

Social Media and Self-Esteem on Voting Behavior among Youth Samples in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract Voting behavior provides the sources of information about the interaction between individuals, society and politics. Studies linking voting behavior with social media and self-esteem among youths in Rivers State are lacking. Therefore, this study examines social media and self-esteem as predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. Cross-sectional survey was used while multistage sampling techniques were used to select one Local Government Area (LGA) and four communities while convenience sampling technique was used to sample the participants. Data were collected from 280 youths using a validated scale and analyzed using multiple regression analysis and independent samples *t*-test. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance. The result revealed that social media and self-esteem jointly predicted voting behavior among study participants ($R^2 = .49.1$, $F(2, 277) = 135.448$, $p = .001$). Furthermore, social media usage ($\beta = -.163$, $p = .001$) and self-esteem ($\beta = .618$, $p = .001$) independently predicted voting behavior among study participants. Finally, gender significantly influenced voting behavior [$t(278) = 17.308$, $p = .001$] such that male participants showed higher voting behavior ($M = 43.510$, $SD = 6.840$) compared to their female counterparts ($M = 30.420$, $SD = 2.748$). The novelty of this finding is its being the first empirical studies that implicated social media usage, self-esteem and gender as predictors of voting behavior among dynamic youths in Rivers State. The study recommended that social media platforms should put appropriate messages to encourage youths' participation in political affairs in their state and Nigeria.

Kata Kunci
media sosial;
harga diri;
perilaku memilih;
negara bagian
sungai

Abstrak Perilaku memilih menyediakan sumber informasi tentang interaksi antara individu, masyarakat, dan politik. Studi yang menghubungkan perilaku memilih dengan media sosial dan harga diri di kalangan remaja di Negara Bagian Rivers masih kurang. Oleh karena itu, studi ini mengkaji media sosial dan harga diri sebagai prediktor perilaku memilih di kalangan remaja di Negara Bagian Rivers, Nigeria. Survei cross-sectional digunakan, sementara teknik pengambilan sampel multistage digunakan untuk memilih satu Daerah Pemerintah Daerah (LGA) dan empat komunitas, sementara teknik pengambilan sampel praktis digunakan untuk mengambil sampel peserta. Data dikumpulkan dari 280 remaja menggunakan skala yang telah divalidasi dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis regresi berganda dan uji-t sampel independen. Dua hipotesis diuji dan diterima pada tingkat signifikansi $p = 0,001$. Hasilnya mengungkapkan bahwa media sosial dan harga diri secara bersama-sama memprediksi perilaku memilih di antara peserta studi ($R^2 = .49.1$, $F(2, 277) = 135.448$, $p = .001$). Lebih lanjut, penggunaan media sosial ($\beta = -.163$, $p = .001$) dan harga diri ($\beta = .618$, $p = .001$) secara independen memprediksi perilaku memilih di antara peserta studi. Akhirnya, gender secara signifikan memengaruhi perilaku memilih [$t(278) = 17.308$, $p = .001$] sehingga peserta laki-laki menunjukkan perilaku memilih yang lebih tinggi ($M = 43.510$, $SD = 6.840$) dibandingkan dengan rekan-rekan perempuan mereka ($M = 30.420$, $SD = 2.748$). Kebaruan dari temuan ini adalah menjadi studi empiris pertama yang mengimplikasikan penggunaan media sosial, harga diri dan gender sebagai prediktor perilaku memilih di antara pemuda yang dinamis di Rivers State. Studi ini merekomendasikan agar platform media sosial menyampaikan pesan yang tepat untuk mendorong partisipasi pemuda dalam urusan politik di negara bagian mereka dan Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Voting refers to the process by which citizens choose candidates for public office or decide political questions submitted to them (Okolie, 2020). It has also been conceptualized as aggregating individual preferences into a collective decision in an election, the action of formally indicating one's choice of candidate or political party at an election (Gerber et al., 2019). In the same vein, voting behavior would be described as a collection of attitudes, values and beliefs in which individuals of a given society have towards elections both at the local, national and international level.

