



Mass Media Influence on Attitude towards Political Participation among Undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Youths are the future leaders, and their involvement in politics is crucial for national development. In Nigeria, undergraduates, in particular, are expected to be agents of change, driving progress through active participation in the democratic process. However, previous studies suggest that many Nigerian youths, including undergraduates, are increasingly disengaged from politics, citing factors like apathy and limited access to reliable information. Hence, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how mass media consumption affects political participation among Nigerian undergraduates particularly in the context of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State.

Objective: This study sought to identify the relationship between mass media consumption and undergraduates' attitude towards political participation.

Methods: This study was guided by the Agenda-Setting Theory while the quantitative approach and Survey method was adopted with randomly sampled 379 (Three Hundred and Seventy-Nine) AAU undergraduates. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire while descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

Results: Findings revealed that social media platforms and television are the most frequently used sources of political information among students. Digital media therefore exerts a stronger influence on political attitudes than traditional media. Media exposure was also found to enhance students' political awareness, stimulate political discussions and encourage participation in political activities.

Conclusion: digital platforms such as social media and television were identified as dominant channels through which undergraduates' consume political information thereby having greater influence on political opinions than the traditional media.

Unique Contribution: This study offered new insight into campus-grounded evidence that integrates both traditional and digital media consumption particularly the prominence of WhatsApp and X formerly Twitter in students' political information routines. This study aims to fill these gaps by identifying the dominant media platforms used by AAU undergraduates and how their consumption patterns influences their political attitude.

Key Recommendation: Integration of media literacy into university curricula in order to promote ethical and balanced political reporting. This study also recommends the usage of strategically dominant media platforms to foster informed and responsible youths political participation.

Keywords: Mass Media consumption, Political attitude, Ambrose Alli undergraduates, Youths



INTRODUCTION

The Mass media remain central to political communication because they are a primary route through which citizens receive political information, interpret political events, and form opinions about leaders, institutions, and public issues. In most societies, individuals do not encounter governance processes directly; instead, they learn about politics through mediated content, including news reports, interviews, editorials, and increasingly, platform-driven commentary. This makes media consumption an important variable in understanding political attitudes, particularly among young people whose political orientations are still developing (McQuail & Deuze, 2020).

Nigeria's media environment has become increasingly hybrid, combining traditional outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers with digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik tok, X, Whatsapp where news and political commentary circulate rapidly. Among Nigerian youths, smartphones and social media have expanded access to political content and lowered the cost of expressing opinions. At the same time, digital participation often blends civic content with entertainment and peer interaction, meaning political exposure is frequently incidental rather than deliberate. Evidence from broader digital media research indicates that social media use is commonly associated with civic and political participation, although the strength and consistency of these relationships vary by context and study design (Boulianne, 2020; Boulianne, 2020).

International research has provided firm foundations for studying digital media and political outcomes. Meta-analytic reviews suggest that digital media use is often associated with civic and political participation. However, effects vary across contexts and are influenced by how participation and media use are measured (Boulianne, 2020). Additional research on media impact indicates that political communication can shape socio-political attitudes over time, supporting the broader claim that repeated exposure to political information and interpretive frames can influence what people believe and how they evaluate political issues (Earle & Hodson, 2022).

African research has increasingly examined youth political participation in relation to the growth of social media, urbanisation, and changing information landscapes. Afrobarometer-based work shows that social media news use is rising and that citizens often hold mixed views, recognising both the promise and the risk, while opposing restrictive approaches (Conroy-Krutz & Koné, 2022). In Nigeria, studies have examined social media and political participation among youths across states, including how perceived usefulness and ease of use are linked to political use of social media (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020) and how image circulation has shaped political mobilisation during #EndSARS (Agbo, 2021).

University students are especially important in political discourse because they are heavy media users, active participants in peer networks, and often early adopters of emerging platforms. Their political orientations can shape broader youth conversations through everyday discussion, group-based interpretation of national events, and online sharing. In fact, contemporary youth political participation literature also recognises that engagement includes both conventional forms, such



as voting, and non-conventional forms, such as protests, expressive participation, and online civic action (Weiss, 2021). For these reasons, studying students' media consumption provides a strategic window into how mediated political information relates to political attitudes in Nigeria.

