

Mande Ande MANDE*
Lambe Kayode MUSTAPHA*
Bahiyah OMAR**
Maryam Lasisi MUSTAPHA*
Ismail Sheikh Yusuf AHMED***

Social Media Content Preferences and Political Participation among Nigerian Youths

Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media content preferences on political participation in Nigeria's relatively nascent democracy. Due to mixed conclusions on the influence of news and entertainment preferences on political participation, we sampled 434 youths aged 18-35 in a Nigerian northern state, to investigate the differential influence of diverse social media content consumption on political participation. Incorporating the moderating and mediating influences of political efficacy and incidental news exposure, findings confirm that news and entertainment preferences are positive, significant predictors of political participation among respondents. While political efficacy moderated the influence of news preference on political participation, incidental news exposure did not mediate the influence of entertainment preference on political participation. We recommend further investigation into the influence of content preferences on political participation among Nigerian youths who constitute considerable members of the nation's electorate.

Keywords: *social media, news preference, political efficacy, political participation, Nigerian youths*

Introduction

With an avalanche of media contents on traditional and social media, research into the motivations for consuming different media and contents occupies a prominent position in communication scholarship (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Motivations for consumption of news and entertainment are two preferences often employed in political communication research (Gan & Wang, 2015). Hence, empirical investigations into the impact of differential motivations for media use on political participation have reached different conclusions (Durante et al., 2019; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013; Yu, 2016). Studies have predominantly established significant contributions of social media use for news on political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013). Thus, scholars have concluded that people averse to politics are not motivated to consume news, which leads to less participatory intention

* University of Ilorin (Nigeria)

** Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia)

*** Qatar University (Qatar), email: iahmed@qu.edu.qa (corresponding author)

(Bimber & Davis, 2003). This school of thought argues that since information is a fundamental requirement to participate in politics, abstention from political marketplace of ideas constitutes great disservice to political participation (Putnam, 2000).

Due to inattentiveness to politics, resulting into 'rational ignorance', there is an increased tendency of political manipulation of politically apathetic citizens (Fishkin, 2009; Zaller, 1991), particularly in the elite-dominated public sphere of the mainstream media (Mustapha & Omar, 2020). Thus, it has been held that the transition to 'high choice' media environment of digital and social media has improved the political involvement among those who consume news rather than entertainment (Prior, 2005). Conversely, other studies conducted in this changing media environment have documented pockets of evidence signalling significant contributions of entertainment preference on political participation among social media users (Chen, 2017; Yu, 2016). Findings supporting influence of social media political satire on youths' political participation are instances of significant contribution of entertainment content to political engagement (Mustapha et al., 2019; Warner et al., 2015). These mixed findings necessitate further investigation into motivations for social media use and their attendant consequences on political participation, especially in a relatively young democracy like Nigeria's. Having research rooted in contexts other than those proposed by an academy that mostly writes from and for the Global North is an imperative if we, as social scientists, want to have a broad perspective to analyse the reality that surrounds us.

While numerous studies have investigated the impact of news and entertainment preferences on political participation (Chen, 2017; Holt et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013; Park & Karan, 2014; Prior, 2005), little if any study has elaborated the mechanism for this association using moderating and mediating influence of key contingent variables such as political efficacy and incidental news exposure, respectively. Previous studies have documented the possible influence of the interaction of news preference and political efficacy on political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Zhou & Pinkleton, 2012). Prior to the advent of ubiquitous social media with their diversified content that accidentally attract users and correlate with civic engagement, incidental exposure to television news has been found to have animated political participation given its 'low choice' advantage (Prior, 2007).

Political participation usually animated by incidental exposure to 'low choice' television news (Prior, 2007) also necessitates revalidation in the contemporary 'high choice' media environment definitively dominated by the social media. The proliferation of social media has led to unbridled incidental news exposure among users whose preference for non-political contents accidentally and occasionally interact with exposure to political news, which eventually impacts on their political knowledge and political participation (Bode, 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Lee & Kim, 2017). The possibility of entertainment-seeking users to pick up news as by-products of their online activities (Tewksbury et al., 2001) needs to be explored with a view to contribute to extant literature through investigation of the indirect influence of incidental news exposure on the relationship between entertainment preference and political participation among Nigerian youths.

Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications theory explains the social and psychological needs that influence audiences' choice of specific media and contents (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). Founded on the notion that audiences' use of media is goal oriented, the Uses and Gratifications theory hypothesises active engagement of audiences with media contents (Siakalli et al., 2015). From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, the audiences consciously use specific media to meet specific needs (Griffin, 2012). The active audience occupies a prominent position in the Uses and Gratifications theory (Lee & Ma, 2012). While the traditional media effects such as "magic bullet theory" considered the media as having powerful effects on their audience (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010), the Uses and Gratifications theory considers the audience as actively utilizing different media and contents to meet specific needs (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Sparks, 2010). As emerging new media and traditional media have availed users with an avalanche of media and diversified content to select from, the Uses and Gratifications theory is considered one of the most prominent theories for investigating motivations for media use in communication research (LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Early research investigated audiences' motives for media use in legacy media (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Motivations for using legacy media include information seeking, escape, passing time, entertainment, companionship, and excitement (Bantz, 1982; Dobos, 1992). The transformation of the media environment motivated a plethora of investigations into audiences' motives for using new media. These inquiries documented interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, entertainment, convenience, relationship maintenance, virtual community, coolness, companionship, socializing, and self-status as motives for using new media (Park et al., 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). However, information seeking and entertainment are the two motivations often employed in political communication discourses (Gan & Wang, 2015).

Several studies have investigated the differential influence that news and entertainment preferences exert on political participation (Chen, 2017; Kim et al., 2013; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013; Prior, 2007). It has been demonstrated that social media use for informational purposes has positive and significant effects on political participation (Chan et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hyun et al., 2014; Leung, 2009; Pang, 2018; Park & Karan, 2014). While some studies have documented a positive, significant relationship between entertainment preference on social media and political participation (e.g., Chen, 2017; Yu, 2016), others have documented negative association between entertainment preference and political participation (Kim et al., 2013; Rittenberg et al., 2012). Thus, scholars have expressed reservations regarding the capacity of online users who do not get exposed to information to participate in civic life (Prior, 2005).

Concurrently, scholars have argued that the affordances of the Internet lead to different outcomes for different motivations of use, with news seekers becoming more informed and those who are politically disinterested less informed (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Brundidge & Rice, 2008). The convergence on these arguments is that information preference on social media facilitates political participation while entertainment preference is negatively related to political participation. However, with pockets of evidences establishing a positive, significant relationship between entertainment preference and political participation (e.g., Chen,

2017; Yu, 2016), there is need for further investigation into the influence of news and entertainment preferences on political participation. While the differential participatory implications of news and entertainment have been established by various studies (Chen, 2017; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Prior, 2007; Rittenberg et al., 2012), the phenomenon of incidental news exposure explains how media exposure to any content could lead to accidental exposure to news thus resulting in unintended learning of civic and political substance (Lee & Kim, 2017; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018).

News Preference and Political Participation

Online users in the current digital era rely on social media platforms for news (Alsriddi, 2018; Levy et al., 2016; Meeds, 2015). Research has documented positive effects of social media use for news on political participation (Pang, 2018). Using representative data collected in the United States, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) found that news preference on social media is a positive and significant predictor of both online and offline political participation among respondents. The scholars averred that people who use social media for informational purposes participate more in politics, with political participation also increasing their news seeking behaviours. Relying on data from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey, Kenski and Stroud (2006) investigated the relationships among Internet access, exposure to news and different political outcomes of citizens. Findings documented that Internet access and online news exposure about the presidential campaign were significant predictors of political outcomes, including political participation.

Similarly, Hargittai and Shaw (2013) relied on data from a diverse population of young adults to investigate the relationship between different Internet uses and online and offline political participation in the United States. Their study found that social media use for informational purposes was positively related to traditional forms of political participation. In addition, Lee et al. (2013) investigated the impact of online news consumption on political participation of adolescents aged 12-17 in the 2008 presidential election in the United States and documented positive effects of news consumption online on political participation among respondents. In a four-wave panel study conducted during the 2010 Swedish election campaign, Holt et al. (2013) investigated the impact of social media use on political interest and political participation among different age groups and reported that attention to social media news had positive effects on offline political participation. Concurrently, studies from Asia have documented positive effects of social media use for informational purposes on political participation (Chen, 2017; Hyun et al., 2014; Park & Karan, 2014). These findings are consistent with empirical investigations within the purview of traditional media (e.g., Moeller & de Vreese, 2013). Hence, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: News preference on social media will predict political participation among Nigerian youths

