

## **PERCEIVED MEDIA INFLUENCE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines how perceptions of media influence affect political attitudes and participation, emphasising corrective political actions among 392 students from Summit University and Federal Polytechnic, Offa. A cross-sectional survey and regression analysis approach was used, with offline participation (e.g., protests, rallies, petitions) and online participation (e.g., posting political content, influencing voter behaviour) as outcome variables. Demographic and psychological factors, such as age, gender, education, political interest, efficacy, and ideological extremity, were included as controls in regression analyses. Key findings reveal that a more significant third-person perception gap significantly increases both offline ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and online ( $B = 0.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ) political participation. Hostile media perceptions also predict higher offline ( $B = 0.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and online ( $B = 0.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) engagement. Interaction effects between third-person perception and media hostility further amplify political activism. Political interest and knowledge were positively linked to both participation types, while internet use was specifically associated with online activism. This study examines how perceptions of media bias and influence drive political participation among Nigerian students, with implications for media literacy in polarized democracies.

**Keywords:** Third-Person Perception (TPP), Hostile Media Effect, Political Participation, Media Influence, Youth Political Activism

### **INTRODUCTION**

The role of news media in society has been pivotal in shaping public knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The news acts as an intermediary between events and the public, providing information that helps citizens make sense of the world. They contribute significantly to agenda-setting, framing public discourse, and influencing perceptions of reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). With the advent of digital platforms, the influence of news media has expanded, reaching diverse audiences and enabling faster dissemination of information.

Historically, media have played a critical role in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. For example, during major political campaigns, the media not only inform voters about candidates and policies but also frame the issues deemed most important (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In democratic societies, this role becomes even more crucial as it directly impacts the way individuals engage with political processes, make voting decisions, and participate in civic activities.

### **Problem Statement**

In today's polarized political climate, understanding the effects of media on public opinion is more important than ever. The proliferation of biased reporting and misinformation has heightened concerns about the media's role in shaping political discourse. This challenge is particularly significant in an era where social media and alternative news platforms often blur the lines between fact and opinion.

Additionally, the increasing fragmentation of audiences into ideological echo chambers has amplified the risk of political polarization (Sunstein, 2018). These developments raise questions about how media influence public opinion, particularly in terms of reinforcing or altering pre-existing beliefs.

### **Research Objectives**

This study seeks to:

1. Analyze the extent to which news media shape political attitudes.
2. Examine the influence of media on political participation and behavior.
3. To determine the relative influence of traditional and new media on public opinion regarding electorate political behaviour.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research contributes to the fields of mass communication and political science by providing insights into how media influence public opinion. Understanding these dynamics is critical for policymakers and media practitioners to address challenges such as misinformation and polarization effectively.

Furthermore, the findings of this study hold practical implications for educators promoting media literacy, enabling individuals to critically assess the content they consume. By exploring the intricate relationship between media and political behavior, this study also offers valuable perspectives for fostering a more informed and engaged electorate.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Political Participation and Communication**

Political participation is the cornerstone of democratic societies, embodying the essence of citizen engagement and societal progress. Defined as the active involvement of individuals in the political process, political participation encompasses a myriad of activities, ranging from voting and activism to running for public office.

Political participation manifests in diverse forms, including but not limited to voting, political activism, community organizing, rallies, and running for office. Voting, perhaps the most

fundamental form, allows citizens to express their preferences and hold representatives accountable (Nnamani and Okafor, 2021). Several factors influence an individual's decision to participate in politics. Socio-economic status, education, and income level play pivotal roles, with higher levels often associated with increased political engagement. Civic education and political awareness are crucial, as informed citizens are more likely to participate actively (Puja, 2018).

Additionally, political communication can influence and motivate individuals to engage in politics. Political communication is simply the role of communication in the political process particularly during electioneering campaign. This complex web of interactions encompasses various media platforms such as speeches, debates, media campaigns, and voting education (Nnamani and Okafor, 2021).