Despite these contributions, gaps remain: first, many studies emphasise participation outcomes more than political attitudes, leaving uncertainty about how media consumption relates to deeper orientations such as trust, cynicism, and perceived empowerment (Akinyetun 2021). Second, "social media" is often treated too broadly, even though different platforms may influence attitudes in different ways due to differences in affordances, credibility cues, and peer dynamics (Erinle & Isola, 2024). Third, campus-specific evidence for Ambrose Alli University in the 2025/2026 academic session is limited, particularly evidence that integrates both traditional and digital media consumption in relation to political attitudes. This study aims to fill these gaps by identifying the dominant media platforms used by AAU undergraduates and how their consumption patterns influences their political attitudes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (1) What is the extent to which undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University are exposed to mass media related to political issues?
- (2) What type of media do undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University consume on political related issues?
- (3) How does undergraduates' consumption of mass media influence their attitude towards political related issues?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Mass Media Consumption and Political Attitudes among Youths

Media consumption refers to patterns of exposure and engagement with media content, including frequency of use, time spent, platform preference, and forms of interaction such as reading, watching, sharing, commenting, or discussing. Among youths, consumption is often shaped by mobility, peer influence, and the convenience of digital access. Media dependency among youths can therefore increase when the media becomes a key resource for interpreting political reality. When consumption is high and politically oriented, it can lead to repeated exposure to political narratives that may shape awareness and attitude formation (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020).

Political attitudes on the other hand refer to relatively enduring orientations toward politics, including beliefs about governance, perceptions of legitimacy, trust or distrust in institutions, and feelings of efficacy and even democratic participation. Media can influence political attitudes by increasing issue salience, providing interpretive frames, and shaping emotional responses. When political issues are repeatedly presented through particular narratives, audiences may adopt more favourable or more sceptical orientations (Earle & Hodson, 2022).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting theory. The basic assumption of agenda-setting theory are that media select and emphasise issues rather than reflecting reality neutrally, that repeated prominence and frequency shape what audiences consider important, and that the effect is stronger where audiences rely on media for political information. In hybrid environments, the agenda may be reinforced not only by journalists but also by platform algorithms, influencers, and peer networks, all of which can push the same issues into repeated visibility. Agenda-setting is relevant to this study because it offers a clear explanation of how media consumption patterns could indirectly relate to political attitudes through political awareness and salience. If students repeatedly encounter particular political issues through the platforms they use most, those issues may become central to how they evaluate governance and democratic life.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Below is a table on reviewed studies that are related to the study: a consistent gap in the studies is that political attitudes are not always the primary outcome, even when participation and awareness are measured in detail. Another gap is weak platform where “social media” is treated as a single category, even though WhatsApp-based circulation, X-based agenda cues and short-video content may influence attitudes differently. This study aims to fill these gaps by identifying the dominant media platforms among AAU students, linking consumption patterns to political awareness and platforms that influence political attitudes.



Table 1: Meta-Analysis Table

Researcher (s) and Date	Objective	Guiding Theory	Methodology	Key Findings	Recommendations	Gaps
Boulianne (2020)	To synthesise two decades of research to clarify whether digital media consistently support participation.	Media Effects Theory	Scholarly synthesis; review of multiple studies and contexts.	Digital media are linked to participation, but effects depend on measurement and design.	More rigorous designs and clearer operationalisation of participation outcomes.	The study focuses on participation but does not address political attitudes or platform dominance in depth.
Earle & Hodson (2022).	To assess whether media exposure can shape evaluative orientations rather than reflect existing beliefs.	Media Effects Scholarship	Empirical approach; longitudinal data analysis.	Exposure to news media influences socio-political attitudes, shaping evaluative orientations.	Scholars and civic stakeholders should consider media environments when assessing attitude change.	Does not address platform-specific effects on political attitudes, focusing on broader media exposure.
Conroy-Krutz & Koné (2022).	To document trends in social media use for news and its impact on public perceptions in Africa.	Not explicitly stated	Cross-national Afrobarometer survey data analysis.	Social media use for news is growing, but concerns about its adverse effects persist. The public generally opposes restricting access.	Responses to digital harms should be balanced and sensitive to public resistance to restriction.	Does not examine the specific impact of media on political attitudes, focusing on general perceptions.
Franke, Burchi, & Gray (2022)	To explore how demographic and digital factors interact with youth political participation.	Not explicitly stated	Afrobarometer-based analysis; comparative study.	Social media plays a role in participation, but broader socio-demographic factors also influence engagement.	Recognise digital media in participation strategies while addressing deeper participation barriers.	Does not address the influence of media on political attitudes, instead focusing on participation levels.
Agbo (2021)	To explain the role of visual content in sustaining mobilisation and shaping political narratives during protests.	Protest Communication Theory	Qualitative analysis of visual content during the #EndSARS protests.	Visual content on social media influenced mobilisation and political narratives during the #EndSARS protests.	Political communication research should take the visual circulation in contemporary civic action seriously.	Does not focus on media consumption patterns or political attitudes, but rather on the role of image production.
Omotayo & Folorunso (2020)	To examine how youths use social media for political participation and the factors driving that use.	Technology Acceptance Theory, Social Cognitive Theory	Survey approach with quantitative analysis.	Social media use for political participation is substantial; factors such as self-efficacy and perceived usefulness influence it.	Improve digital skills and leverage youth-friendly platforms to engage youth in civic life.	Does not focus on political attitudes; the study centres on participation factors and platform use.
Adegbola, Gearhart, & Zhang (2022)	To compare how news use and interpersonal communication influence political engagement.	Political Communication Theory	Empirical methodology; comparative study on communication forms.	News media and interpersonal communication exert different effects on political engagement.	Political communication research should account for multiple communication pathways.	Does not focus on the media's impact on political attitudes, only on engagement through different communication pathways.
Sanni (2025)	To examine how digital media influences youths' perceptions and attitudes towards political empowerment.	Not explicitly stated	An empirical study focusing on youth attitudes toward political empowerment.	Digital media significantly influences youth attitudes toward political empowerment in Lagos State.	Strengthen productive digital engagement for empowerment outcomes.	Does not address platform-specific effects on political attitudes, focusing more on empowerment and participation.