Political Efficacy as a Moderator

Political efficacy comprises internal and external efficacy. Internal political efficacy explains an individual's perception of political competence to know and to participate effectively in politics while external political efficacy describes an individual's perception that officials and government institutions are likely to respond to their needs and interests (Jung et al.,

2011). Thus, political efficacy is predicated on the belief that an individual's political behaviour could influence the political process (Balch, 1974). Among the multifaceted factors that impact political behaviours, political efficacy is regarded to be one of the most prominent psychological definitions closely related to individuals' political actions (Aish & Jöreskog, 1990). Thus, it has been documented that political efficacy has positive effects on citizens' political participation (Delli Carpini, 2004).

Additionally, scholars have investigated the relationship between news consumption and political efficacy (Ahmed, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Using an online survey of 434 respondents from a public university in the United States, Zhou and Pinkleton (2012) found a positive relationship between online news consumption and political efficacy among young adults. Guided by the uses and gratifications approach, Ahmed, (2014) examined political information seeking behavior among a sample of Malaysian registered voters. He found two motives of political information seeking, namely diversion and vote guidance, significantly correlated with political efficacy. In addition, scholars have concluded that people who believe they are competent to participate in politics are motivated to consume political news and participate in politics (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Idid et al., 2017; Pingree, 2011). Equally, scholars have averred that the association between Internet/social media use and political participation will be stronger for those who already have high levels of political efficacy (Chan & Guo, 2013). However, Tewksbury et al. (2008) found partial support for a connection between online news use and political efficacy. While the mediating influence of political efficacy on political participation has received attention in political communication research (Chen et al., 2019; Jung et al., 2011; Park, 2019), few studies have examined the moderating influence of political efficacy on political participation (e.g., Chan & Guo, 2013). The current study, therefore, intends to expand the body of literature. Thus, we contend that:

H2: Internal political efficacy will moderate the influence of news preference on political participation among Nigerian youths, with the tendency to participate in politics higher for youth with high political efficacy and lower for youth with low political efficacy

Entertainment Preference and Political Participation

Extant discourses have established a negative relationship between entertainment preference online and political participation (e.g, Kim et al., 2013; Prior, 2005). In his book *Post-broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections*, Prior (2007) posited that television enhanced levels of political knowledge which positively impacted on voter turnout because the medium did not require much cognitive ability compared to print media and early television offered only news programming without diversity of contents. Due to its novelty, audiences watched the news, which improved political knowledge, hence robust voter turnout. The advent of cable television and the Internet with variegated contents led to consumption of divergent contents (Prior, 2007). This led entertainment-seeking audiences to stop consuming news, leaving only the politically interested to consume news. Consequently, audiences who prefer news had improved participatory outcomes with detrimental effects on the political outcomes of entertainment-seeking audiences. This conclusion has been validated (Rittenberg et al., 2012).

Moreover, some authors have posited that the variety of contents on the Internet facilitate political knowledge of the information-rich while making those who are politically disinterested ill-informed (Bimber & Davis, 2003). Since information is a basic requirement for po-

litical participation, involuntary exposure to political information is detrimental to political cognition and participation among people who are disinterested in politics (Brundidge & Rice, 2008). Similarly, it has been documented that separation from the political world leads to increased levels of political apathy (Putnam, 2000), prompting scholars to conclude that exposure to entertainment has detrimental effects on political participation (Moeller & de Vreese, 2013).

Conversely, some scholars have reported positive effects of entertainment preference on political participation (Chen, 2017; Yu, 2016). Similarly, television entertainment programming has been reported to have significant contributions on political participation (Durante et al., 2019). Correspondingly, various media have proliferated entertainment programming in the form of political satire with positive influence on political knowledge of young people (Warner et al., 2015). With evidence of political entertainment programming on the Nigerian democratic landscape (Eko, 2010), Mustapha et al. (2019) found that exposure to political entertainment programming on social media had significant effects on political knowledge and political attitudes of young adults in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: What is the influence of social media entertainment preference on political participation among Nigerian youths?

