' political participation and activism, Molyneux & Schneider (2019) used content analysis and interviews with a sample of 30 students and 10 political analysts to determine how Twitter is perceived as a tool for influencing political participation and to comprehend the perceived influence of Twitter on student engagement with political issues and political participation discussions. According to the study, students agreed that Twitter is an effective medium for influencing the conversation around political participation. Boulianne (2020) used meta-analysis to examine 40 studies in order to assess the effect of social media on student political participation and to offer a thorough overview of the ways in which social media sites such as Twitter affect student political participation. The

meta-analysis discovered a favourable correlation between students' use of social media and their engagement in politics. This demonstrated that Twitter encourages more advocacy and engagement.

Media sources have the power to shape public conversation by prioritising certain topics above others and so influencing the audience's perception of which concerns are most important. This phenomenon, which is sometimes called the "media agenda," has the power to shape the "public agenda" by giving some topics more weight than others (McCombs & Shaw, 2018). Agenda setting is relevant to this study due to the portrayal of Twitter as a mass medium. With the rise of Twitter (X) as a mass medium and powerful political tool, it has become a key platform where political campaigns set agendas and influence public discourse, especially among younger populations such as university students. Politicians can use Twitter to push specific issues to the forefront of the political conversation, even without the mediation of traditional news outlets. Students, are more likely to be active users of Twitter and in view of this, they are exposed to Twitter's real-time engagement, hash tag activism and viral content mechanisms that
ensure that particular issues related to political campaigns gain significant visibility and prominence.

Uses and gratifications theory places a strong emphasis on how audiences actively interpret and use media content into their everyday lives. According to Sundar & Limperos (2019), people might obtain differing levels of satisfaction from the same media content due to their varied backgrounds, experiences and settings; for instance, some people watch news broadcasts to keep up with current affairs, but others may do so for amusement or as a regular pastime. The uses and gratifications theory offers a strong foundation for comprehending how people actively look for and use media to fulfill different wants and desires. In relation to uses and gratifications, Twitter is a valuable resource for students who are seeking for political information.

## Methodology

The research design for this study is quantitative survey method. This study population was drawn from students of Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria as of 2024. According to the University registry, the total population is 25,000 cutting across the 6 faculties in the University. The sampling technique used for the study is simple random sampling technique. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the undergraduate students of Kwara State University via Google form. The sample size for the study was determined through Taro Yamane (1998) formula thus:

n = Sample size, N = Population under the study, e = Margin of error or level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \qquad n = \frac{25000}{1 + (0.05)^2} \qquad n = \frac{25000}{63.5}$$

n = 397.700 rounded to whole number is 400.

The data obtained from the questionnaire for this research study were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science 22 (IBM-SPSS 22). In addition, data were presented using descriptive statistics such as; frequency tables and percentages.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Rate of engaging in Political Discussions and Debates on Twitter**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very often | 129 | 32.3 |
| Often | 160 | 40.1 |
| Rarely | 111 | 27.8 |
| Never | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **400** | **100.0** |

Table 1 findings suggest that political discussions and debates are quite prevalent on Twitter among Kwara State University students, which could be relevant to how Twitter political campaign messages might influence students' political opinion.

**Table 2: Twitter Political Updates influence the Students of Kwara State University in the Area of Political Campaign, Political Contestants and Political Parties**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 230 | 57.5 |
| Agree | 130 | 32.5 |
| Undecided | 8 | 2 |
| Strongly disagree | 12 | 3 |
| Disagree | 10 | 2.5 |
| **Total** | **400** | **100.0** |

According to table 2, majority of students either strongly agree (57.5%) or agree (32.5%) that Twitter political updates influence them in following political campaigns, contestants and parties and staying informed about political matters. This suggests that Twitter plays a significant role in shaping political awareness among students. The findings also suggest that Twitter is an influential platform for political engagement among Kwara State University students, as the majority of students believe it helps them stay updated on political matters and influences their political activity. This may indicate a strong impact of Twitter as a political communication tool for students.

**Table 3: Rate of Sharing and re-tweeting Political Content on Twitter**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very often | 179 | 44.8 |
| Often | 127 | 31.8 |
| Rarely | 94 | 23.5 |
| Never | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **400** | **100.0** |

Table 3 depicts that a significant portion of students either share or re-tweet political content very often (44.8%) or often (31.8%). This indicates that political engagement via sharing and re-tweeting is common among Kwara State University students on Twitter. The data suggest that Twitter is a platform actively used by Kwara State University

students for political engagement, with many students regularly sharing or re-tweeting political content.

**Table 4: Engaging in Participation in Political Campaigns and Usage of Hash tags on Twitter to Support or oppose Political Causes**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 132 | 33 |
| Agree | 187 | 46.7 |
| Undecided | 17 | 4 |
| Strongly disagree | 34 | 8.5 |
| Disagree | 30 | 7.5 |
| **Total** | **400** | **100.0** |

Table 4 indicates that a significant majority of students either strongly agree (33%) or agree (46.7%) that they engage in political campaigns on Twitter and use hash tags to support or oppose political causes. The findings suggest that Twitter is an important tool for political participation among Kwara State University students, with most students engaging in political campaigns and using hash tags to express support or opposition to political causes. This reflects the strong influence of Twitter in fostering political activism and engagement among students.

