

Newspaper Exposure, Efficacy Feeling and Political Apathy among Youths in South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The spate of youths' political apathy in Nigeria remains a constant source of worry to stakeholders. Nevertheless, efforts to stem the tide have been largely unsuccessful. Studies indicate that many youths rely on newspapers and other mass media for political information, and such reliance may influence their general political behaviour. This study examines the influence of newspaper reports on the extent of political apathy among young people in Southeast Nigeria using a sample of 384 respondents selected through a multistage sampling technique. It also evaluates the roles played by political efficacy and news perception in youths' extent of political involvement. Findings show that obtaining political news from newspaper is positively associated with an increased feeling of political efficacy ($r_s(379) = .567^{**}$, $p < .05$) but negatively related to reduced political apathy among youths ($r_s(379) = -.525^{**}$, $p < .05$). Also, many young people tend to perceive newspaper political reports to lack depth, objectivity, and accuracy. This perception tends to be negatively associated with their extent of political apathy ($r_s(379) = -.427^*$, $p < .05$). Therefore, newspaper coverage must pay more attention to reporting on important political issues that will enable the public to take self-determined action consistent with the social responsibility of the press.

Keywords: Media malaise, media mobilisation, newspaper news, political apathy, political cynicism, political efficacy, youth inclusion

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INTRODUCTION

The level of political participation among young people in Africa is disturbingly low. Despite accounting for more than 70% of the region's population (Gyimah-Brempong & Kimenyi, 2013; YIAGA Africa, 2019), many African youths have been neglected from the political arena and are, therefore,

showing less interest in active political participation (Mengistu, 2017). In the wake of the 2011/2012 Arab Spring that ousted several dictatorial regimes in African countries, there was the hope of increasing recognition of youths' creative skills and innovative ideas across the continent (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017). However, this recognition does not seem to have translated into greater political participation among young people, as evidenced by voters turnout, joining or forming youths' political parties, and running for formal political leadership positions (United Nations Youth [UNY], 2013).

Nigeria is a clear reflection of the African situation. Young Nigerians are not adequately represented in formal political institutions and processes, such as parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administration (Omede & Ojibara, 2017). Studies indicate that young people are less politically active than older adults (Mengistu, 2017). Where a considerable number of youths seem to participate in political activities, they seldom rise to prominent positions but often end up as cannon fodder to older politicians who use them to perpetrate electoral violence (Chiweshe, 2017; Saka, 2010) and organise short-lived protest movements like the EndSARS campaign of 2020.

Although it may seem fashionable to see many Nigerian youths showing support for democracy, most of them tend to be less enthusiastic about how democracy works. Hence, the worrisome level of political apathy among them (Agu et al., 2013).

This negative development continues to adversely affect the outcome of Nigeria's democratic processes, given that young people constitute more than half of the country's entire voting population. For instance, besides the 2003 general elections in which voters' turnout rose to 69.08% from the 52.26% recorded in 1999, there has been a progressive drop in interest towards voting, with only 57.49% casting votes in 2007, 53.58% in 2011, 43.65% in 2015, and 34.75% in 2019 (Agu et al., 2013; Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC] & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], 2011; Yakubu, 2012).

Arguably, newspapers are one of the significant contributors to political discourses in Nigeria, especially in electioneering campaigns and political marketing, during which political parties and their candidates keenly deploy various mass media platforms to project their interests and goals. Previous research has shown that Nigerian political actors frequently use the newspaper medium to advance their political aspirations, particularly in their quest to appeal to public sentiments, legitimise their stands on burning political issues, and identify with the youth culture (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013). Political discourse constitutes a significant proportion of issues reflected in virtually all Nigerian newspapers. However, some national dailies, such as *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Sun*, *Daily Independence*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, and *Nigerian Tribune*, are widely considered the major contributors to political debates and issues in the country (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013;

Ikpegbu & Ihejirika, 2020; Oboh, 2016). Research indicates that how newspapers reflect political issues can significantly influence public perception and response towards such issues (Asiru et al., 2018). For instance, a Nigerian national survey showed that due to media tendency to misrepresent crucial political issues, about 57% of Nigerian adults included in the survey perceive that political campaigns and other political contents published by newspapers seldom focus on the country's current challenges. Hence, the tendency for political cynicism among the electorates (NOI polls, 2015).

