Social Media Use and Opinion Change Among Abia State University Students: Evidence from Experiential Data

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ABSTRACT
The evolution of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., has changed the way we look at and do things, act, and expand our opinion formation and change. There are some ways in which social media can produce opinion change, influencing people's attitudes and behaviours. The platform has become the substrate of our social interactions, and this ultimately leads to an influence on opinion formation and change. The study aims at determining social media use and opinion change among students of ABSU. Apart from finding out the exposure level of ABSU students to social media platforms, used in information sharing and exchanges, the study also specifically aims at checking if exposure to social media posts influences the opinion of students of ABSU. Anchored on the framework of Technological Determinism Theory, this study adopted the descriptive research design. Accordingly, the survey research method was adopted to address our research objectives. This study surveyed undergraduate students of Abia State University Uturu in the 2021/2022 academic session. The target population of the study is 10,062 students in randomly selected Faculties, according to information obtained from the Admissions Office. A sample of 355 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick Sample Size Calculator for the research population. The researcher adopted a questionnaire as the only measuring instrument in this study because of the nature of the study and the research method (Survey). Test statistics reveal that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media

platforms. This is in agreement with the uses and gratifications theory, as used in anchoring this research. Backed by quantitative data, the research came to the reasoned conclusion that social media use offers not only the opportunity for students to form opinions but used sufficiently in opinion moderation and change. Among other things, it was suggested that the Management of ABSU, the Government, and all other development partners should leverage social media for the promotion of messages that will help change the opinion of Nigerian students for societal good.

Keywords: *Social media, Use, Opinion Change, and University students*

Introduction

The social media trend is significantly repositioning the entire world of communication in a phenomenal pattern. Social media influences the attitude and behaviours of users whether they are aware of it or not. Gradually and steadily, social media has an impact on people's personal lives, their political views, and their consumer habits, and all these are somewhat reinforced through opinion change.

Various studies have investigated the impact of media on the beliefs, opinions, attitude changes, and behaviour of users (Nabi and Sulivan, 2001). Potter (1988) stated that the perceived reality of a media presentation may influence mental processes, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Shapiro and Chock, 2003). Prior studies explained the influence of the media on attitudinal and behavioural changes by applying theories of media effects, such as the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Nabi and Sulivan, 2001) and cultivation theory (Gerbnber, 1969; Shrum and Bischak, 2001).

Social media use is a ubiquitous phenomenon (Elhai et al. 2016; Pittman, & Reich, 2016; Quinn, 2016). The term social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. It is an internet-led technology used for the promotion of social interaction among the user community. They are online applications that allow people to communicate and share their lives from all over the world, used also to enhance communication. Social media applications are classified according to their functions such as blogs (word-press), intranets, podcasts, video sharing (YouTube), photo sharing (Flickr), social networks (Facebook, My Space) wikis (Wikipedia), microblogging (Twitter) among others (Hearn *et al.* 2008).

Public opinion is an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community. Some scholars treat the aggregate as a synthesis of the views of all or a certain segment of society; others regard it as a collection of many differing or opposing views. Writing in 1918, the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley emphasized public opinion as a process of interaction and mutual influence rather than a state of broad agreement. Key (1961) defined public opinion as "opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed." Subsequent advances in statistical and demographic analysis led by the 1990s to an understanding of public opinion as to the collective view of a defined population, such as a particular demographic or ethnic group.

Throughout the past decade, social media use has grown exponentially and has changed the way we communicate with one another other. Facebook is the most used online media platform in the world (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016; Steers, 2016) and has a high potential for influencing the opinion of people who use it (Kross et al. 2013). As of April 2017, Facebook enjoys the exalted position of being the market leader in the social media world, with 1.97 billion monthly users (Statista, 2017). In addition to posts, social media sites are bombarded with photo and video uploads, and according to recent numbers, about 400 million snaps a day have been recorded on Snapchat, with around 9000 photos being shared every second (Lister 2017). Bellingham *et al*. (2018), indicate that 51% of the internet population is using smartphones; a majority of them have a data subscription as well. Android is the market leader in this market followed by Apple. Over 98% of web access in Nigeria is through mobile phones.

However, individuals tend to maintain a stable attitude rather than one that shifts easily. To resist opinion and attitude change, people use different strategies, such as attitude bolstering, counter-arguing, negative affect, selective exposure, social validation, and source derogation (Jacks and Cameron, 2003). Some even tamper with their memories to be consistent with their initial attitude (Ross et al., 1981). Besides, people also select evidence from new information, interpret it, and make it consistent with their original beliefs and attitude (Albarracín and Mitchell, 2004). In cases where the new information does not match the previous attitude, they retrieve the old context from their long-term memories (Briñol et al. 2004).

Various social media have been used by people, particularly university students in sharing information about the schools' activities. For example, two billion people around the world and 80 million in Nigeria use Facebook to get their news, debate policy, join political movements and connect with friends and family. The platform has become the substrate of our social interactions, and this ultimately leads to an influence on opinion formation and change. Aside from Facebook, there are other platforms for sharing information that is likely to lead to opinion formation and change like Twitter, Whatsapp Group Platforms, Instagram, and other blogging sites.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing advances in information technologies especially the internet system in recent years have quickened the pace of globalization of communication. Hence, the emergence of various interactive media like Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp has not only changed the narratives but acknowledged engaging the vast majority of people, particularly the students in their information-sharing experiences.