In an era defined by digital advancements and globalization, the dynamics of political communication have evolved significantly, wielding immense power in shaping public opinion, influencing policy decisions, voting decisions and driving social change (Oparaugo, 2021).

Meanwhile, from the ferocious speeches of politicians to the era of the printing press, communication has been an important tool for spreading ideas, mobilizing the voters, and challenging established power structures. The development of mass media in the 20th century, including radio, television equally added a plus to political communication, and later, the internet (social media and blogs) is significantly redefining the scope and reach of political communication in this 21<sup>st</sup> century (Oparaugo, 2021).

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### ***1. Agenda-setting Theory***

Agenda-setting theory, initially formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), suggests that the media's power is not necessarily in telling people what to think but in directing their attention to particular issues. By focusing on specific topics, the media influences the salience of issues in the minds of the public. The power of agenda-setting has been a critical component of media studies, as it demonstrates the role of media in shaping societal priorities and, consequently, political attitudes and behavior (McCombs, 2004). In the past few decades, this theory has been adapted to account for the changing media landscape, particularly with the rise of digital and social media platforms.

Recent scholarship has further extended agenda-setting theory to the digital age, where algorithms play an influential role in determining which topics emerge as important in the public's view. In these new media environments, traditional mass media no longer hold a monopoly on agenda-setting. Instead, platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* prioritize content based on user engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments (Stieglitz et al., 2018). These platforms leverage algorithms that curate personalized news feeds, thus allowing individuals to experience a tailored agenda that may reinforce their preexisting beliefs, further fragmenting the public discourse (Boulianne, 2019). The challenge of algorithmic influence on public opinion is an area

of growing concern, as it raises questions about the degree of control traditional media still maintain over public agendas.

Additionally, digital platforms have introduced a new layer of complexity to agenda-setting. As researchers like Fanta et al. (2020) argue, traditional media still play an essential role in influencing the agenda, but the dynamic between traditional journalism and online media platforms is increasingly interactive and reciprocal. For example, viral content shared on social media often prompts traditional news outlets to cover the same topics, amplifying their importance and visibility. This cyclical relationship between digital and traditional media further complicates the traditional framework of agenda-setting.

Furthermore, recent studies have explored how media agendas shape political behavior, particularly in the context of election campaigns. For instance, the media's emphasis on specific issues—such as economic policy, healthcare, or national security—has been shown to influence public perceptions of political candidates and issues. According to Barberá et al. (2020), media framing in the lead-up to elections can prime the electorate to prioritize certain issues when making voting decisions, thus shaping the outcome of the electoral process. In a similar vein, the framing of social issues, like climate change or immigration, can alter public attitudes and even lead to political mobilization, as shown in the case of climate change activism, where media coverage helped propel environmental issues onto national and international agendas (McCarthy et al., 2019).

Moreover, the role of social media platforms in agenda-setting has led some scholars to suggest a hybrid model of agenda-setting, where both traditional media and digital platforms interact to shape the public agenda. This model allows for a more nuanced understanding of how information spreads and influences political behavior in an age of media convergence (Boulianne, 2020). With the increased reliance on digital platforms for news consumption, understanding how these new dynamics influence the agenda-setting process is essential for assessing the impact of media on public opinion.

Overall, the concept of agenda-setting continues to be a vital framework in understanding how media influence political attitudes and behaviors. As media consumption patterns evolve with technological advancements, it becomes increasingly important to explore how digital platforms, with their algorithmic-driven content dissemination, shape public opinion and political discourse.

## ***2. Spiral of Silence Theory***

The Spiral of Silence Theory, proposed by Noelle-Neumann (1974), posits that individuals are less likely to express their opinions if they perceive themselves to be in the minority or if they believe their opinions contradict the prevailing public discourse. This reluctance stems from the fear of social isolation or ridicule, which may compel individuals to remain silent, thereby further reinforcing the dominant opinion and creating a "spiral" effect. According to the theory, as more people withhold their opinions, the perception of the majority opinion grows stronger, and those who disagree are further marginalized.