Research indicates that the mainstream newspaper remains a steady source of political information to many Nigerian youths despite the growing internet penetration and popularity of online media among young people in Nigeria (Erubami, 2020). Besides, Edogoh et al. (2015) assert that many Nigerian youths regularly read newspaper political reports on the Internet despite the global decline in newspaper readership. Generally, such readership of newspaper political contents by youths may sway their perception about politics and influence their extent of involvement or apathy towards the governance and government of their locale (Moreno et al., 2013; Waqas, 2017).

In the past, research investigating the possible influence of the media on civic engagement and political apathy tended to focus principally on the electronic media and Internet. However, little attention was devoted to empirical inquiry into the

interplay between newspaper use, political efficacy, and political apathy among young people, especially within media studies in Nigeria. Besides, studies on newspaper and political behaviour in Nigeria seem limited to the coverage of elections and political statements (Ikpegbu & Ihejirika, 2020; Oboh, 2016), newspaper campaign discursive strategies (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013), representation of political actors (Asiru et al., 2018) and gender bias in the coverage of politics (Ojebuyi & Chukwunwike, 2018). Thus, our study seeks to extend the frontiers of empirical knowledge on media use and civic engagement by providing precise insights into the interaction between young people's consumption of newspaper political news and their overall civic engagement. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the level of political apathy among youths in Nigeria and examine the relationship between exposure to newspaper political news, perception of newspaper political news, perceived political efficacy, and political apathy among young people in Nigeria.

Political Apathy and Media Use

Political apathy is a general state of indifference towards the affairs and governance of one's political locale. Such indifference usually reflects in the attitudes of the citizens of a state towards political activities, such as elections, public opinions, and civic responsibilities (Yakubu, 2012; Tan, 2012). Hence, a politically apathetic individual lacks interest in the social and political affairs of his or her country and

will likely decline to register as a voter, refuse to cast a vote during public elections, and fail to participate in protests against systemic failures. Such an individual would also lack enthusiasm in socio-political debates, be unwilling to assist security agents with useful information, and generally become indifferent to government policies and programmes irrespective of the consequences of such government's actions (Yakubu, 2012; Idike, 2014).

People's level of political involvement is significantly influenced by the twin factors of political efficacy and situational political involvement (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). While political efficacy denotes an individual's belief in the effectiveness of his or her participation in a democratic process, situational political involvement borders on the perceived relevance of an issue and its degree of contribution to political outcomes (Ejiofor, 2007; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Morrell, 2003). Considering that both factors tend to be strongly influenced by the availability of accurate information and increased civic education (Ejiofor, 2007; Ha et al., 2012; Levy, 2013), the mass media remain indispensable to a functional democracy.

Generally, the media play the critical role of informing and mobilising people for democratic processes. Consequently, their reports tend to hold a considerable level of influence on people's political behaviour. Moreover, the capacity of the media to tweak public opinion by providing the content and context of political discourse

has severe implications for democracy (Aghamelu, 2013). This is because, like a double-edged sword, the media can either increase the extent of political participation or increase the level of political apathy. In this regard, proponents of the media mobilisation theory contend a positive correlation between media use and political participation (Moreno et al., 2013 and Scheufele & Nisbet, 2003). In comparison, advocates of the media malaise school of thought argue that media use is associated with increased public political cynicism and negative political behaviour (Ha et al., 2012; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Lee, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Waqas, 2017).

As the watchdog of society, the mass media focus public attention and direct citizens' interests to governance affairs and public issues. By providing accurate and in-depth coverage of political activities, policies, and programmes, it is assumed that the media may stimulate political consciousness, renaissance, and interest among citizens, including the youths (Ejiofor, 2007). Such political awakening would, in turn, raise the bar of public political participation and deflate political apathy, especially among young people.