Emerging social media platforms such as Twitter and its Chinese equivalent Weibo have become important in information-sharing and communication. They are also gradually becoming stronger in guiding public opinion (Wang et al. 2021). When compared with

traditional media, these platforms have salient characteristics, such as highly efficient dissemination of information and interactive commentary, which can contribute to information overload. In earlier research, only the effect of social media on attitude change has been studied, but the specific mechanism of this effect in the context of changing opinion has not been found in research.

Hence, the extent to which social media use is engendering opinion formation and change by undergraduate students of Abia State University Students is the lacuna that prompted this research.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to determine social media use and opinion change among students of ABSU. However, to better understand these phenomena, the specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the exposure level of ABSU students to social media platforms, used in information sharing and exchanges.
2. Ascertain the opinion change dispositions of ABSU students.
3. Check if exposure to social media posts influences the opinion of students of ABSU.
4. Identify factors that prevent social media posts from producing opinions among ABSU students' users.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research:

1. To what extent are the students of ABSU exposed to social media platforms, used in information sharing and exchanges?
2. To what extent are students of ABSU disposed to the opinion change?
3. Does exposure to social media posts influence the opinion of students of ABSU?
4. What factors prevent social media posts from producing opinions among ABSU students' users?

Research Hypotheses

To speculate on the outcome of this research and to test for the statistical significance of the data collected, the following hypothetical statements were formulated.

Hypotheses One

H_1: The opinion change disposition of ABSU students is highly related to one's level of study.

Ho: The opinion change disposition of ABSU students is not related to one's level of study.

Hypotheses Two

H_2: Opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.

Ho: Opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is not dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.

Significance of the Study

This study is very important since it would go a long way in helping the youth to fully utilize social media and incorporate them into their already existing channels of communication.

This study will expand the frontiers of research in academia by helping teachers in training institutions to teach upcoming practitioners, how social media are being mainstreamed for opinion formation and change.

As a way of replicating or repudiating previous research results, it is hoped that this study will give insights into the effectiveness of social media as to whether satisfaction is got from its use and the effectiveness in being used for opinion formation.

It is expected that the output of this research will benefit the government as it will show the level of use of the students and how they can be mainstreamed in the arduous task of good governance, as the youths will be involved in public discourse that will shape policy formulation, criticism and proper direction. This shall help them to understand how best to engage them by building better opinions amongst them, geared towards good governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework: Social media

The term social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. In the words of Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2009), social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."

Enabled by ubiquitously accessible and scalable communication techniques, social media, besides being used for social interaction as a superset beyond social communication, has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate.

By applying a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) created a classification scheme for different social media types in their Business Horizons article published in 2010. Hence, it is agreed that social media takes on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, videos, rating and social bookmarking.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. Youtube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Technologies include blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice-over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms.

Social media mingled with the internet have variously and tremendously impacted positively on the mass media, their audience as well as practitioners. A prominent communication media scholar, McQuail (2008, p.39) observes that “traditional mass communication was essential one-directional while the new forms of communication (social media) are essentially interactive.”

An overview of social media has been shown below-

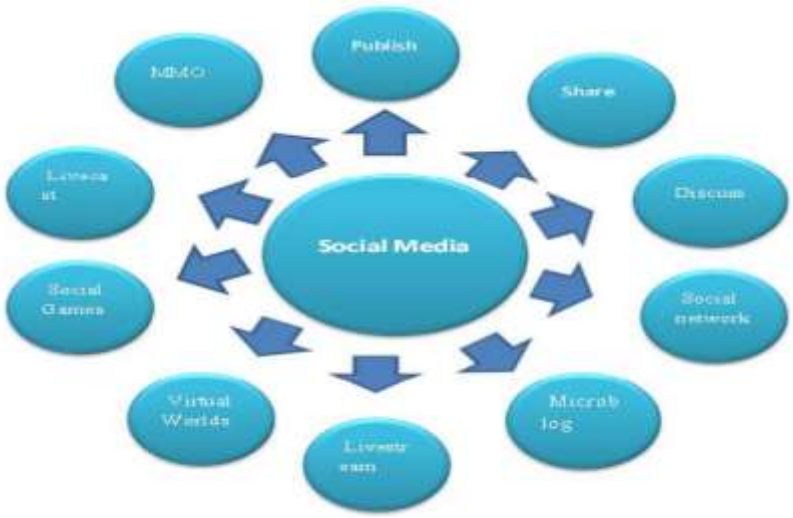

Figure 1: Overview of social media

The emergence of social media which is in vogue now with its unique characteristics in the communication field may be creating a distinct perception of what news is in the minds of the audience and ultimately how they make use of the media. This is very much in sync with the position of Nwammuo (2001, p.106) who stated that "the primary channel of communication changes the way we perceive the world. The dominant medium of any age, no doubt, dominates the people."

Social Media and Public Opinion

Why do social media have such a great influence on public opinion? One of the salient features of social media is that everyone can be a source of information, unlike in traditional media where the source is often authoritative after screening and verification (Hayes and King, 2014). However, anyone can publish a post on social media at any time; usually, neither screened nor verified. In addition, public opinion associated with posts begins to build up. In most cases, some users blindly follow and support opinion leaders, thereby posting new content that further exacerbates the trend of public opinion (Forelle et al. 2015).