**Table 5: Rate of Participating in Political Polls and Surveys on Twitter to express Political Opinion**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very often | 173 | 43.2 |
| Often | 135 | 33.8 |
| Rarely | 92 | 23.0 |
| Never | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **400** | **100.0** |

Table 5 depicts that a significant proportion of students engage in political polls and surveys on Twitter either very often (43.2%) or often (33.8%) to express their political opinions, indicating a high level of participation in political discourse through these activities on Twitter. The findings suggest that Twitter plays an important role in allowing Kwara State University students to express their political opinions through participation in political polls and surveys.

**Table 6: Effectiveness of Twitter Political Campaign Message in Political Participation among Students**

| Variables | Level of Agreement | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **SA** | **A** | **N** | **D** | **SD** | |
| Twitter is effective in | 61 | 205 | 59 | 46 | 29 | 400 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| keeping me informed about current political events and issues | (15.3%) | (51.2%) | (14.8%) | (11.5%) | (7.2%) | (100.0%) |
| Twitter provides an accessible platform for engaging in political discussions and debates | 70 (17.5) | 200 (50.0%) | 67 (16.8%) | 44 (11.0%) | 19 (4.8%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| Political campaigns and discussions on Twitter have influenced my political views and opinions | 74 (18.5%) | 186 (46.5%) | 77 (19.3%) | 46 (11.5%) | 17 (4.3%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| Twitter is an effective tool for mobilising students to participate in political activities | 84 (21.0%) | 187 (46.8%) | 69 (17.3%) | 44 (11.0%) | 16 (4.0%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| Twitter enhances my involvement in civic and political participation beyond just online interactions | 77 (19.3%) | 199 (49.8%) | 64 (16.0%) | 41 (10.3%) | 19 (4.8%) | 400 (100.0%) |

Table 6 shows that majority of the students find Twitter to be an effective platform for political participation, both in terms of staying informed about political issues and engaging in political discussions and activities. Most students agree that Twitter has influenced their political views, mobilised them to participate in political activities and encouraged their involvement in civic matters. The data suggest that Twitter plays a significant and positive role in enhancing political participation among Kwara State University students.

**Table 7: Challenges encountered by the Students in the Course of adopting Twitter for Political Information and Participation**

| **Variables** | **Level of Agreement** | | | | | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **SA** | **A** | **N** | **SD** | **D** | |
| Limited internet connectivity | 36 (9.0%) | 140 (25.0%) | 115 (28.7%) | 27 (6.8%) | 82 (20.5%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| I am concerned about my privacy when supporting a political candidate on Twitter | 43 (10.8%) | 186 (46.5%) | 86 (21.5%) | 15 (3.8%) | 70 (17.5%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| The overwhelming | 41 | 153 | 106 | 22 | 78 | 400 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| amount of information on Twitter makes it hard for me to focus on relevant political campaign | (10.3%) | (38.3%) | (26.5%) | (5.5%) | (19.5%) | (100.0%) |
| I find it challenging to understand how to effectively use Twitter for political participation | 39 (9.8%) | 114 (28.5%) | 66 (16.5%) | 47 (11.8%) | 134 (33.5%) | 400 (100.0%) |
| Negative reactions or backlash | 47 (11.8%) | 126 (31.5%) | 128 (32.0%) | 26 (6.5%) | 73 (18.3%) | 400 (100.0%) |

Table 7 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that among the challenges they encountered in the course of adopting twitter for political participation is the negative reactions and backlash.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings showed that a significant amount of the study population are active political participants on Twitter owing to their affirmation of exposure to Twitter and use of Twitter to; spearhead political discussion, political campaign, support or oppose political cause and re-tweet political content among others. It is pivotal to know that political participation by young people is a prerequisite of democratic participant and at the same time, there is increase possibility of harbouring prospective political analyst; politician; patriotic citizen; galvanising social system and aiding development owing to young people participation in politics.

The data presented in table 6 show the effectiveness of Twitter in political participation among students. This suggests the potency of Twitter in invoking political engagement. The findings showed that students have the ease of connecting to the internet to express their political thought, unlike when they have to observe some protocols in physical means before expressing their political view. The findings further showed that cyber ridicule, over bloated algorithm on the platform, digital divide and digital illiteracy were key factors that drew restricted them from optimal political participation on Twitter.

## Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that majority of the respondents often engage in political participation via Twitter, The students actively use Twitter not only to seek information about candidates and issues, but also to engage in social interactions and to express their political identities. Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Political education and media literacy should be made as one of the compulsory courses in institutions so that students can understand their civic and political right.

2. Young people should not be discriminated upon; they should be given optimal liberty to experience and be part of political decisions.
3. Digital divide, protection of online privacy and cyber bully should be given keen attention to nib challenges preventing people from participating in politics through online platform in the bud.

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