The newspaper is one of the media platforms devoted to disseminating information on diverse areas, including politics. Consequently, obtaining news from newspaper is one of the strongest predictors of political participation (Ha et al., 2012; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2003). It is, therefore, likely that youths' exposure to media-political content will influence their level

of involvement or apathy towards politics (Pasek et al., 2006). Research has shown that individuals with heavy reliance on the mass media, especially television, are likely to have lower levels of subjective efficacy and, consequently, increased political apathy (Loveless, 2010). Similarly, the way young people perceive media-political content may influence their political behaviour, given the overlapping relationship between perception and people's behaviour (Erubami, 2020; Seggaard, 2015). In light of earlier theoretical and empirical findings, we assumed that newspaper exposure would interact significantly with youths' political apathy and their general perception of newspaper content on politics. Hence, the study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Exposure to newspaper political news will be negatively associated with political apathy among youths.

H2: Political apathy will be negatively related to youths' perception of newspaper political reports.

Political Efficacy, Political Apathy, and Media Use

The feeling of efficacy is arguably the fulcrum upon which human agency rests. People tend to be less motivated to act when they feel that their action may not yield the desired results (Bandura, 2001; Henson, 2002). Previous studies have shown that political efficacy is a strong predictor of political participation, and it is an essential mediator between general self-efficacy and political participation (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2017; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Gastil &

Xenos, 2010; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Political efficacy refers to an individual's conviction that their action can influence the overall political process. Such assurances usually include the internal feeling that individuals hold the capacity and political competence to act (internal efficacy) and that their actions will be appropriately responded to by the government (external efficacy) (Ejiofor, 2007; Loveless, 2010; Morrell, 2003).

In extending the frontiers of efficacy as a determinant of political involvement, Ejiofor (2007) asserts that individuals become less likely to participate in politics if they place a low valuation on the rewards gained in political involvement relative to the rewards expected from other kinds of human activities. Accordingly, individuals are less likely to engage in politics if they feel that the alternative they face will not make a significant difference (unchallenged alternatives) if they doubt that their action can bring about significant changes in the outcome of political processes (self-deprivation), or if they feel that their knowledge is too limited for effective political engagement (relative ignorance).

Debates on the possible influence of the media on political efficacy and political involvement easily lend themselves to two schools of thought: the media form reliance bloc and the specific media use bloc (Loveless, 2010). Generally, dependence on certain media forms (such as television or newspaper) tends to manifest variations in people's world views and political orientations; hence, studies have

demonstrated that people may be politically immobilised by television viewing due to the peculiar form (rather than content) of television that promotes more entertainment than information and education (Hooghe, 2002). Similarly, Pasek et al. (2006) found that although total time spent watching television was negatively related to civic activity, specific forms of television, such as national news programmes, promoted knowledge acquisition and civic engagement.

Conversely, the opposing school of thought contends that it is not the form of the media but the content that influences people's political behaviour considering that deliberate use of the media can serve as a bulwark or potential mechanism for mitigating the demobilising effect of the media. In their study, Bakker and de Vreese (2011) argue that specific media usage is a stronger predictor of political participation/apathy than the time spent with a medium. Other studies have also shown that the Internet is a powerful tool for promoting political participation due to the peculiar nature of online technologies, and the Internet is a stronger predictor of newer forms of political participation, such as participating in online polls, compared to traditional forms of political participation, such as participation in public political debates (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Jung et al., 2011; Ha et al., 2012). Based on these debates, we proposed that young people's exposure to political news in the newspaper is significantly related to their perceived efficacy, which interacts with their level of

political apathy. Therefore, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H3: Exposure to newspaper political news will be positively related to perceived political efficacy among youths.

H4: Political apathy will be negatively related to perceived political efficacy among youths.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and Sampling Procedure

The study adopted the survey research approach, which seeks to determine why people behave in specific ways (Asemah et al., 2017). This approach also allows researchers to examine many variables, including people's opinion, attitude, motive, and intention towards societal problems (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The population of the study comprised all residents of Nigeria's southeast geopolitical zone. The zone consists of five states covering about 41,440km², with a population of 21,955,414 people (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2018).