Source: Researchers' compilation



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research approach and descriptive survey method to systematically examine the relationship between mass media consumption and political attitudes among undergraduate students. The study population consists of all undergraduate students at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State. Records from the Information and Communication Technology Unit of the university indicate that the estimated undergraduate population for the 2025/2026 academic session was approximately 24,195 students across the various faculties and departments (Ambrose Alli University ICT Unit, 2026).

Undergraduates were considered appropriate for the study because they represent a highly media-exposed segment of the youth population and are actively involved in political discussions, particularly through digital media platforms. The sample size for this study is determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, a widely accepted method for social science research. Using the formula for a population size of 24,195 students and a margin of error of 5% (0.05), the sample size is calculated as follows:

$$S = \frac{X^2 \cdot N \cdot (1 - N)}{(e^2 \cdot (N - 1)) + X^2 \cdot N \cdot (1 - N)}$$

Where:

- S = sample size
- X^2 = the table value for a 95% confidence level (1.96)
- N = population size (24,195)
- e = margin of error (0.05)

The resulting sample size is approximately 379 respondents. This sample size ensures that the study is statistically robust and can be generalised to the larger population of undergraduate students at AAU. This study employed a simple random sampling in order to accurately reflect the media consumption habits and political attitudes of the broader student body (Akinyetun, 2022).

Data for this study were collected using a self-developed and structured questionnaire designed by the researchers to ensure uniform data collection and suitability for quantitative analysis. The content validity of the research instrument was ensured through expert review: the draft questionnaire was evaluated by specialists in communication studies and research methodology to confirm the relevance and clarity of the items for measuring the study variables.

Their observations informed necessary revisions before the final administration of the instrument. Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted among undergraduates outside the main sample, after which the data were analysed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The validity co-efficient from the questionnaire item analysis was 0.70. Informed consent was sought from the undergraduates and relevant authorities. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using both descriptive statistics and were later presented in frequency tables and percentages.



DATA PRESENTATION

Table 2: Questionnaire Administration and Retrieval Rate

Questionnaire Status	Frequency
Number of the copies of questionnaire distributed	420
Number of the copies of questionnaire retrieved	379
Number of the copies questionnaire not retrieved	41
Percentage of the copies of questionnaire retrieved	90.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 shows that 379 out of 420 copies of the questionnaire distributed were successfully retrieved, giving a high retrieval rate of 90.2 per cent. This indicates strong respondent cooperation and suggests that the data are reliable and adequate for quantitative analysis. The number of unreturned questionnaire (41) minimises non-response bias and strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 379)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	203	53.6
	Female	176	46.4
Age Group	Below 18 years	41	10.8
	18–22 years	211	55.7
	23–27 years	93	24.5
	28 years and above	34	9.0
Level of Study	100 Level	86	22.7
	200 Level	97	25.6
	300 Level	89	23.5
	400 Level	78	20.6
	500 Level	29	7.6
Faculty	Arts	46	12.1
	Social Sciences	71	18.7
	Management Sciences	63	16.6
	Natural Sciences	58	15.3
	Engineering	49	12.9
	Education	51	13.5
	Law	23	6.1
	Agriculture	18	4.7

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 shows that the gender distribution is relatively balanced with males constituting 53.6 per cent and females 46.4 per cent, ensuring that views from both sexes are well represented. The largest age group was 18–22 years (55.7 per cent), followed by 23–27 years (24.5 per cent), confirming that the study predominantly captured young adults who are typically heavy media users. In terms of



academic level, 200 Level students formed the highest proportion (25.6 per cent), while 500 Level students recorded the lowest (7.6 per cent). Respondents were drawn from all faculties, with Social Sciences (18.7 per cent) and Management Sciences (16.6 per cent) recording the highest representation. This diversity enhances the generalisability of the findings within the university context.

