Enhancing Youth Political Participation: The Connection between Facebook Use, Interactivity, Quality Information, Political Interest and Online/Offline Participation

Abdu Dauda Shamsu
Department of Mass Communication
Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Nigeria
shamsud.abdul@gmail.com; +2348037651022

Abstract
This study is an examination of the relationship between Facebook usage and youth political participation. Survey research design was adopted, while questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The findings showed that Facebook usage significantly relates to youth political participation. The results also showed that Facebook usage, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest significantly correlate with online/offline political participation among youths. Facebook allows marginalised youth from political activities to interact with weak and strong ties about political issues, share and express their opinions. Conversely, in this study, interactivity with political figures does not significantly correlate with online political participation. Nonetheless, the findings of this research have reinvigorated the implication of Facebook usage and present an in-depth knowledge and understanding about Nigerian youth political participation.

Keywords: Online/Offline, Political Participation, Facebook, Usage, Youth

Introduction
Political participation has been in existence since time immemorial, therefore it has a long history from the early Ancient Greeks that used to gather at the Agora which is a market place to hear civic announcement. The open space provided citizens access to civic education and the opportunity for political participation in order to influence public policy (McManimon, 2014). Since then, political participation as a concept has been evolving and receiving increasing attention from different scholars and political figures in the society. Thus, scholars over the years have shown concern by investigating the reasons behind youth participation or non-participation in political activities using different theories and models (Thun, 2014). These concerns are basically more apparent in countries characterised with youth declining to participate in both online and offline political activities (Milner & Montréal, 2008).

Political participation includes, among other things, political activities such as joining civic/political groups and having face-to-face meeting, interacting with politicians, voting, contacting government officials by phone or writing letter, signing petition online, making political contribution on social media, participating in protest, fundraising, volunteering or participating in campaign and deliberating with political figures, institutions and organisations (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle & Maheo, 2012; Waller, 2013). These types of political participation are the important components and foundations of successful democracy (McManimon, 2000, 2014).
Studies in many countries like Cambodia, United States, England and some parts of African countries have revealed that youth are not interested in participating in political affairs and thus; do not engage in democratic process. In addition, youth in particular do not have trust in representative institutions as well as politicians. It is equally worrisome that young people hold negative attitudes towards voting and participating in political processes such as joining and supporting political parties or candidates. This means that youth are abandoning politics in advanced democracies as well as being likely to vote (Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell, 2007).

In the light of this background, youth declining from political participation is now a serious source of concern to many democracies all over the world both developed and developing countries (Skoric & Poor, 2013). For instance in Europe, America, Asia and Africa, youth are not stimulated by the traditional media such as radio, television and newspaper which invariably have limited influence on increasing their political interest. Before the coming of social media, space in newspaper and airtime on radio and television were limited and expensive; thus, youth specifically cannot express their opinion nor participate in politics through the old media. Similarly, in Nigeria youth participation over the years has decreased because of the fact that youth in political space have been used as thugs by the selfish politicians who seek personal aggrandisement through violence (Suleiman, 2011). Consequently, this trend decreases youth morale to participate in politics. Further, according to the reports of Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation, the issue of youth marginalisation in Nigerian politics has been portrayed in some viewpoints as a factor that creates insurgency, criminal activities and violence (Olabamiji, 2014).

However, in recent years there has been a new development of political interest and participation among youth in USA, Britain, Canada, Malaysia and Nigeria for example (Wyngarden, 2012; Adaja & Ayodele, 2013; Yang & DeHart, 2016), especially with the proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook; the pattern and options for an online political participation have tremendously changed. Moreover, Facebook has brought new possibilities for youth to participate in political activities which was not possible previously (Ternes et al 2014). Facebook is now the primary source of political information and serves as a facilitator of a new form of political participation. Unlike traditional or legacy media (such as Television, Radio and Newspapers), Facebook does not need prior permission from the gatekeepers and owners of the medium. The medium allows youth to express their opinions, share personal information with friends and provide them with everlasting awareness into identity foundation, status co-operation and peer-to-peer sociality (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, the question now is why has youth political participation changed? What is it in Facebook that is persuading youth to participate in politics? In interrogating these questions, some researchers have suggested that examining the relationship between Facebook usage and youth online/offline political participation is important. Few studies have accounted for the relationship between Facebook usage, Facebook information quality, political interest and online/offline political participation among youth, but literature indicated that interactivity with political figures may likely correlate with online/offline youth political participation (Lee & Cho, 2011; Lim, 2012; Tang & Lee, 2013).
Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study were to:
1. Examine the relationship between Facebook usage and online/offline political participation among youth.
2. Investigate the relationship between interactivity with political figures and online/offline political participation among youth.
3. Identify the relationship between perceived Facebook information quality and online/offline political participation among youth.
4. Explain the relationship between political interest and online/offline political participation among youth.