In the digital age, the relevance of the Spiral of Silence Theory has been re-examined, particularly with the rise of social media. Online platforms like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *Reddit* provide users with both a sense of anonymity and an expansive reach, which can either exacerbate or mitigate the effects of the Spiral of Silence. On the one hand, these platforms have the potential to reduce the impact of social isolation, as users can express opinions without the immediate fear of in-person repercussions (Gearhart & Zhang, 2020). However, they also create new dynamics in which the vocal majority, particularly in online echo chambers, may influence the behavior of users who feel pressured to conform to dominant narratives.

Recent research highlights how the anonymity afforded by social media can lead to more extreme expressions of opinion, with users often feeling emboldened to share views that they might otherwise suppress in face-to-face interactions. According to Zúñiga et al. (2020), social media platforms can increase political expression, but this expression is often polarized, especially when users feel strongly about certain issues. In contrast, users who perceive themselves to be in the minority may experience greater fear of ostracism and, as a result, might refrain from participating in online discourse altogether, contributing to the Spiral of Silence.

Further studies, such as those by Walker et al. (2021), have explored how the rapid spread of misinformation on social media platforms can amplify the Spiral of Silence effect. When individuals encounter false information that aligns with their beliefs, they may feel encouraged to share and discuss it, yet those who disagree with the misinformation might be less inclined to speak out for fear of being ostracized or labeled as "unpatriotic" or "uninformed." This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in politically charged contexts, where the risk of social isolation may prevent users from expressing dissenting opinions.

On the other hand, some researchers argue that the Spiral of Silence theory may be mitigated in the digital age due to the amplification of diverse voices. Platforms like Twitter and YouTube allow minority opinions to find wider audiences, and in some cases, they can lead to the formation of counterpublics where individuals with marginalized views can engage in dialogue without fear of being silenced by dominant public opinion (Himmelboim et al., 2019). This phenomenon is particularly notable in movements like *#BlackLivesMatter* or LGBTQ+ rights, where social media serves as a space for marginalized communities to express their views and counter mainstream narratives.

The tension between social media's potential to either amplify or mitigate the Spiral of Silence effect is indicative of the evolving nature of public opinion expression in the digital era. The growing influence of online communities, algorithms, and echo chambers presents new opportunities for individuals to express opinions, but it also creates challenges related to the polarization of public discourse. Understanding how these dynamics interact with traditional theories like the Spiral of Silence is crucial for assessing their influence on political behavior and social engagement in contemporary society.

## Previous Studies

### *1. Overview of Key Research on Media Influence*

Extensive research over the years has consistently demonstrated that traditional media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and political behavior. For example, Patterson and Donsbach (2020) emphasize how television and newspapers have historically influenced voting patterns and civic engagement. Television, in particular, has had a significant impact on election outcomes through campaign ads and debates, framing political issues and candidates for mass audiences. Newspapers, similarly, have long been essential in shaping public views, particularly through investigative journalism, which has been crucial in holding public figures accountable and shaping societal discourse (Patterson, 2019). These traditional media outlets have historically set the public agenda and shaped political attitudes by determining which issues receive prominent attention.

In contrast, digital media—especially social media platforms—have fundamentally altered how information is disseminated and consumed. Tucker et al. (2018) highlight that while online platforms have increased access to diverse viewpoints, they have also introduced challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and increased political polarization. The decentralized nature of social media allows for the rapid spread of both accurate and false information, and algorithms prioritize sensational content that often lacks nuance or factual grounding. The viral nature of content on social platforms, particularly *Twitter* and *Facebook*, contributes to the quick dissemination of political opinions and news, but these platforms also foster echo chambers where individuals are primarily exposed to views that reinforce their existing beliefs, intensifying political polarization (Bessi et al., 2018).