(Harrop & Miller, 1987) has earlier explained voting behavior as a pattern of political participation taking place in democratic societies where people react to certain laid down values, principles and beliefs on how they choose their leaders and how they want to be governed. These beliefs are shaped by age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, income level, marital status, geopolitical zones and psychosocial factors (Kulachai et al., 2023; Şener et al., 2023). Voting behavior provides the richest sources of information about the interaction between individuals, society and politics. By investigating voting behavior, individuals learn important lessons about the nature of the political system, and gain insight into the process of social and political change (Dressler & Mugerma, 2023; Heywood, 2004).

Some factors have been implicated as predictors of voting behavior among different populations and samples. One factor considered in this study is social media described as the use of modern technology including Internet, computers, smartphones to engage in social interaction (Tayo et al., 2019). Social media platforms such as X (Twitter), Facebook, Whatsapp, Chatgo, TikTok, YouTube, WeChat and Instagram have become powerful tools for political engagement especially among the youths. With the widespread use of social media, there has been an increase in the influence of social media on voting behavior among youths.

(Kim & Dennis, 2019) identified social media use to have positive influences on political participation among youths as it provides them with a platform to share their opinions and engage in political discussions. Also, social media has become a veritable tool for political mobilization, especially during election periods. (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2009) found social media as instrumental in mobilizing youths to participate in the 2014 Swedish parliamentary elections. Similarly, (Galston & Kamarck, 2022) found social media to have played a significant role in mobilizing young people during the 2018 US presidential election. Also, (Ikirika, 2023) found social media as a strong predictor of voting behavior among their study participants.

The second factor considered in this study is self-esteem which describes how an individual evaluates self as high or level in relationship to self-worth and self-competent vis-à-vis other individuals (Tao et al., 2012). Self-esteem has been found to play a significant role in determining voting behavior. According to social identity theory, individuals tend to vote for candidates who

they perceive to be similar to them, as this reinforces their self-concept and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Research has shown that individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to see themselves higher and tend to participate in political activities such as voting (Campbell et al., 2021).

This means that individuals with higher self-esteem feel more empowered and confident in their ability to make a difference in the political process (Brown & Marshall, 2001). Additionally, self-esteem influences the way individuals perceive political messages and candidates. For example, individuals with higher self-esteem would be more critical of political messages and candidates that threaten their sense of self-worth or self-concept (Chen & Ma, 2023). Finally, a study by (Ikirika, 2023) revealed self-esteem as a strong predictor of voting behavior among study participants.

The final factor considered in this study is gender which explains whether an individual is male or female vis-à-vis their political participation in voting behavior. Observations found that past politics in Nigeria used to be male-dominated activities with fewer women holding political positions or participating in political activities. This was what made it difficult for women to participate in politics which influenced their voting behaviors. However, with the new policies and declarations giving women a percentage to be filled in elected political positions, more women and youths are now offering themselves to contest and be elected into party positions and political offices. (Kotzé, 2021) found gender affects the likelihood of young people participating in politics and voting in Nigeria. Also, (Clerk, 2020) found that female youths are more likely to participate in politics and vote in elections than their male counterparts. That female youth had a higher turnout in elections than their male youths.

Studies have investigated predictors of voting behavior among different populations and samples with varied results. Studies linking social media and self-esteem on voting behavior among youths in Rivers State are scarce thus leaving gaps in knowledge to fill. Therefore, this study investigated social media and self-esteem as predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. It also explored the influence of gender on voting behavior among study participants. Two research questions were raised to guide this study: Would social media and self-esteem jointly and independently predict voting behavior among youths in Rivers State? And would there be gender difference in voting behavior among youths in Rivers State?

The study would provide a better understanding of the contributions of social media and self-esteem on voting behavior among the dynamic youths' populations in Rivers State and its environment. Also, data generated from this study would provide materials for further studies on voting behaviors among youths beyond the study population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two theories of perceived benefits: The Rational Choice Theory (RCT, (Down, 1957) and the Social Identity Theory (SIT, (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) were used to contextualize this study. The RCT posits that individuals make decisions based on rational calculation of the cost and benefits of what they intend to do. According to TRCT, youths would engage in voting if they perceived it to be beneficial for them. The perceived benefits include the ability to influence political actions, express their opinions, and contribute to the democratic process. Besides, youth voters would consider the potential policy outcomes that align with their preferences and interests. When they believe that their votes would make a difference in shaping these outcomes, they would be more likely to participate in the electoral process and exercise their voting behavior.