Research Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were formulated:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant relationship between Facebook usage and online/offline political participation among youth.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant relationship between interactivity with political figures and online/offline political participation among youth.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant relationship between Perceived Facebook information quality and online/offline political participation among youth.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is a significant relationship between political interest and online/offline political participation among youth.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature
According to uses and gratifications perspectives, media usage is often decided and influenced by people’s needs and motives to communicate, this means that people rely on media to satisfy specific desire and in the process they cultivate certain amount of dependency on the media (Vitak *et al* 2011). Uses and gratifications theory also focuses on how media are used to satisfy cognitive and affective needs that have to do with personal and entertainment needs. From the perspectives of Facebook usage, this theory embodies a new trend now in the society that people have begun to identify several gratifications from the social networking sites use that motivate them to engage in interpersonal communication and socialisation. It is also right to say that youth in particular recently spend more time online using Facebook because the medium is accessible, interactive and serve interpersonal function such as building relationships, social recognition, entertainment and information function (Leung, 2009).

The coming of Facebook has reinvigorated the youth to participate in political activities by creating new opportunities for participation with substantively lower cost. Facebook has now become an important tool for mobilising youth into active engagement in political process and democratic processes (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). It also allows youth to express their grievances, interact with their friends, share information and at the same time publish their own views on the internet (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Facebook is
generating a new generation of Nigerians who have neither power nor money but have influence (Nwakanma, 2014). The technology is a platform where you can be the news, you can make the news, and you can report news all at the same time. Thus, it empowers a new generation of individuals (Nasution, 2014).

In spite of the growing popularity of Facebook as a facilitator of political activities, many scholars have expressed serious concerns regarding the pattern of Facebook usage and democratic value of the medium. Scholars argued on whether Facebook may help to increase democratic society by mobilising youth to participate in online/offline political activities and dissemination of political knowledge (Dimitrova et al, 2011). In this regard, some scholars believe Facebook as an entertainment medium (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009). On the other hand, studies have indicated Facebook may have a positive and strong influence on youth online/offline political participation (Jarvis, 2010). Nevertheless, studies have indicated that Facebook is more powerful than traditional media (Gromping, 2014). Facebook provides similar and advanced features in terms of exposure to information, but has the additional benefits and advantages of global reach, better quality and greater speed and also an interactive medium of online political discussion. With these features, Facebook shows a significant role in the formation of political knowledge (Muntean, 2015). Additionally, youth today get their political information from social media (Facebook) rather than the legacy traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers.

The information given is more interactive, user friendly, concise and easier to comprehend. Youth are frequently posting political issues online, their views and opinions in relation to politics, sharing news and informative articles, their interaction with political actors and viewing videos about political activities. Therefore, it can be safe to say that Facebook is a suitable medium to spread political knowledge among youth and in turn increase their online/offline political participation. Political knowledge, as defined by Carpini (2000), is the series of factual and true information concerning politics or political actors that is kept in a long-term memory. In spite of the growing popularity of Facebook as a facilitator of political activities, many scholars have expressed serious concerns regarding the pattern of Facebook usage and democratic value of the medium (Feezell, Conroy & Guerrero, 2009; Waller, 2013).

Furthermore, Facebook provides a great opportunity to political figures to reach out to their constituents and voters. The technology also links and facilitates interaction between community and elected political representatives by providing a public online ‘Wall’- a space where community members can easily write comments in favour or against their political leaders (Lahabou & Wok, 2011). Apparently, because of Facebook’s heavy usage and technological advantage which bridges the online/offline connections through interactivity and fostering political campaign and engagement; politicians are now using it to post their profiles, share political information and also directly interact with their supporters (Conroy et al, 2012).

Recent literature shows that social interaction contributes positively to event participation, for instance people, especially youth are more willing to honour invitation sent by someone they have already established relationship and interacted with (Tang & Lee, 2013). Thus, information that is distributed through multiple networks and with existing established relationship and interaction via Facebook for example in which people are already connected online may likely trigger online and offline participation.
Individual interaction and identity is a fundamental factor and instrumental towards invitation or influence for offline participation, thus message exchange online and the strength of social ties may influence political mobilisation and participation (Marlowe, 2009; Vitak et al, 2011).