Despite the challenges of misinformation, digital platforms have democratized information and provided an avenue for marginalized groups to express their opinions and challenge mainstream narratives. This opens up new avenues for political participation, as demonstrated by social movements such as *#MeToo* and *#BlackLivesMatter*, which have found significant traction on social media, offering underrepresented voices a platform to influence public discourse (Kaiser et al., 2022). Thus, while digital media can facilitate the spread of misleading content, it also has the potential to empower marginalized groups and transform the political landscape by amplifying their voices.

### *2. Contrasting Findings Between Traditional and Digital Media*

While traditional media, such as television and print newspapers, tend to maintain higher editorial standards and gatekeeping practices, digital platforms are often criticized for their role in amplifying echo chambers and the spread of fake news (Lazer et al., 2018). Traditional media are usually subject to editorial oversight, fact-checking procedures, and regulatory frameworks, which can help ensure that information adheres to professional standards. In contrast, the rise of social media has led to concerns about the lack of accountability in the content shared online. Digital platforms often operate without the same editorial constraints, and users are more likely to encounter content that is emotionally charged or designed to elicit engagement rather than provide factual information (Friggeri et al., 2019). This absence of editorial standards can lead to the



proliferation of fake news and misinformation, which, as studies by Vosoughi et al. (2018) show, spreads more quickly on social media than factual information.

However, research has also suggested that digital media provide significant opportunities for marginalized voices to engage with and challenge mainstream narratives, complicating the dichotomy between traditional and digital media effects. Kaiser et al. (2022) note that social media platforms have been instrumental in empowering groups that are often overlooked in traditional media spaces, such as racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other social justice advocates. These platforms offer an opportunity for these groups to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly engage with a global audience. This dynamic has led to the rise of counterpublics—groups of people who organize and engage in political discourse outside of the mainstream media (McDougall et al., 2021).

Furthermore, digital platforms have also been shown to facilitate civic engagement and political participation. Studies by Xenos et al. (2019) suggest that users of social media, while being exposed to more partisan content, are also more likely to participate in offline political activities, such as protests and voting, due to the mobilizing effect of social media. Thus, while the spread of misinformation and the risk of echo chambers are significant concerns, there are positive effects of digital media that have not always been acknowledged in traditional media studies.

In conclusion, while traditional media and digital platforms have differing impacts on public opinion, both have significantly shaped political behavior. Traditional media's editorial standards have ensured the public is exposed to balanced and fact-checked information, while digital media, despite their drawbacks, have provided new opportunities for marginalized voices to engage in the political process and challenge mainstream narratives.

## **Gaps in the Literature**

### ***Limited Research on Emerging Platforms***

While much is known about the influence of traditional media on public opinion and political behavior, research on newer platforms such as *TikTok*, *WhatsApp*, and others remains relatively limited. These platforms have seen rapid growth in their use for political communication, yet their unique affordances differ significantly from older social media platforms like *Facebook* or *Twitter*. *TikTok*, for instance, uses short-form video content, which encourages the creation of highly engaging, often viral, political messages, influencing users' opinions and behaviors in ways that traditional text-based platforms do not (Anderson & Vogels, 2020). *TikTok's* algorithm, which prioritizes content based on user engagement and behavior, has been noted to shape political discourse, especially among younger audiences significantly, but the long-term effects on political behavior are still under-explored (Hu et al., 2020).

*WhatsApp*, on the other hand, functions as a messaging app that enables encrypted communication among individuals or small groups, which makes it distinct from public-facing platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter*. As a result, *WhatsApp* has become an important tool for political campaigning, particularly in regions where political discourse is more private and less mediated

by traditional news outlets. However, *WhatsApp's* encrypted nature also makes it susceptible to the spread of misinformation and political manipulation in ways that can undermine public trust (Chadha et al., 2020). Research by Zeng et al. (2021) reveals that *WhatsApp* plays a significant role in disseminating political messages in developing countries, particularly during elections, but the spread of fake news and political rumors via *WhatsApp* poses unique challenges that remain poorly understood in the academic literature.