Public opinion sometimes has a certain degree of blindness regarding social media content, thus causing people not to trust it as much as mainstream media. Evidence from the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report concluded that only 41% of people say they trust social media. Cognizant of this, people spend more time and energy discerning whether the information is worth believing, thereby causing more obstacles to cognitive processing. The duplication of publishers of information in social media platforms requires more cognitive resources.

Moreover, social media platforms have a large selection set. They are different from the simple one-after-another mode in the old media. As such, users can be inundated with hundreds or even thousands of posts from various posters in minutes (Zhang et al. 2016). The processing of this information leads to challenges such as uncertainty, diversity, ambiguity, novelty, and complexity. This further leads to cognitive overload, thereby affecting the understanding and interpretation of the information (Eppler and Mengis, 2010; Paas et al. 2010). A recent study revealed that using social media platforms unwittingly increases cognitive overload and this further weakens understanding, especially in reading tasks (Jiang et al. 2016).

One of the factors leading to individual cognitive load is information overload, which is the psychological state in which an individual subjectively perceives that the amount of

information he/she receives exceeds his/her information processing ability (Ferrari, 2010). That is, the brain has insufficient cognitive resources. At present, the Internet has become the primary cause of information overload in our society. The amount of digitized information is increasing rapidly, and its types are more varied (Schultz and Vandenbosch, 1998). Moreover, the quality of online information is uneven.

Thus, it is hard to distinguish between true and false information. At the same time, the number of information noise, irrelevant information, untruthful information, ambiguous information, and alternative options increases (Eppler and Mengis, 2004; van Knippenberg et al. 2015; Zhang et al. 2016), which may negatively affect the mental or physical health of individuals (Matthes et al. 2019). The information overload of social networking sites will further lead to negative social comparison and social fatigue among users (Lee et al. 2016; Fu et al. 2020; Niu et al. 2020). Information overload can also cause consumers to make worse decisions when they shop online (Chen et al. 2009). In addition, information overload can reduce the productivity and creativity of employees, which hurts society (Fu et al. 2020).

Mass Media versus Social Media

Newspapers and news and opinion Web sites, social media, radio, television, e-mail, and blogs are significant in affirming attitudes and opinions that are already established. The U.S. news media has become more partisan in the first two decades of the 21st century, has focused on conservative or liberal segments of the public on certain personalities and issues, and generally reinforced their audience's preexisting political attitudes.

Mass media and social media can also affirm latent attitudes and "activate" them, prompting people to take action. Just before an election, for example, voters who earlier had only a mild preference for one party or candidate may be inspired by media coverage not only to take the trouble to vote but perhaps also to contribute money or to help a party organization in some other way (Greifeneder et al. 2010).

Mass media and social media, to varying extents, play another important role by letting individuals know what other people think and by giving political leaders large audiences. In this way, the media make it possible for public opinion to encompass large numbers of individuals and wide geographic areas.

In areas where the mass media are thinly spread or where access to social media is limited, as in developing countries or in countries where print and electronic media are strictly controlled, word of mouth can sometimes perform the same functions as the press and broadcasting, though on a more limited scale. In developing countries, it is common for those who are literate to read from newspapers to those who are not or for large numbers of people to gather around the village radio or a community television. Word of mouth in the marketplace or neighbourhood then carries the information further. In countries where important news is suppressed by the government, a great deal of information is transmitted by rumour. Word of mouth (or other forms of person-to-person communication, such as text messaging) thus becomes the vehicle for underground public opinion in authoritarian or totalitarian countries, even though these processes are slower and usually involve fewer people than in countries where the media network is dense and uncontrolled.

The Formation and Change of Attitude and Public Opinion

No matter how collective views (those held by most members of a defined public) coalesce into public opinion, the result can be self-perpetuating. In 1993 the German opinion researcher Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann characterized this phenomenon as a "spiral of silence," noting that people who perceive that they hold a minority view will be less inclined to express it in public.

Once an issue is generally recognized, some people will begin to form attitudes about it. If an attitude is expressed to others by a sufficient number of people, a public opinion on the topic begins to emerge. Not all people will develop a particular attitude about a public issue; some may not be interested, and others simply may not hear about it (Matthes et al. 2019).

The attitudes that are formed may be held for various reasons. Thus, among people who oppose higher property taxes, one group may be unable to afford them, another may wish to deny additional tax revenues to welfare recipients, another may disagree with a certain government policy, and another may wish to protest what it sees as wasteful government spending. A seemingly homogeneous body of public opinion, according to Matthes et al. (2019), may therefore be composed of individual opinions that are rooted in very different interests and values. If an attitude does not serve a function such as one of the above, it is unlikely to be formed: an attitude must be useful in some way to the person who holds it.

Empirical Literature

A study conducted by Dr. Michael Workman, associate professor of technology management, found that social media can affect bias. “We found that when people are seeking new information about a topic, social media can change people’s minds,” Workman said. “But if they have already made up their minds on something, say politics or religion, they mostly seek out information to confirm what they already believe.” (Workman, 2019).

Workman initiated this study for a global financial company that restructured employee compensation from raises to graduate bonuses. Human resources sought to understand employees’ feelings about the pay change and how it would be received company-wide.