A sample of 384 respondents was drawn using the sample size determination formula advanced by Cochran in 1963. The Cochran formula allows researchers to calculate an ideal sample size with a desired level of precision, confidence level, and estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population of the study (Asemah et al., 2017). Next, the participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, the Southeast geopolitical zone was stratified based on states—Abia,

Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. A simple random sampling technique was used to select Enugu and Anambra States in the second stage through a lucky dip. In the third stage, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the capitals of these states, Enugu and Awka cities, as the study locations. Considering the broad-based nature of both cities, we assumed that they would have a significantly higher literacy rate and level of newspaper usage when compared to the other parts of the states. Hence, their purposeful selection for the study. The fourth stage involved the selection of individual respondents from the study areas using the convenience sampling technique.

Like online surveys, scholars contend that the convenience sampling technique has the problem of bias and generalisability; hence, study samples obtained through this technique should be compared with the stratification of the general population to determine their extent of distortion (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Sadler et al., 2010). Compared with the general Nigerian population, our collected sample presented in the results section did not differ much from the stratification of the Nigerian population (NBS, 2018). Only young Nigerians aged 18 to 35 years were considered youths and included as respondents in the final sample (National Youth Policy, 2009; Oji & Erubami, 2020). Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to individuals in selected households within the studied areas through four research assistants who were university graduates of Mass Communication.

Instrument and Measures

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire instrument is generally considered suitable for studies involving many participants because it enables researchers to collect data on respondents' peculiar feelings, perceptions, and knowledge in a quantifiable form (Akpoghiran, 2014). The instrument's measures were drawn from previous studies on media use and political participation/apathy. Respondents were asked to value items with responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Prior to the actual data collection exercise, the instrument was subjected to content validation by two experts in research and media studies who affirmed the appropriate operationalisation of the instrument against the relevant content domain of the construct. Also nuanced as logical or rational validity, content validity is an important research method that estimates how well a test measures its intended behaviour (Asemah et al., 2017). For the initial reliability test of the instrument, we conducted a pilot survey involving 20 residents of Nsukka, a relatively fast-growing town in Enugu State. The result yielded acceptable Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables—newspaper exposure (0.91), political apathy (0.78), perception of newspaper political reports (0.82), perceived newspaper influence (0.88), and political efficacy (0.89).

Newspaper Exposure

Drawing on previous studies on general media exposure (Donaldson et al., 2017; Lompo & Bago, 2018), we measured newspaper exposure with a single item on a 5-point scale using the question, “What is your frequency of reading newspaper reports on the political happenings in Nigeria?” Possible responses ranged from Never (1) to Always (5) ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Political Apathy

Relying on previous studies (Busse, et al. 2015; Madueke, et al., 2017; Omede & Ojibara, 2017), youths’ political apathy was measured with four items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. (1) “I have signed a public petition this year”, (2) “I have been involved in a protest against socio-political ills this year”, (3) “I have participated in a political discussion this year”, (4) “I will vote if elections were tomorrow”. Higher scores represented lower level of political apathy and vice versa ($\alpha = 0.89$, $X = 3.01$, $SD = 1.33$).

Perception of Newspaper Political Reports

Based on previous studies on general public perception of the media (Apuke & Apollos, 2017; Erubami, 2020; Karamat & Farooq, 2016), perception of newspaper political reports was assessed with four questions on a 5-point Likert scale, with possible responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questions were: (1) “The depth of newspaper political reports do not

compel participation in Nigerian politics”, (2) “Newspaper reports are often filled with too many news of scandals, corruption and crime”, (3) “Newspaper political reports don’t focus on important issues of the society”, (4) “Newspaper political stories are not objective and accurate”, ($\alpha = 0.84$, $X = 3.55$, $SD = 1.32$).