Table 4: Media Consumption Patterns of Respondents: Frequency of Media Use for General Information

Media Type	Very Often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Radio	71	89	121	63	35
Television	134	127	78	26	14
Newspapers (print/online)	58	91	129	71	30
Social media platforms	201	117	41	13	7

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 indicates that social media platforms are the most frequently used medium for general information, with the highest number of respondents reporting “very often” use (201), followed by “often” (117). This clearly surpasses all other media, highlighting social media's dominance in students’ daily information consumption. Television ranks next as the most consumed traditional medium, with a combined total of 261 respondents using it “very often” (134) or “often” (127). In contrast, radio and newspapers show lower levels of regular use, with radio recording the highest “never” responses (35) and newspapers recording high “occasionally” (129) and “rarely” (71) usage. This pattern suggests a declining reliance on traditional print and broadcast media among students.

Table 5: Most Relied Media for Political Information and Dominant Digital Platforms

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Most Relied Traditional Media for Political Information	Radio	32	8.4
	Television	91	24.0
	Newspapers (print/online)	47	12.4
	Social media	171	45.1
	Online news websites/blogs	38	10.1
Most Relied Digital Media for Political Information	WhatsApp	112	29.6
	X (Twitter)	91	24.0
	Facebook	68	17.9
	Instagram	49	12.9
	YouTube	37	9.8
	TikTok	22	5.8

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5 shows that social media is the most relied-upon source of political information, with 45.1 per cent of respondents. Television follows at 24.0 per cent, while radio records the lowest reliance at 8.4 per cent. Among digital platforms, WhatsApp is the most used for political



information (29.6 per cent), closely followed by X (Twitter) at 24.0 per cent. TikTok records the lowest usage (5.8 per cent), indicating that not all social media platforms are equally influential in political information seeking. The dominance of social media, particularly WhatsApp and X (Twitter), is significant because it reflects students' preference for fast, interactive, and peer-driven channels for political information.

Table 6: Media Consumption and Political Awareness / Engagement

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
Media exposure increases my awareness of political issues in Nigeria	149	127	51	32	20
Media content motivates me to discuss political issues with friends or classmates	131	121	59	41	27
Regular media use encourages my participation in political activities	117	129	63	43	27

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 6 addresses the relationship between media consumption and students' political awareness and engagement. Respondents majorly agreed that media exposure increases their awareness of political issues in Nigeria: 149 strongly agreed and 127 agreed, making this the most strongly supported statement in the table. Only 20 respondents strongly disagreed, representing the lowest frequency. Similarly, media content was found to motivate political discussions, as shown by the combined agreement of 252 respondents, although a moderate number remained undecided (59). Regarding political participation, most respondents agreed that regular media use encourages involvement in political activities; 246 agreed or strongly agreed. These findings are important because they demonstrate that media consumption not only informs students but also actively supports political discussion and engagement.

Table 7: Media Platforms and Political Attitudes

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
Social media platforms influence my opinions about political leaders and government actions	143	131	47	36	22
Digital media affects my trust or distrust in political institutions	127	139	51	41	21
Digital media have a more substantial influence on my political attitudes than traditional media	151	123	49	35	21

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 7 show that social media platforms influence opinions about political leaders and government actions: 143 respondents strongly agreed, and 131 agreed, making this the most significant response pattern in the table. The lowest responses were recorded under "strongly disagree" (22), indicating that few respondents reject the idea of media influence. Respondents majorly agreed that digital media affects their trust or distrust in political institutions, with 266 agreeing, highlighting the media's role in shaping political confidence and scepticism. Finally, digital media were perceived to have a more substantial influence on political attitudes than



traditional media, as shown by 151 respondents who strongly agreed and 123 who agreed. This finding is significant because it confirms the growing dominance of digital platforms over traditional media in shaping political attitudes among undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University.