Incidental News Exposure as a Mediator

Incidental news exposure describes unintended encounter with news while surfing the Internet for a different purpose (Tewksbury et al., 2001). Though the changing media environment has led to resurgence in research on incidental news exposure (e.g., Bergström & Belfrage, 2018; Feezell, 2018; Goyanes, 2020; Kaiser et al., 2021; Weeks et al., 2017; Yadamsuren & Heinström, 2011), incidental news exposure, however, is not a recent phenomenon. In his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Downs (1957) found evidence of chanced encounter with news on traditional media with significant influence on political knowledge. It has been concluded that incidental news exposure was central to political participation in the 'low choice' media era (Prior, 2007). According to Prior, cable television and the Internet have diminished chanced encounters with news content among users who are averse to politics. However, Prior's conclusion was made at a time when the Internet, particularly social media, were still developing and had not become dominant sources of news.

Recently, social media have been reported to have enhanced the consumption of news in an incidental manner, especially among young people (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). Although the expansion of the media landscape may have altered motivations to actively get exposed to news content, the significant growth of social media has increased the opportunities for citizens to learn about politics in an incidental manner (Bode, 2016; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). What is perhaps the progenitor of empirical investigations into the impact of incidental news exposure on political knowledge within the online media environment established positive, significant effects (Tewksbury et al., 2001). The explosion of social media as dominant sources of information (Pew Research, 2018) motivated empirical investigations into the impact of incidental news exposure on diverse political outcomes among social media users (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2017; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019).

Consequently, studies have established significant contributions of incidental news exposure to political knowledge and political participation (Bode, 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; Tewksbury et al., 2001; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). However, other scholars have found that incidental news exposure is negatively associated with political knowledge (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). With studies reporting social media to have enhanced chanced encounters with news contents, the implication is that entertainment-seeking users are likely to encounter news without searching for it. Perhaps, the impact of entertainment preference on political participation as reported by some scholars (Chen, 2017; Yu, 2016), may be an indirect effect of chanced encounters with news while using social media for entertainment purposes. We, therefore, pose the following research question:

RQ2: Does incidental news exposure mediate the influence of social media entertainment preference on political participation among Nigerian youths?

Methodology

Data

Cross-sectional data were collected from youth aged 18-35 (National Youth Policy, 2009) through self-administered questionnaire in Kaduna metropolis, Nigeria. Being the old capital of colonial administration in northern Nigeria and the capital of the then northern region after independence, Kaduna attracts people from all over Nigeria (Alao & Mavalla, 2016). Thus, Kaduna takes the plural nature of the bigger Nigerian state, being a cosmopolitan society with the representation of diverse ethnic and religious nationalities that peopled the Nigerian state (Alao & Mavalla, 2016). Due to its diversity, Kaduna is an interesting location for conducting empirical investigations into the political outcomes of Nigerian youths. Comprising four local government areas, Kaduna metropolis reflects a mini Nigerian state. Using Slovin's formula (Guilford & Fruchter, 1973) to determine an adequate sample size, a total of 434 respondents were sampled proportionally to the population of youths in each local government area that form Kaduna metropolis, namely Kaduna North (24.4% of respondents), Kaduna South (27.0% of respondents), Igabi (24.7% of respondents), and Chikun (24.7%). Other demographic variables relevant to the study were incorporated, namely age, gender, and education. Respondents in the study fell between 18 and 35 years of age ($M=24.96$, $SD=4.63$, $Min=18$, $Max=35$) in tandem with the definition of a youth in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Female respondents (53.0%) outnumbered their male counterparts (47.0%) which was representative of the age-category under investigation. Similarly, academic qualifications were representative of the population under review as respondents with a postgraduate degree accounted for 10.1% of the population; respondents with a college degree accounted for 51.8%; respondents with a diploma accounted for 20.3% while respondents who had completed high school accounted for 17.7%.

Measures

News preference: The measure of motivations for news use was adapted from validated items in previous research (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Four items assessed motivations for news use on social media (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Respondents reported their

level of agreement “to get news and stay informed,” “to get news about public and government affairs,” “to get updates about political leaders,” “to keep me updated during elections” ($\alpha = .74$, $M = 3.55$, $SD=1.02$).