Newspaper Influence

Relying on previous studies (Ha et al., 2012; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Lee, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Waqas, 2017), we constructed a 5-point Likert scale of newspaper influence with four items, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The questions were: (1) “I feel cynical and alienated from Nigerian political affairs after reading newspaper political reports”, (2) “Newspaper political reports motivate me to take an active part in Nigeria’s political affairs”, (3) “Based on newspaper political reports, I think voting is a waste of time”, (4) “Based on newspaper political reports, I think the masses have a say over what happens in the Nigerian political system”. The two negative questions (items 1 and 3) were reverse coded so that higher scores denote the positive perception of newspaper political news ($\alpha = 0.79$, $X = 2.87$, $SD = 1.26$).

Political Efficacy

This measure was adapted from the internal and external political efficacy scale developed by Niemi et al. (1991) with slight modification. The scale has a high reliability and validity value, and it is

least affected by question order (Ha et al., 2012). It comprised four items, with possible responses ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The questions were: (1) “I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics”, (2) “I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people”, (3) “I feel that if I join a protest or sign a petition against political incompetence, the government might listen”, and (4) “I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people” ($\alpha = 0.86$, $X = 3.39$, $SD = 1.26$).

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD), which had the benchmarks of 3.00 and 1.41, respectively. Any item with a mean score below 3.00 was rejected, while items with mean scores above 3.00 were accepted (Nworgu, 2006; Oji & Erubami, 2020; Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020). For standard deviation, a high mean and low or moderate standard deviation indicated that the responses are marked different (high variability). In contrast, a low mean and a low or moderate standard deviation indicated a low variability among the responses. Finally, the formulated hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis conducted with SPSS Version 23.

RESULTS

The analyses were based on 371 copies of the completed and returned questionnaire, representing a 96.4% response rate. Female

respondents amounted to 45.3% of the sample, while 54.7% consisted of males; the least possible age of the respondents was 18 years, and the highest was 35 years; the modal age range was 25-30 years. 10.8% of the respondents have had primary education, 48% have had secondary education. The remaining 41.2% have received various levels of tertiary education. In addition, 52.3% of the respondents had various forms of active employment, while 47.7% were unemployed. The NBS (2018) data show slightly more males than females in Nigeria (at least 1.04 males per every female Nigerian).

Frequency of Obtaining Political News from Newspaper

Data presented in Table 1 show that most respondents are exposed to newspaper reports on political developments in Nigeria. About 18.1% of the respondents admitted reading newspaper political news, 19.4% do so often, 23.7% sometimes read newspaper political news, and 19.1% rarely do so. Only 19.7% of the respondents claimed they do not read newspaper political stories at all.

Table 1
Frequency of obtaining political news from newspaper

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Always | 67 | 18.1 |
| Often | 72 | 19.4 |
| Sometimes | 88 | 23.7 |
| Rarely | 71 | 19.1 |
| Never | 73 | 19.7 |
| Total | 371 | 100 |

The Extent of Youth Political Apathy

The results presented in Table 2 indicate a high level of political apathy among the respondents, particularly on issues relating to active political involvement, given that many of them have neither signed any public petition against poor governance ($X = 2.67, SD = 1.42$) nor participated in physical protests against social ills ($X = 2.57, SD = 1.29$). Nevertheless, the respondents tend to display a lower level of political apathy on issues concerning passive political involvement, such as taking part in political discussions ($X = 3.35, SD = 1.30$) and showing intentions to vote in future elections ($X = 3.45, SD = 1.32$).

Youths' Perception of Newspaper Political News

Our results presented in Table 3 show that the respondents have a negative perception towards newspaper political reports as many

of them perceived that newspaper reports are often filled with too much news of scandals, corruption and crime, ($X = 3.88, SD = 1.34$), seldom focus on important issues of the society ($X = 3.32, SD = 1.35$), and lack objectivity and accuracy ($X = 3.25, SD = 1.34$); hence, newspaper political reports do not compel political participation among young people in Nigeria ($X = 3.75, SD = 1.26$).