On the other hand, social identity theory focuses on how an individual's sense of identity and belongingness to a particular group influences their behavior. In the context of this study, the theory suggests that youths are more likely to vote if they identify strongly with a particular political party. Taken together, both theories emphasize the importance of perceived benefits in shaping youths behavior. While the rational choice theory emphasizes on individuals calculations of cost and benefits, the social identity theory emphasizes group identification as a motivating factor.

When applied in this study, (Ikirika, 2023) used rational choice theory to examine social media on voting behavior among youths and found social media to predict voting behavior among study participants. Moreover, (Roberts et al., 2024) and (Intyaswati et al., 2025) have found social media as significant predictors of voting behavior and participant youth population in Rivers State, Nigeria and Jakarta and Islamabad, respectively. Finally, (Venus et al., 2025) found exposure to political advertising and following political influencers had significant indirect effect on Generation Z's participation in election in Indonesia.

METHOD

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design where data were collected using validated questionnaires. The independent variables were self-esteem and social media while the dependent variable was voting behavior.

The United Nations (UN)/Work Bank Statistics put the total population of youths in Rivers State at about 2,118,484 youths both males and females. The population for this study was youths aged 18 to 29 years in Rivers State. The study adopted a multistage sampling technique. The first stage of sampling involved selecting one Local Government Area (LGA) from the three LGAs in the State. The next stage was the use of a simple random sampling technique to select four communities from the LGA. This was followed by conveniently sampling 70 potential participants from each of the four communities to give a sample size of 280 potential participants.

Voting Behavior Scale (Ikirika, 2023) was used to tap voting behavior among study participants. It is a 15-item scale presented on a 4-point Likert's format ranging from "Extremely important" to "Not important at all". Sample items include: "Have you ever changed your mind about a political issue or candidate as a result of a political advertisement?" and "How important do you consider the role of money in political campaigns?" The author obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 and in the present study, Cronbach's of 0.79 was obtained.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) was used to measure self-esteem among study participants. It is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is presented in a 4-point Likert's format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Sample items include: "On the Whole I am Satisfied with myself" and "I am able to do things as well as most other people". Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem while low scores indicate low self-esteem. Author Cronbach's alpha was 0.77 while in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 was obtained.

Social Media Usage Scale (Tuck & Thompson, 2024) was used to assess social media usage among study participants. It is a 17-item scale presented on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from Always to Never. Sample items include: "I use social networking sites to become more sociable" and "I use social networking sites to keep in touch with my relatives". The authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 while in the current study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was obtained.

A letter of introduction was collected from the Department of Psychology, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt which was used to identify the researchers for the permission to carry out the study. Potential participants were approached at homes, recreational centres, shopping malls, Mosques and Churches, and special hang out places for political discussions. Potential participants were briefly informed of the purpose of the study and requested to be part of the study.

They were told that participation was voluntary and responses given in the questionnaires would be treated confidentially. While many turned down the request, those who agreed were given the questionnaires to fill. A total of 288 questionnaires were given out and collected on the spot. During the screening and coding, eight questionnaires had more than 10% missing or inconsistent responses and were removed leaving 280 questionnaires used for the analysis.

IBM SPSS was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Hypothesis one was tested using multiple regression analysis while hypothesis two was tested using independent samples t-test. All hypotheses were accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance.

Ethical consideration was taken into account throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the questionnaires were distributed to them.

Participants were duly informed of the voluntariness of participation and their rights to withdraw were emphasized. Confidentiality was ensured, and data was stored securely. .

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Result

Participants socio-demographics

Descriptive statistics revealed that 192 (69%) were males while 88(31%) were female participants. The age brackets showed that 55(20%) were less than 20 years of age, 98(35%) were between 21-25 years old, while 127(45%) were between 26-29 years old. In terms of marital status, 207(74%) were singles, 38 (14%) were married and 35(13%) were classified as others. H1: Self-esteem and social media would jointly and independently predict voting behavior among youths in Rivers State. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the results are presented in Table1.