Despite the increasing importance of these platforms in shaping public opinion and political behavior, there is a lack of research that systematically investigates their role in political communication compared to established platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *YouTube*. As such, there is an urgent need for studies that address how emerging platforms such as *TikTok* and *WhatsApp* influence political attitudes, voting behavior, and political polarization. These platforms have distinct affordances, such as their ability to facilitate rapid, informal communication among users and promote viral content, that has not yet been fully examined (Boulianne, 2020). To understand how these platforms influence political opinions and behavior, more comprehensive, cross-platform research is needed to assess their impact.

### *Need for Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies*

Existing scholarship on the effects of media frequently concentrates on Western democracies, most notably the United States and Western Europe, while offering scant examination of how these phenomena manifest in alternative sociopolitical and cultural frameworks. Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) advocate for an expansion of comparative research, underscoring that media systems exhibit significant variation across different regions owing to disparities in political frameworks, media autonomy, and social conditions. Their research specifically investigates the digital environment in Africa, revealing that digital inequalities extend beyond mere access and are profoundly interconnected with socioeconomic standing, linguistic factors, educational attainment, and cultural perceptions. Notwithstanding the rising prevalence of mobile technology, substantive digital engagement continues to be impeded, particularly for marginalized demographics, as a result of issues related to affordability and insufficient digital literacy. The authors further champion the need for locally informed, participatory digital policies and introduce the notion of digital decolonization, calling for an acknowledgment of indigenous epistemologies. Collectively, these findings emphasize the necessity of situating media influence within localized contexts—particularly in regions such as Nigeria—where digital and media interactions are influenced by distinct historical, cultural, and economic variables. For instance, research on media effects in countries with more authoritarian regimes or in non-Western democracies often shows different patterns of influence, with state-controlled media playing a more dominant role in shaping public opinion (Huang & Mutsvairo, 2021).

In Africa, for example, social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* are increasingly used for political mobilization. Yet, their role in these regions can differ due to issues such as lower internet penetration rates, digital literacy challenges, and the prominence of mobile phones as the primary medium for online communication (Chiluwa, 2018). Similarly, in countries like India, where political communication is heavily mediated through *WhatsApp*, the spread of misinformation on the platform has become a major concern, with potential consequences for



elections and political behavior (Muralidharan & Mutsvairo, 2020). These regional differences underscore the need for cross-cultural comparative studies that consider how local media environments, political structures, and cultural norms interact with new digital media platforms to shape public opinion and political behavior.

Cross-cultural research can also shed light on the impact of different types of media content and the public's response to them in various sociopolitical contexts. For example, the way political messages are framed in countries with a high level of media freedom may differ substantially from those in countries with more restrictive media environments. In Latin America, where political communication is often highly polarized and contentious, digital platforms have played a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes (Rivas & Prado, 2020). Understanding these regional differences is crucial to developing a nuanced theory of media effects that is not only applicable in Western contexts but can also provide insights into the role of media in shaping political attitudes and behaviors in diverse global settings.

In conclusion, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the study of emerging platforms like *TikTok* and *WhatsApp* and how they impact political communication, as well as the need for more comparative research that examines the cultural and political contexts of media effects globally. As digital media continues to evolve, addressing these gaps will be essential for understanding the broader implications of media in shaping political landscapes around the world.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a quantitative research design (descriptive approach), hence, a cross-sectional survey research method was used to enable researcher draw inference on variables under study. Lauren (2022) writes that a cross-sectional study is a type of research method in which the researchers collect data from respondents at a single point in time.