Using a technology called Natural Language Programming, Workman detected the degree of feeling and intensity in employees’ sentiments posted on blogs. NLP analyzes the relationship between words and their use to determine affect intensity, or how strongly they feel about a topic.

“If they use expletives that count as an emphasis on what they are saying or if they use certain adjectives, then we could determine some of the co-affect intensity and whether they are for something or against something.”

First, employees were required to watch an unbiased, factual video about the compensation changes. After watching, Workman assessed that the video did change employees’ sentiments about the compensation changes. Then, they were encouraged to post about the compensation changes on a blog created by the company’s HR department.

After analyzing employee comments from the blog, Workman found that this form of social media did not change most employees’ minds.

“What we generally concluded based on the social media data is, if you have already made up your mind about something, then social media is not going to change it for you.”

However, Workman investigated further to find that individuals who are externally focused, people who ask questions like ‘What do people think about this pay change?’ were more affected by the social media commentary than those who are more internally focused and rely more on their own opinions when making decisions.

“We did find that people who are externally focused, those that tend to seek other people’s opinions, were more statistically likely to change their opinion, based on what people were saying in the blog.”

Lastly, Workman sought to understand how social media influences people to take action for or against a cause. He classified users into three modes: minimal effort, moderate effort and maximum effort.

People that would click a button to sign a petition were classified as having minimal effort. The moderate effort involved writing a message to HR. The maximum effort meant

attending a rally for or against the compensation changes. If an individual took all three actions they were scaled at the polar end of activism.

Workman found that individuals who were for something were less likely to take stronger action than when an individual who was against something. "If people were strongly for something, they might take some mild form of action such as pressing the "For It" button. If they were strongly against it, they took more stringent action, including activism."

Workman said a valuable lesson that comes from this research is that social media users should educate themselves about the influences of social media and think critically about topics before taking a stance. "We fail when we do not study the issue to understand its complexities to make an informed decision."

Theoretical Underpinning

There is a body of theories that explain observable phenomena in the field of mass communication. It is the belief of Ohaja (2003, pp.63-64) that "knowledge does not exist in a vacuum", hence the need to anchor academic research like this on some relevant communication theories.

This study is situated within and around the framework of *Technological Determinism Theory which was proposed in 1962*. This framework helps to provide theoretical insights into how students' users have leveraged the use of social media for opinion formation and change. The technological determinism theory, as advanced by Marshall McLuhan believes that we learn, feel and think the way we do because of the messages we receive through the available modern technology. As we move from one technological age to the other, the use of social media for various things continues to advance in technology.

Before now, information leading to opinion change was normally sourced from conventional media and interpersonal channels. But with the emergence of various social media platforms, it has become easier for people to access information that can lead to opinion change. This is the base on which this study rests.

METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of the study, the survey research method was deemed most appropriate to address our research objectives. The survey method employed in this research is the use of sociometric measures in evaluating collected primary data from the sampled undergraduate students. A sample of 355 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick Sample Size Calculator out of the surveyed target population of 10,062 students in randomly selected Faculties of Abia State University Uturu in the 2021/2022 academic session. The questionnaire was used as the only measuring instrument in collecting quantitative data in this study. The research instrument was administered by the researchers through the Departmental Course Representatives of each Department selected. They were given formal training in line with the research objectives and methodology. The data collection lasted for one week (Monday – Friday). The hypotheses formulated were tested using the data collected. Tabulation and simple percentages mathematical tools were used in the presentation of data. Quantification in research permits the measurement of variables involved in a study. This may have prompted Wimmer and Dominick (1987) to aver that the use of numbers "allows greater precision in reporting results".

For the analysis, the researchers used a "nominal scale" i.e. the enumeration of frequencies of occurrence of the variables in each category as advanced by Wimmer and Dominick (1987). The interpretation of descriptive statistics made it possible to make appropriate inferences based on test results.

Data Presentation and Analysis

***Table I*: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Males	114	32.1%
Females	241	67.9%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Data presentation in *Table I*, derived from question 1 in the questionnaire suggests that most of the undergraduate students involved in using social media for opinion change were females. The implication of this was that the female respondents (241 representing 67.9%) are more in number than their male responding counterparts (114 or 32.1%).

***Table II*: Age Distribution of Respondents**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
15 – 20 years	124	35%
21 – 25 years	183	51.5%
26 – 30 years	48	13.5%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

The presentation of research data in *Table II*, derived from question 2 in the questionnaire shows that most of the ABSU students surveyed are within the age bracket of being undergraduates. Between 15 – 20 years (124 or 35%), they are within the age bracket that actively uses social media, and are involved in opinion change. However, the majority of them are between 21 – 25 years (183 or 51.5%), while and 26 – 48 years (48 or 13.5%) are undergraduate social media users in ABSU.

***Table III*: Marital Distribution of Respondents**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Single	328	92.4%
Married	26	7.3%
Divorced	1	0.3%
Widowed	0	0%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Data presentation in *Table III* shows that most of the respondents are single, implying that they have the needed time for using social media, leading possibly to changes in opinions formed on issues encountered.

***Table IV*: Respondents' Level of Study**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
100 Level	67	18.9%
200 Level	88	24.8%
300 Level	101	28.5%
400 Level	78	21.9%
500 Level	21	5.9%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

The presentation of research data in *Table IV* indicates the level of study of the respondents, with the 300 level having the highest number (101 or 28.5%), followed by the 200 level (88 or 24.8%) and the 400 level (78 or 21.9%) respondents respectively.