Table 1. Multiple regression showing joint and independent predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
Self-Esteem	.613	13.066	.001	.703	.494	135.448	.001
Social Media	-.163	-3.441	.001				

Dependent variable: Voting behavior

Source: Authors' Field Work (2024), Note N=280, $p < .001$.

Table 1 presents multiple regression analysis showing joint and independent predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State. The result revealed that self-esteem and social media jointly predicted voting behavior among youths in Rivers State ($R^2 = .49.1$, $F(2, 277) = 135.448$, $p = 001$). This means that the independent variables explained 49.1% of variance in voting behavior among study participants. Furthermore, $R^2 = .49.1$, $F(2, 277) = 135.448$, $p = 000$ both Self-esteem ($\beta = .618$, $t = 13.066$, $p = 001$) and social media usage ($\beta = -.163$, $t = -3.441$, $p = .001$) independently predicted voting behavior among study participants. The hypothesis was supported.

H2: Gender would significantly influence voting behavior among youths in Rivers State. The hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Independent sample t-test result voting behavior based on gender

Gender	N	M	SD	t	Sig
Male	192	43.5104	6.84074	17.308	.001
Female	88	30.4205	2.74897		

Source: Authors' Field Work (2024), Note N=280, $p < .001$.

Table 2 shows an independent sample t-test of gender influence on voting behavior among youths in Rivers State. The results indicated a significant gender difference on voting behavior among study participants [$t(278) = 17.308, p = .001$] such that male participants showed higher voting behavior ($M = 43.510, SD = 6.840$) compared to their female counterparts ($M = 30.420, SD = 2.748$). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

The study investigated social media and self-esteem as predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance. The hypothesis that social media and self-esteem would jointly predict voting behavior among youths was supported. This means that the interaction of social media and self-esteem contributed to the political involvement of youths in terms of voting behavior. The use of social media in political electioneering tends to change youths involvement in election and voting behavior thus reducing voting apathy across age groups including youths in Rivers State.

This finding lent credence to previous results that the interaction of social media and self-esteem increased political engagements among youths in election matters including voting behavior (Ikirika, 2023; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Also, this finding corroborated previous study that when individuals reported high self-esteem, the individual would see himself as worthy of participating in the affairs of the state and do so accordingly (Galston & Kamarck, 2022). Voting behavior is one of such important parts of political engagement.

The second hypothesis that gender would significantly influence voting behavior among youths was confirmed. Male youths were found to be more into political activities than their female counterparts which supported previous studies (Ikirika, 2023; Kotzé, 2021). Also, the finding corroborated the result by (Clerk, 2020) that male youths have a positive voting behavior than the females. This means that an individual who used social media and stayed informed in the political sphere and seeing being abreast of the political situation would likely be a male who would participate in election in his ward, constituency or national election.

CONCLUSION

The study has empirically confirmed that social media and self-esteem are strong predictors of voting behavior among youths in Rivers State. This means that social media usage among the

youth is extremely high and this could be used as an advantage to increase the availability of information and boost youths voting behavior in Rivers State. Also, the gender of the youths was found to be a significant factor in the determination of voting behavior among study participants. That is, male youths have a more positive voting behavior than the females.

The study recommends appropriate postings of political contents on the social media platforms to ginger youths to participate in political matters. Appropriate content creations should be the watchword when putting information on election issues on social platforms. Also, female youths should be encouraged to participate in the political activities of the State without discrimination against them.

The study has some limitations that need to be addressed in further studies. To begin with, data were collected using self-reports which were not free of social desirability bias. Further studies should include focus group discussions and documentary evidence from the electoral empire to triangulate data from self-reported questionnaires. In addition, only four communities were selected from the three senatorial districts with 280 sample sizes which hindered generalization of study findings. Further study should include more communities with increased sample size to enhance generalization of study findings. Finally, the independent variables investigated were not exhaustive. Further study should include personality traits, political knowledge, and social support.

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