While social media in general and Facebook in particular provides important opportunities for youth to interact with politicians and various stakeholders, youth can become friends and initiate other linkages with political figures such as politicians in representatives’ bodies, government officials and prominent community leaders through Facebook (Tang & Lee, 2013). Consequently, youth ‘friendship’ and interaction with those important political figures are likely to be vital sources of political information and viewpoint (Gromping, 2014). Therefore, these political figures, especially politicians, grass root activists and political commentators have the tendencies of mobilising and influencing youth to participate in offline political activities (Feezell et al, 2009). Thus, interactions with these political figures may increase political participation because political interactivity and discussions may likely stimulate interest to participate in online/offline political activities due to the fact that the process of interaction itself influences opinion formation (Turner, 2011; Ksiazek et al, 2014). Therefore, Facebook use appears as a fundamental source of political information as a result of political interactivity between youth and political figures thus, online interactivity seems to be correlated to political participation offline (Smith et al, 2009; Dumitrica, 2014).

Studies have revealed that people use a particular channel of communication because of both external and internal factors for instance, the strength and quality of the information, the credibility of source of the information, easy accessibility and understanding of the information, its timeliness, the organisation and arrangement of the information and also the completeness and reliability of the information (Sundar, Bellur, Oh, Jia & Kim, 2014). Similarly, individual personal purpose or intention of having good and reliable information can motivate people to select and use a specific medium. Therefore, this can help in ascertaining and justifying Facebook information quality as a motivating factor for youth in particular, for using Facebook for both online/offline political participation. This can be supported with the fact that youth select and use Facebook; because it may satisfy their political information needs and desires, youth’s social and psychological factors often mediate quality of information among them (Diemer & Li, 2011). Uses and gratifications theory for example has recently focused on motivational factors involved in social networks such as Facebook which shifted from simple information searching to active self-expression and participation in political activities (Tang & Lee, 2013). Thus, Facebook information quality is now becoming an increasingly attractive predictor of participation in political affairs as it provides accurate, complete, up-to-date, well-arranged and organised information needed by the youth (Young & Quan-Haase, 2009). Cogburn & Vasquez (2011) also claim that Facebook information quality is a determinant of youth’s decision to use Facebook for political activities. Supporting this, some study aspect emphasises how people, especially youth may like to exploit the informative, educational and political potentials of online network sites such as Facebook with content deemed political. The study emphasises and demonstrates the richness and accuracy of information available online to the general public and how the network offers information with speed and timely new freedoms to youth, government and non-governmental organisations to spread their messages that
may encourage offline participation (Fadi, 2011). Therefore, accurate information is highly influential to youth in terms of making a right political decision (Dhaha & Igale, 2013).

Literatures have documented that political interest has a positive influence on online/offline political participation (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). Similarly, the result of their study indicated that Facebook operators who are more concerned in politics are more likely to participate through Facebook in elections. There is a large consensus among scholars that among all other predictors, political interest has a strong influence in terms of motivation to participate in politics. This statement has a synergy with the work of Moeller, Vreee, Esser & Kunz (2014) who supported this assertion by emphasising that political interest is an attitude that provides a stable and sustainable outcome in politics because it often tells whether an individual may be politically active or passive. Therefore, it may be correct to say that Facebook users promote political interest and influence friends in their network to participate in online/offline politics. Additionally, Vissers et al (2012) corroborated that opportunities for political participation are more likely to manifest if the level of political interest among youth specifically is high.

Methodology
Quantitative method was used in data collection and analysis stages, descriptive and explanatory research procedure were adopted. The research area is Bauchi Metropolis in Bauchi State. Youth, comprising both males and females in Bauchi Metropolis form the population for this study. The size of the sample was 390. This is in conformity with the rule of thumb for a sample size determination. According to Krejcie & Morgan’s (1970), from 1,000,000 up to 1,000,000,000 population, a sample size of 390 is tenable. Consequently, simple random sampling technique was adopted. Thus, every youth had an equal chance of being selected and participated in this research. The instrument of collecting data for this study was questionnaire. Data were analysed using multiple regressions to test the relationship between Facebook use, interactivity with politicians, information quality, political interest and online/offline political participation among youth in Nigeria. Multiple regression technique was chosen because it allowed researchers in social sciences to deal with complexity in human behaviours (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003).

Results and Discussion
Multiple regression was used to test the relationship between Facebook use, interactivity with politicians, information quality, political interest and online/offline political participation among youth in Nigeria. The central idea of the multiple regression method is that it is used to test the relationship between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables. Thus, by applying a multiple regression technique we can also determine specific independent variables that have a major influence on a dependent variable. The hypotheses deal with the relationship between Facebook use and online/offline political participation among youth respondents.
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Reliabilities of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Online political participation.</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Offline political participation.</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Facebook usage</td>
<td>.827</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interactivity with political figures</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Facebook information quality</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Political interest</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance *p < .05; **p < .01; Note: ON, Online Political Participation; OF, Offline Political Participation; FU, Facebook Usage; IF, Interactivity with Political Figures; PQ, Facebook Information Quality; PI, Political Interest.