DISCUSSION

Dominant Media Platforms Used By Ambrose Alli University Undergraduates for Political Information

This study found that social media is the most consumed medium among AAU undergraduates and the most relied-upon source of political information. Social media recorded the highest “very often” use for general information (201), clearly surpassing radio, television, and newspapers. In contrast, television ranked second as the most used traditional medium, with strong combined “very often” and “often” usage (261). For political information, social media again led (45.1%), followed by television (24.0%), with radio ranking lowest (8.4%). Within digital platforms, WhatsApp (29.6%) and X/Twitter (24.0%) were most used, while TikTok was least used (5.8%), showing that students’ political information seeking is concentrated on platforms that support rapid sharing and discussion.

This pattern aligns with the empirical review that point to the growing centrality of social media in youth political communication in Africa and Nigeria (Conroy-Krutz & Koné, 2022; Franke et al., 2022; Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). From an agenda-setting perspective, the dominance of social media suggests that students’ sense of “what matters” politically is likely shaped by the issues that become repeatedly visible and discussed on their most-used platforms, not only through traditional editorial gatekeeping but also through peer networks and platform-driven amplification.

Relationship between Media Consumption and Political Awareness among Ambrose Alli Undergraduates

Findings of this study indicate that media consumption is strongly linked to political awareness and reasonably linked to engagement. However, the influence appears stronger for awareness than for direct participation. Most respondents agreed that media exposure increases awareness of political issues (149 strongly agree; 127 agree), with limited scepticism shown by the low number of “strongly disagree” responses (20). Media content also encouraged discussion with peers (a combined agreement of 252), while participation-related engagement remained positive but less emphatic, as agreement (246) coexisted with a notable group of undecideds.

This pattern reflects what the empirical review suggests: digital media exposure often correlates with civic and political involvement, but the strength of effects varies and depends on context and how engagement is measured (Boulianne, 2020). It also supports the argument that engagement is shaped by multiple pathways, including news use and interpersonal conversation, rather than media exposure alone (Adegbola et al., 2022). Interpreted through agenda-setting, repeated exposure to political issues increases salience and awareness first and then stimulates discussion, while participation may be moderated by political efficacy, opportunity and perceived costs of involvement.



Influence of Media Platforms on AAU Undergraduates' Political Attitude

The study found that digital media, especially social media, most strongly influences students' political attitudes, including opinions about leaders, interpretations of government actions, and feelings of trust or distrust toward institutions. Respondents largely agreed that social media shapes their opinions of political leaders and government actions (143 strongly agree; 131 agree), and that digital media affects trust or distrust in political institutions (266 combined agreement). Most importantly, respondents perceived digital media as having a more substantial influence on political attitudes than traditional media, with firm support (151 strongly agree; 123 agree).

This finding closely mirrors the empirical review: Earle and Hodson (2022) provide evidence that news exposure can relate to sociopolitical attitudes, while Sanni (2025) similarly highlights how digital media can shape youth perceptions and attitudes toward political empowerment. In addition, the result resonates with Conroy-Krutz & Koné, (2022) which confirms that social media news use is increasing and that perceptions of its effects are tied to concerns about credibility and impact. Agenda-setting theory offers a clear explanation here: when students repeatedly encounter certain political narratives on dominant platforms, those issues and frames can become the reference points through which they evaluate leaders and institutions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that mass media plays a significant role in shaping the political attitudes of undergraduate students at Ambrose Alli University. Social media platforms and television were identified as the dominant channels through which students' access political information, with digital platforms exerting greater influence on political opinions than traditional media. Media exposure was found to enhance students' awareness of political issues, encourage political discussions, and stimulate engagement in political activities. These outcomes suggest that mass media in its digital form, has become a central force in the political socialisation of university students and remains influential in shaping their perceptions of governance, political leaders, and democratic processes. Hence, digital platforms have become the most influential drivers of political attitudes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends integrating media literacy into the University curricula so as to equip AAU undergraduates with the skills to evaluate political information and resist misinformation critically. Media organisations and content creators should also be encouraged to uphold ethical standards and provide balanced political reporting, especially on digital platforms where students are most active. In addition, policymakers, electoral bodies, and civil society organisations should strategically utilise dominant media platforms, particularly social media and television, to promote informed and responsible youth political participation.



Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Monsurat Olasumbo Aiyegusi conceived the study, developed the research questions, research design and methodology of the study. Benjamin Osadolor compiled the literature review and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, while Yusuf Temitope Adebisi supervised the research process and interpreted the findings of the data. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final draft of the manuscript.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly and Quillbot for paraphrasing and restructuring. The authors carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all outputs generated by the tool and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript content.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request subject to ethical and confidentiality requirements.

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