Entertainment preference: Three items that have been validated in previous research were used to measure this construct (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). On a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), respondents reported their level of agreement with the following items: “to get update and follow celebrities,” “to seek entertainment and leisure,” “to pass the time away when bored” ($\alpha = .71$, $M=3.57$, $SD=1.02$).

Internal Political efficacy: Seven validated items were adapted from previous research to measure this construct on a five-point scale (Niemi et al., 1991). Respondents reported their level of agreement with the following items: “I feel that I am qualified to participate in politics,” “I believe I am better informed about politics and government than most people,” “Sometimes, politics and government are difficult for me to understand” “I feel that I can do well as a public official” “I feel that I understand the important political issues that face our country” “I feel I can influence government policies” and “Public officials care about what people like me think” ($\alpha = .79$, $M=3.17$, $SD=1.00$).

Incidental news exposure: Six items adapted from previous research were used to measure incidental exposure to news on social media (Kim et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001). On a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), respondents reported their level of agreement with the following items: “I don’t worry about keeping up with political news on social media because I know the news will find me,” “I rely on my friends/family members to tell me what important news on social media is,” “I stumble upon political news content” “I can be well informed about national issues through incidental news exposure” “I rely on political information from my social networks based on what they like, follow or share” and “I come across political news that I did not look for” ($\alpha = .67$, $M=2.99$, $SD=1.00$).

Political participation: Six items adapted from previous research measured this construct (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2013). On a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), respondents reported their agreement with the following items: “I have persuaded others to vote for a political party,” “I contribute to a political campaign on social media,” “I have attended a political meeting” “I contribute to political discussions on social media” “I vote during elections” and “I participate in political rallies” ($\alpha = .82$, $M=2.85$, $SD=1.02$).

Control variables: Age and gender have been controlled for in previous research because of their relationship with political participation (Park, 2019). Therefore, age ($M=24.96$, $SD=4.63$) and gender (female, 53.0%; male, 47.0%) served as control variables in this study.

Results

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 25.0. A series of ordinary least square regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses advanced and answer the research questions posed in the study. The moderating and mediating influences were investigated using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018). PROCESS macro is an SPSS add-on that uses a regression-based approach to test for mediation and moderation. Reliability of constructs was tested using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Scaled items were computed to form an index that was used for analyses.

Test of hypotheses

H1 predicted the influence of news preference on political participation among Nigerian youths. Similarly, *RQ1* sought to investigate the influence of entertainment preference on political participation among Nigerian youths. Result of hierarchical regression analysis revealed that both news preference ($\beta = .292, p < .001$) and entertainment preference ($\beta = .116, p < 0.05$) are positive, significant predictors of political participation among Nigerian youths, even after controlling for the two demographic variables of age and gender (Table 1).

Table 1. Regression predicting influence of social media content preferences on political participation

Variables	B	Model 1 (SE)	b	B	Model 2 (SE)	b
Constant	2.649	(.336)	-	1.345	(.364)	-
Age	.038	(.010)	.174***	.029	(.010)	.132***
Gender (M = 0; F = 1)	-.492	(.097)	-.241***	-.561	(.092)	-.274***
News preference				.343	(.052)	.292***
Entertainment preference				.119	(.046)	.116*
R ²			.111			.223
F _{change}	.26.994(2, 433) ***			30.713(4, 429) ***		

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

News preference, being a positive and significant predictor of political participation among Nigerian youths, lends support for *H1*. Thus, the more users consciously get exposed to news on social media, the more they are likely to participate in politics. We also found significant and positive support *RQ1* that sought to investigate the influence of entertainment preference on political participation among Nigerian youths. To this end, entertainment-oriented content has the potential to spur political participation among respondents. While news and entertainment preferences were positive and significant predictors of political participation among respondents, news preference exerted stronger influence on political participation among respondents. This affirms the submission that exposure to news is necessary for participation in politics (Brundidge & Rice, 2008). The second model of the analysis indicates a great improvement in R² change, .111, $p < .001$. Hence, the two models predicted 22.3% variance of political participation among respondents. Of the control variables, age was positively and significantly correlated with political participation. Meanwhile the effects of gender on political participation revealed that males were generally more politically involved than females.