Model 1: Online Political Participation

Model one is the youth online political participation which involves Facebook usage, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest as independent variables. Thus, below is the regression analysis of the model:

Table 2: Multiple Regression Result of Model 1: Online Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Expected Sign</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t-Statistics</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook usage</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity with political figures</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook information quality</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R^2</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistics (df 4, 367)</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.430</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durbin-Watson</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>372</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: ** significant at 0.05 (1-tailed), respectively; Dependent variables = ON, Online political participation; OF, Offline political participation; Independent variables = FU, Facebook usage; IF, Interactivity with political figures; PQ, Facebook information quality; PI, Political interest.
Table 3: Results for testing the Hypotheses of Model 1: Online Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>$t$-statistics</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>Test Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H_1_a$: There is a significant relationship between Facebook usage and online political participation among youth.</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_2_a$: There is a significant relationship between interactivity with political figures and online political participation among youth.</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>Not supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_3_a$: There is a significant relationship between perceived Facebook information quality and online political participation among youth.</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.02**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_4_a$: There is a significant relationship between political interest and online political participation among youth.</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model one test hypotheses $H_{1a}$, $H_{2a}$, $H_{3a}$ and $H_{4a}$. The significant result shows 3 out of 4 hypotheses are statistically significant. Thus, these hypotheses demonstrating the standard estimate were all significant ($r^2= 0.293$ and $\beta=0.759$) respectively. However, hypothesis $H_{2a}$ was rejected because it was not statistically significant ($\beta=0.131$ and $p$-value$=0.145$) which is greater than 0.05. Thus, model one (online political participation) fit the data statistically. Therefore, among the independent variables comprising Facebook usage, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest, their relationship with online political participation is positive and statistically significant at 0.05 level. The results indicated a strong empirical evidence for $H_{1a}$, $H_{3a}$ and $H_{4a}$ while the relationship between interactivity with political figures and online political participation is insignificant. Thus, political interest has the highest relationship with online political participation with $\beta =0.357$ and $t$-statistics$=6.135$

Model 2: Offline Political Participation

Model two is the youth offline political participation which involves Facebook usage, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest as independent variables. Thus, below are the hypotheses testing and regression analysis of the model

Table 4: Multiple Regression Result of Model 2: Offline Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Expected Sign</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$t$-statistics</th>
<th>$P$-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook usage</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity with political figures</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook information quality</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F-statistics (df.4, 367)       13.68   .00**
Durbin-Watson                1.83
N                              372

Notes: ** significant at 0.05 (1-tailed), respectively; Dependent variables = ON, Online political participation; OF, Offline political participation; Independent variables = FU, Facebook usage; IF, Interactivity with political figures; PQ, Facebook information quality; PI, Political interest

Table 5: Results for testing the Hypotheses of Model 2: Offline Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>t-statistics</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Test Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1b: There is a significant relationship between Facebook usage and offline political participation among youth.</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: There is a significant relationship between interactivity with political figures and offline political participation among youth.</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: There is a significant relationship between perceived Facebook information quality and offline political participation among youth.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.02**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b: There is a significant relationship between political interest and offline political participation among youth.</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model two test hypotheses H1b, H2b, H3b, and H4b. The significant result shows that all the 4 hypotheses are statistically significant. The hypothesis model testing indicated the results as presented in Table 5.14, H1b, H2b, H3b and H4b are supported. Thus, these hypotheses demonstrating the standard estimate were all significant ($r^2 = .317$ and $\beta = .458$) respectively. Thus, model two (offline political participation) fit the data statistically. Therefore, among the independent variables comprising Facebook usage, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest, their relationship with offline political participation is statistically significant at 0.05 level. The results indicated a strong empirical evidence for H1b, H2b, H3b and H4b. Thus, interactivity with political figures has the highest relationship with offline political participation with $\beta = .265$ and t-statistics= 5.187

Conclusion and Recommendations
Evidently, this research presents data and facts concerning the relationship between online/offline youth political participation and Facebook usage. The results are consistent with the hypotheses, but interactivity with political figures has no significant relationship with online political participation among youth in Nigeria. The results of this research confirmed a significant relationship between online/offline political participation and Facebook usage, Interactivity with political figures, Facebook information quality and political interest. Therefore, it may be wise for political figures to appreciate and understand that youths are now seriously using Facebook in their quest for political information and participation. Thus, it is imperative to state that political participation
amongst youth is largely dependent on the use of Facebook because more youths are often showcasing stronger reliance on Facebook as their platform for securing the political information they need to make an informed political decision. Hence, targeting and tailoring political messages to the youth through Facebook should be an important factor in future campaign strategies. Additionally, politicians need to consolidate and consider both Facebook and youth in their allocation of campaign resources.

References