***Table V*: Respondents' Departments of Study**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Accounting	43	12.1%
Mass Communication	47	13.2%
Banking and Finance	27	7.6%
History and International Studies	21	5.9%
Business Management	41	11.5%
Political Science	42	11.8%
Public Administration	40	11.3%
Sociology	27	7.6%
Economics	46	12.9%
Marketing	21	6%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

The presentation of research data in *Table V* indicates the various disciplines of respondents at the Abia State University, Uturu, with Mass Communication (47 or 13.2%), Economics (46 or 12.9%) and Accounting (43 or 12.1%) having the highest number of respondents, possibly because of the number of students for the individual departments in the 2021/2022 academic session.

Relevant data collected in response to the achievement of this specific objective have been presented hereunder:

***Table VI:* Respondents' Use of the Social Media**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
On social media	355	100%
Not on social media	0	0%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Data collected as presented in *Table VI* shows evidence of ABSU students' exposure to social media and used possibly for opinion formation and change on issues of national or local importance. The implication, therefore, is that the data collected are good for presentation, analysis and making of inferences therefrom.

***Table VII:* Duration of being in the use of social media**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
0 – 3 years	86	24.2%
4 – 6 years	241	67.9%
7 years and above	28	7.9%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Quantitative research data presented in *Table VII* indicates the extent of the use of social media. For the number of years involved in the use of social media, one ordinarily expects such

users to equally use the same for opinion formation and change on issues of national or local importance.

Table VIII: **Social Media Used For Meeting Your Information Need**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	294	82.8%
Somehow	61	17.2%
No	0	0%
Can't Say	0	0%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Data presented in *Table VIII* shows that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (294 or 82.8%) used social media platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp in meeting their information needs. However, 61 others, representing 17.2% of the respondents claimed they somehow use Facebook and Whatsapp in meeting their informational needs. None of the respondents differed or was indifferent.

Table IX: **Proficiency Level in the Use of These Social Media Channels**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Very proficient	205	57.7%
Proficient	104	29.3%
Moderately	33	9.3%
Average	11	3.1%
Poor	2	0.6%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Presented research in *Table IX* shows that out of the 355 respondents, 205 representing 57.7% of the respondents claimed to be very proficient in their use of *Social Media Channels*; 104 or 29.3% claimed to be very proficient; 33 representing 9.3% claimed to be moderately proficient. Those with average proficiency or poor knowledge of the use of social media are students, possibly from poor families, where there are constraints on the use of social media due to a lack of financial resources. The import, therefore, is that the respondents have a good understanding of their use of social media, possibly for opinion formation and change on issues.

Table X: **Frequency of Social Media Use, Particularly Posts on Facebook and Whatsapp**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Regularly (Daily)	317	89.3%
Occasionally (Weekly)	38	10.7%
Rarely (Monthly)	0	0%
Never	0	0%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Presented research data in *Table X* show that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (317 representing 89.3%) frequently use the social media platform, which is daily, a

justification of the contemporary experience where most youths are always on social media platforms with varying usage and gratification patterns.

Table XI: **If Respondents Change Their Opinions on Issues**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	231	65.1%
No	0	0%
Somehow	115	32.4%
Can't Say	9	2.5%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Collected research data as presented in *Table XI* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (231 or 65.1%) claim to change their opinions on issues. While 115 representing 32.4% claim to have somehow changed their opinions on issues, 9 or 2.5% were undecided.

Table XII: **Respondents' Description of Opinions Held On Issues**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Easy to change	65	18.3%
Difficult to change	281	79.2%
Not Changeable	0	0%
Can't Say	9	2.5%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Research data collected as presented in *Table XII* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (281 or 79.2%) claimed to have difficulty in changing their opinions. Although 65 representing 18.3% of the respondents claimed to change their opinions with ease, 9 representing 2.5% were indifferent. However, no respondent claimed to have an unchangeable opinion. The implication, therefore, is that there is no opinion that is not amenable to change.

Table XIII: **If Respondents Ever Changed Earlier Opinion Based On Contrary Opinions Raised In Posts Read On Social Media Platform**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	229	64.5%
No	0	0%
Somehow	117	33%
Can't Say	6	1.7%
Not applicable	3	0.8%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Collected research data as presented in *Table XIII* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (229 or 64.5%) claimed to have changed their earlier opinion based on contrary opinions raised in posts they read on social media platforms. While 117 representing 33% claimed to have somehow changed their earlier opinion based on contrary

opinions raised in posts they read on social media platforms, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively.

Table XIV: **If Respondents Defend their Position or Opinions Held on Issues Encountered On Social Media Posts**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	213	60%
No	0	0%
Somehow	133	37.5%
Can't Say	6	1.7%
Not applicable	3	0.8%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Research data collected as presented in *Table XIV* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (213 or 60%) claimed to defend their positions or opinions held on issues encountered on social media posts. Also, 133 representing 37.5% claimed to have somehow defended their position or opinions held on issues encountered on social media posts, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively. This data imply that people do have reservations about issues encountered on social media, hence, do not change opinions without the possibility of inoculation.