Influence of Newspaper Political Reports on Nigerian Youths

On the influence of newspaper political reports on Nigerian youths, Table 4 show that reading newspaper political news neither creates the feeling of political cynicism or alienation among Nigerian youths ($X = 2.45, SD = 1.24$) nor make young people think that casting votes during elections is a waste of time ($\bar{X} = 2.64, SD = 1.40$). Instead, obtaining political

Table 2
Extent of youth political participation

| S/N | ITEM | X | SD |
|-----|--|------|------|
| 1 | I have signed a public petition this year | 2.67 | 1.42 |
| 2 | I have been involved in a protest against socio-political ills this year | 2.57 | 1.29 |
| 3 | I have participated in a political discussion this year | 3.35 | 1.30 |
| 4 | I will vote if elections were tomorrow | 3.45 | 1.32 |

Table 3
Perception of newspaper political news

| S/N | ITEM | X | SD |
|-----|---|------|------|
| 1 | The depth of newspaper political reports do not compel participation in Nigerian politics | 3.75 | 1.26 |
| 2 | Newspaper reports are often filled with too much news of scandals, corruption and crime | 3.88 | 1.34 |
| 3 | Newspaper political reports don't focus on important issues of the society | 3.32 | 1.35 |
| 4 | Newspapers political stories are not objective and accurate | 3.25 | 1.34 |

Table 4
Influence of newspaper political reports on Nigerian youths

| ITEM | X | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 1 I feel cynical and alienated from Nigerian political affairs after reading newspaper political reports. | 2.45 | 1.24 |
| 2 Newspaper political reports motivate me to take active part in Nigeria's political affairs | 3.24 | 1.22 |
| 3 Based on newspaper political reports, I think voting is a waste of time | 2.64 | 1.40 |
| 4 Based on newspaper political reports, I think the masses have a say over what happens in the Nigerian political system | 3.14 | 1.19 |

Table 5
Perceived political efficacy among Nigerian youths

| ITEM | X | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 1 I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country | 3.35 | 1.34 |
| 2 I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people | 3.54 | 1.19 |
| 3 I feel that if I join a protest or sign a petition against political incompetence, the government might listen | 2.98 | 1.28 |
| 4 I consider myself to be well qualified to actively participate in politics | 3.67 | 1.24 |

news from newspaper tends to motivate young Nigerians to take an active part in the country's political affairs ($\bar{X} = 3.24$, $SD = 1.22$), and increases their confidence in the power of the masses to influence the political system ($\bar{X} = 3.14$, $SD = 1.19$).

Youths' Political Efficacy

According to the results in Table 5, there is a high feeling of political efficacy among the respondents, given that the majority of them are convinced that they have a very good understanding of the important political issues facing the country ($X = 3.35$, $SD = 1.22$), feel they can do as good a job in public office as most other people ($X = 3.54$, $SD = 1.19$), and feel they are well qualified to participate in politics actively ($X = 3.67$, $SD = 1.24$). However, many respondents feel that joining a protest or signing a

petition against political incompetence will not attract necessary government attention ($X = 2.98$, $SD = 1.28$).

Hypotheses Testing

The Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis was used to test our hypotheses. The results in Table 6 show that obtaining political news from newspaper is negatively associated with political apathy among youths in Nigeria ($r_s(369) = -.525^{**}$, $p = <.05$), suggesting that an increase in the frequency of obtaining political news from newspaper by young people may actuate a decrease in their level of political apathy. Consequently, we accepted our first hypothesis, which states that exposure to newspaper political news will be negatively associated with political apathy among youths. It suggests that political apathy among young Nigerians

may decrease with a significant increase in their exposure to newspaper political news. Similarly, we found a significant negative relationship between political apathy and youths' perception of political news ($r_s(369) = -.427^*$, $p < .05$), supporting our second hypothesis, which states that political apathy among youths will be negatively related to their perception of newspaper political reports. The results, therefore, indicate that the level of political apathy among Nigerian youths would likely increase as their negative perception of newspaper political news increases and vice versa.

However, the study results indicate that obtaining political news from the newspaper is significantly and positively associated with political efficacy ($r_s(369) = .567^{**}$, $p < .05$). Hence, we accepted our third hypothesis, which states that there is a significant positive relationship between youths' exposure to newspaper political news and their level of perceived political efficacy. Furthermore, it indicates that an increase in youths' exposure to newspaper reports on political issues in Nigeria may tend to actuate a corollary increase in their level of perceived political efficacy. Accordingly, political apathy among youths

was found to be negatively related to their perceived political efficacy ($r_s(369) = -.404^{**}$, $p < .05$), supporting our fourth hypothesis, which states that political apathy among youths will be negatively associated with their perceived political efficacy.