The study population for this study are undergraduate students of Summit University Offa and Federal Polytechnic, Offa according to the school portal is 15, 000 (fedpoffaonline, n.d), while Summit University has over 5000 undergraduates (submmituniversity.edu.g/history, n.d). Pritha (2021) explained that a population is the entire group that you want to draw conclusions about. Hence, the population of this study is 20,000.

For this study, 392 participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness across both institutions. Pritha (2020) writes that a sample size is a part of the population chosen for a survey or experiment through appropriate sampling technique. By sample size, it is understood as a group of subjects that are selected from the general population and is considered a representative of the real population for that specific study. To arrive at the sample size for this study, Taro Yamane formula was used as explain below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where  $n$  = Sample size

$N$  = Population of the study

$e$  = Tolerable error (5%)

$$n = \frac{20,000}{1 + 20,000 (0.05)^2} \text{ i.e } 0.05 \times 0.05 = 0.0025$$

$$n = \frac{20,000}{1 + 20,000 (0.0025)} \text{ i.e } 20,000 \times 0.0025 = 50$$

$$n = \frac{20,000}{1 + 50} \text{ i.e } 1 + 50 = 51$$

$$n = \frac{20,000}{51} \text{ i.e } 20,000 \div 51 = 392$$

$$n = 392$$

The process of selecting a smaller group of participants to tell essentially what a larger population might tell if asked every member of the larger population the same questions (Adwok, 2017). The sampling technique used in this study was accidental sampling technique.

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample size. The questionnaire was structured and designed to allow the respondents to answer the research questions appropriately. It comprises two sections.

Data were analyzed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used, and the data were presented with the aid of a histogram. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 28.

Demographic control variables included gender (60% female), education level ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 1.6$ ), and house stratum, a proxy for household income ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ). Previous research indicated a curvilinear relationship between house stratum and participation, with middle-class individuals participating less than their working- or upper-class counterparts (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009b). Consequently, the house stratum was squared to account for this curvilinear relationship in regression models (Hayes, 2005).

Additional control variables included internet usage, political interest, political efficacy, political knowledge, and ideological extremity. These variables helped account for the possibility that

individuals more engaged online, politically interested, or with stronger ideological leanings might be more likely to participate in the measured activities. General internet use was proxied by the frequency of email use to communicate with friends and family, rated on a 6-point scale from 0 (never) to 5 (frequently) ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ).

Political interest was measured by respondents' interest in local, national, and international politics, aggregated into a single index ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Political efficacy, representing confidence in influencing government and solving community issues, was averaged from four items on a 6-point agreement scale ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $\alpha = 0.72$ ). Political knowledge, adapted for the Colombian context, combined responses to eight items covering political rules, substance, and figures ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ,  $\alpha = 0.74$ ). The ideological extremity was determined by folding responses from a self-placement on an 11-point political ideology scale, where 0 was "left," 5 was "center," and 10 was "right" ( $M = 1.49$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ).

The independent variables analyzed included the third-person perception gap, total perceived media influence, and perceived media hostility. The third-person perception gap was calculated by subtracting respondents' perceived influence of media on themselves ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ) from perceived influence on others ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ), yielding a mean gap of 1.3 ( $SD = 1.5$ ).

Total perceived effects were measured by summing perceived influence on self and others (Boyle et al., 2008), resulting in a variable with  $M = 5.8$  and  $SD = 2.6$ . A modest negative correlation ( $\beta = -0.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was observed between perceived influence gap and total perceived influence.