Table XV: **If Respondents Attribute a Change in their Opinion to Contrary Opinions Raised In Posts You Read On Social Media Platform**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	258	72.7%
No	39	11%
Somehow	49	13.8%
Can't Say	6	1.7%
Not applicable	3	0.8%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Collected research data as presented in *Table XV* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (258 or 72.7%) attribute a change in their opinion to contrary opinions raised in posts they read on the al media platforms. While 39 representing 11% of the respondents differed, 49 or 13.8% claimed to have somehow changed their opinions contrary to opinions raised in posts they read on the social media platform. However, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively. Impliedly, contrary opinions raised in posts on social media platforms have a way of leading to opinion change among users.

Table XVI: **If Respondents Resisted Opinions Expressed On Social Media Post at Any Point, Thereby Avoiding a Change in Opinion**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	292	82.3%
No	0	0%
Somehow	54	15.2%

Can't Say	6	1.7%
Not applicable	3	0.8%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Data presented in *Table XVI* as collected indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (292 or 82.3%) claimed to have at one point or the other resisted opinions expressed on social media posts, thereby avoiding a change in opinion. While no respondents differed, 54 representing 15.2% claimed to have somehow resisted opinions expressed on social media posts, thereby avoiding a change in opinion at one point or the other. However, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively. Impliedly, social media users are always discerning, even with the potential of forming and changing opinions based on social media posts encountered.

Table XVII: **Factors That Prevent Social Media Posts from Influencing a Change in Respondents' Opinion**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Belief System	8	2.3%
Strongly held previous opinion	23	6.5%
Posts without supportive evidence	11	3.1%
Contradicting evidence	26	7.3%
Mere speculation	5	1.4%
All the above	273	76.9%
Can't say	9	2.5%
TOTAL	**355**	**100%**

Source: *Field Data, 2022*

Collected research presented in *Table XVII* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, most of the respondents (273 representing 76.9%) claimed that a combination of *Belief System, Strongly held previous opinion, Posts without supportive evidence, Contradicting evidence* and *Mere speculation* are factors that most prevent social media posts from influencing a change in the opinions of respondents. However, 9 or 2.5% were undecided. Impliedly, various factors have been found to prevent social media posts from influencing a change in the opinions of respondents. Such factors include; *Belief Systems, Strongly held previous opinions, Posts without supportive evidence, Contradicting evidence* and *Mere speculation.*

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Chi-square formula as the statistical instrument for testing the hypotheses raised in the study.

Hypotheses One

H_1: The opinion change disposition of ABSU students is highly related to one's level of study.

H_O: The opinion change disposition of ABSU students is not related to one's level of study.

Contingency Analysis

Here, research data presented in **Table IV** and **Table XV** were used for contingency analysis.

Table XVIII: **(Contingency): If Opinion change disposition of ABSU students is highly related to one's level of study (Merged Data from Table IV** and **Table XV)**

RESPONSE	OPINION CHANGE		LEVEL OF STUDY		TOTAL
	Freq. Obsv.	Freq. Expd.	Freq. Obsv.	Freq. Expd.	
1	258	*177.5*	67	*177.5*	**325**
2	39	*63.5*	88	*63.5*	**127**
3	49	*75*	101	*75*	**150**
4	6	*42*	78	*42*	**84**
5	3	*12*	21	*12*	**24**
Total	**355**		**355**		**710**

The figures in brackets are the expected frequencies

$$Fe = \frac{TR \times TC}{GT}$$

Expected Frequency Calculation

$$ER = \frac{\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Row 1 Cell 1	355 x 325	÷	710	=	177.5
Row 1 Cell 2	355 x 127	÷	710	=	63.5
Row 1 Cell 3	355 x 150	÷	710	=	75
Row 1 Cell 4	355 x 83	÷	710	=	42
Row 1 Cell 5	355 x 24	÷	710	=	12
Row 2 Cell 1	355 x 325	÷	710	=	177.5
Row 2 Cell 2	355 x 127	÷	710	=	63.5
Row 2 Cell 3	355 x 150	÷	710	=	75
Row 2 Cell 4	355 x 83	÷	710	=	42
Row 2 Cell 5	355 x 24	÷	710	=	12

***Table XIX*: Chi-square Testing of Hypothesis One**

Of	ef	of – ef	$(of - ef)^2$	$\frac{(of - ef)^2}{ef}$
258	*177.5*	80.5	6480.25	36.51
39	*63.5*	-24.5	600.25	9.45
49	*75*	-26	676	9.01
6	*42*	-36	1296	30.85
3	*12*	-9	81	6.75
67	*177.5*	-110.5	12210.25	68.79
88	*63.5*	24.5	600.25	9.45
101	*75*	26	676	9.01
78	*42*	36	1296	30.85
21	*12*	9	81	6.75
710				**217.12**

χ^2 = value calculated = **217.42**

Degree of freedom (df): To find the degree of freedom (5 rows and 2 columns)

$$df = (R - 1)(C - 1)$$

(5 – 1) (2 – 1)
4 x 1 = 4
df = 4

Level of significance = 5% = 0.05

Test Result: At 0.05 probability level or 95% confidence level and degree of freedom placed at 4, the table value is 9.49. Since the *Table Value* (9.49) is less than the calculated value (**217.42**), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This, therefore, means that the opinion change disposition of ABSU students is highly related to one's level of study.

Hypotheses Two

H_2: Opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.

Ho: Opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is not dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.

Contingency Analysis

Here, research data presented in **Table IX** and **Table XV** were used for contingency analysis.