DISCUSSIONS

Analysing data collected from youths in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical zone, this study explores how exposure to newspaper political reports influences the extent of active political involvement among young people in Nigeria. On the whole, the study has established that most Nigerian youths in the study area are exposed to newspaper political news, given that about 61.2% of the respondents claimed that they read newspaper political stories at relatively frequent intervals (always, often, or sometimes). Moreover, it suggests that about three in every five respondents were exposed to online or offline newspaper political news. Further analysis shows that a combined total of 37.5% of the respondents read newspaper political news regularly (either always or often) in contrast to the 19.7% who do not read newspaper political stories at all. Such a considerable high level

Table 6
Correlation matrix for variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1 Newspaper Exposure | | | | |
| 2 News Perception | .082 | | | |
| 3 Political Efficacy | .567** | .084 | | |
| 4 Political Apathy | -.525** | -.427* | -.404** | |
| 5 Newspaper Influence | .124* | .098 | .199** | -.270** |

Note: **Correlation is significant at $<.01$ and $<.05$

of exposure to political news may have been essentially made possible by modern digital tools that enable users to quickly and conveniently access the contents of many Nigerian newspapers, which now maintain a visible online presence (Edogoh et al., 2015).

The extent of political apathy among young Nigerians tends to be high on issues relating to active political involvement, such as initiating/joining public protests against societal ills or signing public petitions against poor governance. Conversely, on issues relating to passive involvement, such as engagement in political discussions or intention to vote in future elections, the youths tend to have a higher level of political participation and a lower political apathy. It contradicts previous research suggesting that young people neglect traditional approaches to political participation, such as voting or party membership, in preference of unconventional forms of political participation, such as protesting (Busse et al., 2015). The present findings suggest a reversal of such a trend. They indicate that the youths are more likely to engage in the so-called conventional forms of political participation, such as voting, engaging in political debates, and joining political parties, than being involved in a public protest or signing a public petition. Our results lend credence to the findings of Omede and Ojibara (2017). They found that 75.5% of youths showed intention to vote by actively participating in voters' registration exercises, and 18.5% were

active political party members. However, only a paltry 8.5% admitted to participating in a public demonstration against perceived poor governance.

Undoubtedly, the Nigerian political terrain exhibits a sturdy opposition to public protest- be it legitimate or otherwise. Like the 2020 #EndSARS protests, many attempted protests have been forcefully quashed by security agents and their proponents arrested, detained, and sometimes charged for sedition and/or treason. Such a hostile stance towards civil disobedience might have also influenced the feeling of political efficacy among youths. Thus, the youths feel that they have an excellent understanding of the country's important political issues and can offer effective leadership like most other people. However, they are not persuaded that initiating/joining public protests or signing public petitions against poor governance will positively change the government.

Such acts of forceful containment against civil disobedience are also extended to the media. The media profession in Nigeria is encumbered by various legal and illegal constraints aimed at gagging the press and suppressing the inalienable right to free speech. A fallout of this is that many of the legacy newspapers in the country now turn a blind eye to societal ills as part of their precautionary measures. At the same time, only a few have damned the consequences of living up to their societal expectations. This partly explains why many Nigerian youths hold a negative perception of newspaper political reports. The responses showed

that most of them believe that newspaper political stories are neither objective nor accurate and do not focus on the important issues of the society. In addition, they are often filled with too much news of scandals, corruption, and crime. Hence, they seldom compel political participation and inadvertently increase political apathy among young people in Nigeria.