Hostile media perceptions were assessed by comparing personal ideological positions with perceived media ideology on an 11-point scale. The distance between these positions, regardless of left or right orientation, formed a measure of media hostility ( $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). Interaction terms were constructed by standardizing variables and creating multiplicative terms to examine whether hostile media perceptions moderated the relationships involving third-person perceptions or total media influence.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis revealed significant relationships between media influence perceptions and political participation behaviors. Offline corrective political participation showed a positive association with the third-person perception gap ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that individuals perceiving a greater disparity between media influence on others and themselves were more likely to engage in traditional forms of political activism. Similarly, online corrective political participation was significantly predicted by the third-person perception gap ( $B = 0.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Hostile media perceptions also exhibited significant predictive power. Respondents with higher perceived ideological distance from the media demonstrated greater corrective political participation both offline ( $B = 0.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and online ( $B = 0.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The interaction between hostile media perceptions and third-person perceptions was significant, suggesting that individuals perceiving high media hostility and a large third-person perception gap were the most likely to engage in corrective actions.

Among control variables, political interest and political knowledge were positively related to both forms of participation. Political efficacy was significantly linked to offline participation but had a weaker, non-significant relationship with online behaviors. Internet use frequency was positively associated with online participation but had no significant impact on offline activism.

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that perceived media effects and ideological biases influence political engagement. The interaction effects highlight the compounded impact of third-person perceptions and media hostility in motivating corrective actions. These insights contribute to understanding the nuanced dynamics of media influence on public opinion and political behavior.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant role of media influence perceptions, particularly the third-person perception gap and media hostility, in shaping political participation both offline and online. The findings demonstrate that individuals motivated by perceived media bias are more likely to engage in corrective political actions, with compounding effects from hostile media perceptions. By incorporating demographic and psychological factors, the research provides a robust understanding of the dynamics between media influence, political attitudes, and activism.

This study represents one of the pioneering investigations within the Nigerian context that correlates hostile media perceptions with youth activism, thereby providing crucial insights from a region that has been inadequately represented in the corpus of global media scholarship. The findings are consistent with discernible trends observed in recent political movements within Nigeria, exemplified by the 2020 #EndSARS protests, wherein the perception of media bias regarding the coverage of police brutality was a significant factor that spurred heightened political mobilization both offline and online.

Although the cross-sectional design inherently limits the capacity for causal inference, and the reliance on self-reported data may result in an overestimation of participation rates, these findings significantly enhance the broader discourse surrounding media effects and public opinion. This underscores the necessity of addressing media-related perceptions to cultivate a more informed and actively engaged democratic participation in nascent democracies such as Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

To address the significant influence of perceived media effects on political participation, media literacy programs should be strengthened to help individuals critically assess media content and reduce susceptibility to perceived bias. Educational institutions, policymakers, and civil society organizations should collaborate to develop initiatives that enhance public understanding of media influence and promote informed political engagement. Additionally, media organizations must prioritize transparency in their reporting and editorial processes to mitigate perceptions of media hostility. Implementing fact-checking mechanisms, ensuring balanced coverage, and fostering open dialogue between journalists and the public can help build media trust and reduce ideological polarization.

Given the role of online platforms in political participation, social media companies and civic organizations should leverage digital spaces to encourage constructive political discourse. Fact-based discussions, civic engagement campaigns, and digital literacy efforts can ensure that online political participation remains productive rather than reactionary. Furthermore, since political efficacy and knowledge were positively linked to participation, targeted initiatives such as voter education programs, public debates, and participatory governance projects should be implemented to empower citizens with the necessary confidence and understanding to engage meaningfully in political processes.

In the context of Nigeria, collaborations with the National Orientation Agency to implement curricula focused on media literacy would be highly beneficial. Academic institutions ought to integrate critical media analysis within their curricula to equip students with the necessary skills to assess news sources effectively. Moreover, Nigerian media organizations are encouraged to establish explicit and transparent guidelines regarding political reporting to bolster public confidence.

Finally, forthcoming research should investigate the enduring effects of media perceptions on political behavior to ascertain whether these influences are sustained over time. Comparative analyses across diverse political and media landscapes would also yield significant insights into the variability of media influence on perceptions across different cultural contexts. By addressing these considerations, policymakers, media professionals, and educators can foster a more informed, engaged, and critically aware citizenry, ultimately enhancing democratic participation.

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