Table XX: **(Contingency): If opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms (Merged Data from Table IX** and **Table XV)**

RESPONSE	OPINION CHANGE		LEVEL OF USE		TOTAL
	Freq. Obsv.	Freq. Expd.	Freq. Obsv.	Freq. Expd.	
1	258	*231.5*	205	*231.5*	**463**
2	39	*71.5*	104	*71.5*	**143**
3	49	*41*	33	*41*	**82**
4	6	*8.5*	11	*8.5*	**17**
5	3	*2.5*	2	*2.5*	**5**
Total	**355**		**355**		**710**

The figures in brackets are the expected frequencies

$$Fe = \frac{TR \times TC}{GT}$$

Expected Frequency Calculation

ER = Row Total x Column Total / Grand Total

Row 1 Cell 1	355 x 463	÷	710	=	231.5	
Row 1 Cell 2	355 x 143	÷	710	=	71.5	
Row 1 Cell 3	355 x 82	÷	710	=	41	
Row 1 Cell 4	355 x 17	÷	710	=	8.5	
Row 1 Cell 5	355 x 5		÷	710	=	2.5
Row 2 Cell 1	355 x 463	÷	710	=	231.5	
Row 2 Cell 2	355 x 143	÷	710	=	71.5	
Row 2 Cell 3	355 x 82	÷	710	=	41	
Row 2 Cell 4	355 x 17	÷	710	=	8.5	
Row 2 Cell 5	355 x 5		÷	710	=	2.5

Table XXI: Chi-square Testing of Hypothesis Two

Of	Ef	of – ef	$(of - ef)^2$	$\frac{(of - ef)^2}{ef}$
258	*231.5*	26.5	702.25	3.03
39	*71.5*	-32.5	1056.25	14.77
49	*41*	8	64	1.56
6	*8.5*	-2.5	6.25	0.73
3	*2.5*	0.5	0.25	0.1
205	*231.5*	-26.5	702.25	3.03
104	*71.5*	32.5	1056.25	14.77
33	*41*	-8	64	1.56
11	*8.5*	2.5	6.25	0.73
2	*2.5*	-0.5	0.25	0.1
710				**40.38**

χ^2 = value calculated = **40.38**

Degree of freedom (df): To find the degree of freedom (5 rows and 2 columns)

df = (R – 1) (C – 1)
(5 – 1) (2 – 1)
4 x 1 = 4
df = 4

Level of significance = 5% = 0.05

Test Result: At 0.05 probability level or 95% confidence level and degree of freedom placed at 4, the table value is 9.49. Since the *Table Value* (9.49) is less than the calculated value (**40.38**), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This, therefore, means that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.

Discussion of Results

In this study, we aimed to evaluate social media use and opinion change among Abia State University students. In testing hypothesis one, research data presented in Table IV and Table XV were used for contingency analysis. At 0.05 probability level or 95% confidence level and degree of freedom placed at 4, the table value is 9.49. Since the *Table Value* (9.49) is less than the calculated value (217.42), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. Findings indicate that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms. This is in agreement with the uses and gratifications theory, as used in anchoring this research.

For hypothesis two, research data presented in Table IX and Table XV were used for contingency analysis. At 0.05 probability level or 95% confidence level and degree of freedom placed at 4, the table value is 9.49. Since the *Table Value* (9.49) is less than the calculated value (40.38), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. It is therefore inferred from data analysis that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms. Also, presented research data in *Table IX* shows that out of the 355 respondents, 205 representing 57.7% of the respondents claimed to be very proficient in their use of *Social Media Channels*; 104 or 29.3% claimed to be very proficient; 33 representing 9.3% claimed to be moderately proficient. Those with average proficiency or poor knowledge of the use of social media are students, possibly from poor families, where there are constraints on the use of social media due to a lack of

financial resources. The import, therefore, is that the respondents have a good understanding of their use of social media, possibly for opinion formation and change on issues.

Data collected as presented in *Table VI* shows evidence of ABSU students' exposure to social media and used possibly for opinion formation and change on issues of national or local importance. This they do frequently, as evidenced in research data presented in *Table X* showing that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (317 representing 89.3%) frequently use the social media platform, which daily, a justification of contemporary experience where most youths are always on the social media platforms with varying usage and gratification patterns. The implication, therefore, most of the undergraduate students of Abia State University Uturu use social media sufficiently. Accordingly, as presented in *Table VIII*, research data suggest respondents (294 or 82.8%) used social media platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp in meeting their information needs.

Evidence from research data points out that the opinions change of students is categorised as *Easy to change, Difficult to change* and *Not Changeable.* Table XII indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (281 or 79.2%) claimed to have difficulty changing their opinions. Although 65 representing 18.3% of the respondents claimed to change their opinions with ease, 9 representing 2.5% were indifferent. However, no respondent claimed to have an unchangeable opinion. The implication, therefore, is that there is no opinion that is not amenable to change.

As presented in *Table XI*, research data suggest that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (231 or 65.1%) claim to change their opinions on issues. While 115 representing 32.4% claim to have somehow changed their opinions on issues, 9 or 2.5% were undecided.