Table 2. Regression testing the moderating influence of internal political efficacy

	B	SE	t	p
Constant	1.6654	.5069	3.2855	<.001
News preference (X)	-.3251	.1476	-2.2032	.028
Internal political efficacy (W)	.1823	.1653	1.1030	.270
News preference x Internal political efficacy (XW)	.1526	.0455	3.3516	<.000
	R ² = .0152, MSE = .6123 F (3, 430) = 11.2332, p<.000			

Note: News preference (predictor variable); Internal political efficacy (moderator)

To test *H2*, which proposed that internal political efficacy will interact with news preference to influence political participation among Nigerian youths, we ran moderation analyses using PROCESS macro. Result (Table 2) revealed that the interaction between news preference and internal political efficacy (*XW*) exerted a significant influence on political participation among respondents. Hence, *H2* was supported. Internal political efficacy moderates the influence of news preference on political participation. Furthermore, we are not just interested in testing moderation effect of internal political efficacy but probing it, hence we expected that the tendency to participate in politics will be higher for youth with high political efficacy and lower for youth with low political efficacy (Table 3).

Table 3. Conditional effects of the interaction

Political Efficacy	Effect	SE	T	p
2.286	.0238	.0588	.4045	.686
3.286	.1764	.0476	3.7057	.000
4.000	.2855	.0629	4.5404	.000

This result (Table 3) revealed support for the conditional effects of internal political efficacy as predicted in this study. Using the Pick-a-Point Approach for probing interaction, values at the 16th (2.286, $p > 0.05$), 50th (3.286, $p < .000$), and 84th (4.000, $p < .000$) percentiles represent low, median, and high internal political efficacy. It is advised that the Pick-a-Point Approach should be used with caution because it is arbitrary (Hayes, 2018). The implication is that the influence of news preference on political participation will be higher for respondents with high internal political efficacy at the 84th percentile, $p < .000$ and lower for respondents with low internal political efficacy at the 16th percentile, $p > 0.05$. In other words, the effect of news preference on political participation will be higher for respondents who have increased confidence to participate in politics while for respondents with low levels of political efficacy, the conditional effects of the interaction will disappear.

Table 4. Regression predicting indirect effects of entertainment preference

Antecedent	Consequent					
	M (Incidental news exposure)			Y (Political participation)		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
X (Entertainment preference)	0.254	0.036	<.000	0.056	0.051	.271
M (Incidental news exposure)	-	-	-	0.214	0.064	<.000
constant	2.086	0.134	<.000	2.010	0.224	<.000
	R ² = 0.102 F (1, 432) = 49.283, $p < .000$			R ² = 0.040 F (2, 431) = 8.206, $p < .000$		

To answer *RQ2*, we ran mediation analysis using PROCESS macro. One of the numerous assumptions underlying mediation analysis is its supposed suitability with longitudinal data against cross-sectional data (for a review of these assumptions, see Preacher, 2015). However, scholars have debunked these assumptions, arguing that mediation could be tested using cross-sectional data (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). Besides, cross-sectional data have been used in recent mediation research (e.g., Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018). Thus, the indirect effect is

found by multiplying the coefficient of the predictor variable with the coefficient of the mediator, thus, $0.254(0.214) = 0.054$. This means that two social media users who differ by one unit in their exposure to entertainment content are extrapolated to differ by 0.054 units to participate in politics due to the tendency to get more incidentally exposed because *ENP* is significant, $p < .000$, which leads to greater political participation because *INE* is significant, $p < .000$. Using the bootstrap confidence interval, the indirect effect is statistically different from zero, with $BOOTLLCI = 0.018$ and $BOOTULCI = 0.096$. Thus, incidental news exposure mediated the influence of entertainment preference on political participation among Nigerian youths. The implication is that the effects of entertainment preference on political participation operates through incidental news exposure.

Discussion

Predicated on the impact of social media use on political participation (Gan & Wang, 2015), we explored the impact of news and entertainment preferences on political participation among Nigerian youths. Findings revealed that the two preferences exert a significant and positive influence on political participation among respondents. Interestingly, the significant effect of entertainment preference on political participation of respondents allays fears of the negative impact of entertainment on various participatory intentions (Prior, 2007; Rittenberg et al., 2012), thus validating few studies that established a connection between entertainment preference and political participation (Chen, 2017; Yu, 2016). However, despite entertainment preference exerting significant influence on political participation, news preference was a stronger predictor of political participation among Nigerian youths. This underscores the primacy of exposure to political news as a necessary requirement for stimulating political participation (Brundidge & Rice, 2008). Due to their democratic features, social media have been reported to be dominant sources of news among citizens (Pew Research, 2018; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Similarly, it has been documented within the Nigerian democratic milieu that social media have become the number one source of news and entertainment with differential influence on political participation, especially among young people (Mustapha et al., 2019) just as it is the case in advanced democracies (Coleman, 2011). Hence, social media make useful contributions to political participation among young adults in Nigeria, irrespective of content preferences. This is important for the democratic development of Nigeria where powerful political and economic actors have captured the traditional media space with negative impact on citizenship.