One of the overarching objectives of the study was to ascertain the influence of exposure to newspaper political reports on political apathy among young people in Southeast Nigeria. Responses to the question probing this objective showed that political news tends to influence youths positively in terms of their involvement in politics. Despite of the reported negative perception, the results showed that newspaper political news neither creates cynicism nor results in political alienation among youths in Nigeria, unlike the broadcast/entertainment media found to generate cynicism in politics (Ha et al., 2012). Furthermore, reading political news was identified as a motivator for active political participation ($\bar{X} = 3.23 > 3.00$) and belief in the power of the electorates to have a say in the Nigerian political system, primarily through the ballots ($\bar{X} = 3.14 > 3.00$). Overall, there is a significant positive relationship between reading newspaper political reports and the feeling of political efficacy among Nigerian youths ($r_s(369) = .467^{**}$, $p = <.05$). Accordingly, obtaining political news from newspaper is negatively associated with youth political apathy ($r_s(369) = -.525^{**}$, $p = <.05$).

On the flip side, however, the relatively high feeling of political efficacy among youths is negatively associated with their extent of political involvement. Our results showed that political apathy among the respondents tends to decrease as their political efficacy increases and vice versa ($r_s(369) = -.404^{**}$, $p = <.05$). This finding supports earlier research which indicates that political efficacy is a predictor of political participation/apathy (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2017; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Arguably, the feeling of political efficacy among youths is important. People are more likely to participate in politics if they value the rewards gained in political involvement relative to the rewards expected from political apathy (Ejiofor, 2007). The observed overall significant relationship among political efficacy, political apathy, and newspaper exposure also agree with earlier findings which indicate that the media is a significant contributor to people's level of political involvement, and obtaining news from newspaper is a predictor of political participation (Loveless, 2010; Ha et al., 2012). Such association affirms the assumption of the media mobilisation theory, and is explained by the fact that reading newspaper increases voters' ability to assess political candidates, parties, and their manifestoes adequately, thereby increasing their overall confidence in voting decisions (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2003; Moreno et al., 2013).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that the newspaper medium remains a significant source of political information to many Nigerian youths. However, many young people in the country hold a negative perception towards newspaper political reports because they feel such stories are not objective enough, inaccurate, filled with irrelevant content, and seldom motivate political participation. However, reading newspaper political stories neither causes political alienation nor cynicism but tends to stimulate interest in politics and stir up the belief in the power of the masses to cause consequential political changes. More so, the study extends the frontiers of current knowledge on youths' civic engagement by demonstrating a relatively low level of political apathy among youths on issues relating to passive political involvement, such as engagement in political discussions or intention to vote in future elections. However, their apathy on issues concerning active political involvement, such as joining a public protest or signing a public petition against poor governance, is high. Overall, obtaining political news from newspaper is positively related to a higher political efficacy but negatively associated with political apathy among youths. Similarly, a negative association exists between political apathy and youths' perception of newspaper political news. By implication, the study indicates that people's valuation and opinion on media products may influence how they relate with the larger society.

The results of the current study hold several implications for media research and practice. First, the findings underscore the imperative for the Nigerian mass media, particularly the newspaper, to focus more on reporting the most crucial political issues that will inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action in line with the social responsibility principles of the press. Second, there is the need for the government and its agencies to fully recognise the constitutional and social functions of the press as the true conscience of society. The press is constitutionally charged with upholding the fundamental objectives and directive principles of the Nigerian state. Thus, the society should create an enabling environment for the press to hold the government and its agencies accountable to the people. Similarly, the government should be more receptive to legitimate civil disobedience and respond to protesters' demands within the ambits of democratic rules and constitutional provisions.

Furthermore, young people in Nigeria should make deliberate efforts to stir up their interest and involvement in politics to significantly increase their visibility in governance and abort the endless deferment of their leadership opportunities couched in the unpopular phrase, "the youths are leaders of tomorrow". Also, INEC, political parties, Non-Governmental Organisations, Community-Based Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations, and similar bodies should make it a point of duty to sensitise young Nigerians to take an active part in the determination of Nigeria's political

future. Importantly, electioneering activities across Nigeria should be peacefully, fairly and credibly conducted. This will ensure that elections will genuinely count, and the masses will have their say through the ballots. Arguably, the flagrant disregard for electoral laws and high-level impunity and corruption during polls constitute decisive factors militating against youths' political participation.

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