As suggested in the data presented in *Table XIII*, based on contrary opinions raised in posts on social media platforms, people change their opinion. Out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (229 or 64.5%) claimed to have changed their earlier opinion based on contrary opinions raised in posts they read on social media platforms. While 117 representing 33% claimed to have somehow changed their earlier opinion based on contrary opinions raised in posts they read on social media platforms, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively.

Research data collected as presented in *Table XIV* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (213 or 60%) claimed to defend their positions or opinions held on issues encountered on social media posts. Also, 133 representing 37.5% claimed to have somehow defended their position or opinions held on issues encountered on social media posts, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively. This data imply that people do have reservations about issues encountered the social media, hence, do not change their opinions without the possibility of inoculation.

The research data point to the fact that respondents' opinions are amenable to changes. However, such changes have been attributed to contrary opinions raised in posts you read on social media platforms. Collected research data as presented in *Table XV* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, the majority of them (258 or 72.7%) attribute a change in their opinion to contrary opinions raised in posts they read on social media platforms. While 39 representing 11% of the respondents differed, 49 or 13.8% claimed to have somehow changed their opinions contrary to opinions raised in posts they read on the social media platforms. However, 6 or 1.7% and 3 or 0.8% were undecided and not applicable respectively. Impliedly, contrary opinions raised in posts on social media platforms have a way of leading to opinion change among users.

Factors such as *Belief Systems, Strongly held previous opinions, Posts without supportive evidence, Contradicting evidence* and *Mere speculation*, the study reveals, prevent

social media posts from influencing a change in respondents' opinions**.** Collected research presented in *Table XVII* indicate that out of the 355 respondents, most of the respondents (273 representing 76.9%) claimed that a combination of *Belief System, Strongly held previous opinion, Posts without supportive evidence, Contradicting evidence* and *Mere speculation* are factors that most prevent social media posts from influencing a change in the opinions of respondents. However, 9 or 2.5% were undecided. Impliedly, various factors have been found to prevent social media posts from influencing a change in the opinions of respondents.

Summary of Findings

Inferences from test statistics of research data revealed various findings as summarized below:

1. Research evidence suggests also that most of the undergraduate students of Abia State University Uturu use social media platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp sufficiently in meeting their information needs.
2. Test statistics reveal that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms. This is in agreement with the uses and gratifications theory, as used in anchoring this research.
3. Inferences adducible from data analysis suggest that opinion change on issues among students of ABSU is highly dependent on exposure to posts on social media platforms.
4. Proficiency in the use of *Social Media Channels*, data reveals, is highly dependent on the economic well-being of the user, *leading* to a good understanding of their use of social media, and possibly for opinion formation and change on issues.
5. Inference adducible from quantitative data indicates that opinion change of students is categorised into *Easy to change*, *Difficult to change* and *Not Changeable,* with most students having difficulty in changing their opinions.
6. It is evident from research data that contrary opinions raised in posts read on social media platforms by users lead to changes in their previously held opinion.
7. Findings reveal that people do have reservations about issues encountered on social media, hence, do not change opinions without the possibility of inoculation. Hence, defend their positions or opinions held on issues encountered on social media posts.
8. Various factors such as *Belief Systems, Strongly held previous opinions, Posts without supportive evidence, Contradicting evidence* and *Mere speculation,* the study reveals, have been found to prevent social media posts from influencing a change in the opinions of respondents.
9. Social media were found to have opened a new era as a result of its use for opinion formation and change.

Conclusion

Evidently, during a public opinion storm on social media, the attitude of users is not directly changed but is a wave that shows obedience first, and resistance but acceptance totally in the end. The wrong amount of posts in the storm would not popularize the information but do a disservice. Furthermore, cognitive overload plays an important role in persuasion on social media. Adding amounts or decorating content, which could increase cognitive load, may contribute to convincing others. There are several different stages during the persuasion process. Thus, identifying these stages and using the proper strategy would be more effective.

However, as has been shown in this study, social media is not without its pitfalls. Backed by quantitative data, findings in this study provide compelling evidence that social media use offers not only the opportunity for students to form opinions but is used sufficiently in opinion moderation and change.

Recommendations

Consequent to the findings of this research and conclusions are drawn, the following recommendations are made;

1. Since opinion change on issues is highly dependent on the exposure Management of ABSU, the Government and all other development partners should leverage social media for the promotion of messages that will help change the opinion of Nigerian students for societal good.
2. There is need for Information Technology experts to help in giving periodic training to students and youth to sustain their proficiency in the use of social media.
3. Since people do have reservations about issues encountered on social media, hence, do not change opinions without the possibility of inoculation, messages should be adequately verified for correctness, balance, objectivity and accuracy before being posted to the social media gateways. This will reduce incidences of resisting messages geared towards change for national development.
4. The fact that social media have been found to open a new era as a result of their use for opinion formation and change, effort should be sustained to harness the potential inherent in its use.
5. Since the results of this research will be lodged with the Central School Library, College and Departmental Library, it would serve more public good having this work in the conventional public libraries or e-libraries for the benefit of students, while future researchers conducting studies in a similar area of knowledge may wish to depend on this study as a rich resource of literature material or secondary data.
6. The Department and College of Social and Management Sciences should duplicate the research report and send it to various Mass Communication offering institutions in Nigeria as a way of raising the needed interest in online communication in the area of opinion formation and change.
7. Future research could focus on examining the role of the media in opinion formation and change towards product marketing. A replicative study with a wider scope is also suggested for future researchers.

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