Findings of the study validated suggestions that people with high political efficacy are more inclined to participate in politics than people with low political efficacy (Chan & Guo, 2013). Conditional effects revealed that the impact of news preference on political participation is moderated by political efficacy. Due to the tripartite relationship among news use, political efficacy, and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Pingree, 2011), the democratic features of social media have improved the perceived political competence of Nigerian youths who were largely disinterested in politics due to the domination of the traditional media space by interests that undermine the quality of information disseminated to the citizens to spur political participation. While previous studies have averred that explosion of contents on social media have led to accidental exposure to news (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018), incidental news exposure mediated the influence of entertainment preference on political par-

ticipation among respondents. Consequently, exposure to entertainment-oriented content make useful contribution to citizens' civic engagements while picking up news as a by-product of their online activity. As evidenced in the findings, exposure to news or entertainment influences political participation among respondents which further reaffirms the potential of social media as burgeoning sites that motivate political participation among young people.

While the study has made modest contributions to the discourse of differential motivations of social media use on political participation, the study has certain limitations that could serve as a direction for future research. Dependence on cross-sectional data and the inability of the study to conduct a national survey of the youth population of Nigeria limit understanding of these phenomena overtime. Therefore, future studies could collect expansive data from different regions of Nigeria over an extended period of time to investigate these phenomena. While the predictor variables in the study recorded significant contributions to political participation among respondents, even after controlling for some demographic variables, it is possible that these outcomes stem from unexamined variables such as message intensity and political interest, among others. It is, therefore, recommended that future studies should investigate the interaction between information preference and political interest and its impact on political participation, also investigating the indirect effect of message intensity on political participation within the confines of entertainment preference. Additionally, a methodologically diverse approach could be employed to file out the expected interests. The use of sophisticated analytical tools like CB-SEM or PLS-SEM will sure model the relationship among the constructs better than a first-generation tool (SPSS) used in the current study. Similarly, a qualitative design or mixed-methods approach could crystalize grey areas inadvertently uncovered in this study.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the impact of news and entertainment preferences on political participation in Nigeria's relatively nascent democracy. Primary data were obtained from young Nigerians in Kaduna metropolis, a location that is considered a mini-Nigerian state due to its ethnic and religious diversities. Predicated on the Uses and Gratifications theory, the effects of news and entertainment preferences on political participation were investigated within the Nigerian democratic landscape. While previous studies have investigated the differential utility of news and entertainment preferences on political participation (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013; Prior, 2007; Rittenberg et al., 2012), the moderating and mediating influences of political efficacy and incidental news exposure have not received much attention in the body of political communication research.

Although findings on the differential effects of media content preferences on political participation have been mixed, the present study found significant evidence of news and entertainment preferences on political participation. With significant effect of entertainment preference on political participation, the fears voiced in some quarters regarding the potential of entertainment-seeking users to participate in politics are, therefore, allayed. Thus, both news and entertainment preferences stimulate political participation among young adults. Importantly, political efficacy exerts differential effects on users' political participation emanating from news consumption. The effect of news preference on political participation is higher for respondents who have high levels of political efficacy and lower for users with low lev-

els of political efficacy. This is further reinforced by the mediating influence of incidental news exposure on political participation, emanating from entertainment preference. Thus, incidental news exposure bridges the civic engagements gap among users who do not intentionally consume news. Consequently, from the findings in this study, we can posit that while news and entertainment preference were significant predictors of political participation among respondents, intentional exposure to news remains indispensable to facilitating civic engagements. Equally, entertainment preference was dependent on incidental news exposure to exert influence on political participation among respondents. Similarly, the extent to which respondents get involved in the political process is dependent on their level of perceived competence to participate in the political process.

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