INFLUENCE OF FACEBOOK ALGORITHMS ON POLITICAL OPINION FORMATION AMONG UNIVERSITY LECTURERS IN SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN OFFA, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Facebook algorithms on public opinion formation among university lecturers in Offa, Kwara State. It explores how algorithmic curation affects lecturers' exposure to political information and the extent to which their beliefs and awareness of algorithmic processes shape their opinions. Grounded in Priming Theory, the study adopts a quantitative survey design, engaging the entire population of 129 lecturers to ensure comprehensive representation. Findings reveal that lecturers are active users of Facebook and other social media platforms, demonstrating high awareness of how algorithms personalize content based on their engagement patterns. However, this awareness does not always result in critical consumption of information, as pre-existing beliefs remain the most significant determinant of political opinion formation. The study further finds that Facebook's algorithmic filtering reinforces belief-consistent content, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and fostering echo chambers. It concludes that while Facebook enhances connectivity and access to information, its algorithmic structure subtly shapes political discourse within academic circles. The study recommends that higher education institutions incorporate digital and algorithmic literacy programs to foster critical engagement with online content and encourage exposure to diverse

political viewpoints, thereby strengthening democratic participation and informed opinion formation among lecturers.
Keywords: Algorithm, Facebook, Political Information, Public Opinion

Introduction

Social media, a dominant form of electronic communication, has emerged as the most prevalent online activity (Özkent, 2022). According to Sandel (2019), social media platforms encompass networking sites designed to facilitate perspective-sharing and maintain social connections. These platforms democratize information by transforming passive consumers into active content creators, representing a paradigm shift in how information is discovered, disseminated, and consumed (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). Appel, Grewal, Hadi, and Stephen (2020) highlight that social media provides digital spaces for free engagement, where individuals exchange information through text, images, videos, and audio. Its influence lies in shaping perceptions through interactive discussion and opinion exchange (Ausat, 2023). Globally, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are pivotal in modern digital communication (Alodat, Al-Qora'n, & Abu-Hamoud, 2023).

In political communication, social media increasingly supplants traditional mass media. Platforms like Facebook do more than host political discourse; their algorithms actively curate news feeds based on users' engagement patterns, likes, shares, and clicks (Tufekci, 2015). These algorithms often amplify highly engaging or emotionally charged content, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs while filtering dissenting views. Consequently, public opinion formation has undergone substantial transformation, with social media serving as arenas for political mobilization, opinion expression, and public discourse (Alodat, Al-Qora'n, & Hamoud, 2023).

Public opinion is influenced by family, religion, cultural norms, education, political systems, media, and social affiliations, all contributing to individual beliefs and societal orientations (Al-Dbeisi, Tahaat, & Yassin, 2013). Rapid information dissemination within digital networks is explained by the concept of "information flows," where individuals adopt and propagate beliefs within social structures (Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 2022). Facebook algorithms, by amplifying engaging content and filtering opposing views, create echo chambers and filter bubbles, potentially distorting perceptions of political reality and hindering critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints (Pariser, 2011; Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015).

Lecturers play a crucial role in shaping political discourse within academia and society. If their exposure to political information is subtly manipulated by Facebook algorithms, their opinions, teaching, and civic engagement may reflect algorithmic biases rather than objective analysis (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), raising concerns about the integrity of political education and public debate. Despite global interest in social media's influence on political opinion, research predominantly focuses on youth, voters, or political campaigns (Ekoh & George, 2021; Oluleye, Maduagwu, Adeniyi, & Musa, 2023; Uwalaka, Amadi, & Enyindah, 2024; Bassey, Bernard, Ogande, & Tata, 2024; Ang, 2024). Most studies examine youth (Papa & Photiadis, 2021; International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin, 2024), voters (Anwar & Giglietto, 2024; Abid, Roy, Lees-Marshment, Dey, Muhammad, & Kumar, 2025), or campaigns (Apuke & Tunka, 2018;

Hasibuan, Putra, Deto, & Dirgantari, 2024), leaving limited attention on university lecturers, who are content creators, analysts, and influencers. This gap concerns the extent of lecturers' awareness of algorithmic curation, the political content they consume, and how this shapes their political attitudes. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the influence of Facebook algorithms on the public opinion formation of political information among lecturers in Offa, contributing to scholarship on political communication, media literacy, and democratic engagement in digital environments.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of social media usage among university lecturers in selected tertiary institutions in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State,
2. To assess the level of knowledge of Facebook algorithms among university lecturers in selected tertiary institutions in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara state.
3. To investigate the influence of university lecturers' knowledge of Facebook algorithms on their political opinion formation on Facebook in selected tertiary institutions in Offa Local Government Area,

Literature Review

Scholarly interest in social media algorithms has developed along two complementary lines: empirical investigations measuring algorithmic effects on information exposure, and critical analyses examining algorithms as governance and visibility mechanisms. Large-scale empirical studies indicate that Facebook's News Feed algorithm modestly reduces exposure to cross-cutting news relative to other drivers such as social networks and user behavior (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). Analysis of millions of accounts demonstrates that algorithmic curation interacts with network homophily and user selection, complicating early claims that algorithms alone create political "filter bubbles" (Bakshy et al., 2015).

Critical scholarship emphasizes the governance role of algorithms, which reflect design choices, business incentives, and content-moderation practices that collectively shape public discourse (Gillespie, 2018; Narayanan, 2023). Gillespie (2018) posits that content moderation and ranking make platforms "custodians" of conversation, while Narayanan (2023) highlights how recommendation systems' objectives, training data, and feedback loops amplify particular content. These perspectives suggest that understanding Facebook algorithms requires a multi-layered approach: examining empirical effects on exposure, technical properties of recommender systems, and the institutional incentives that determine prioritization (Bakshy et al., 2015; Gillespie, 2018; Narayanan, 2023).

Public opinion formation is increasingly conceptualized as an emergent process shaped by interactions among governments, platforms, and citizens. Kristensen (2022) frames this as the aggregation of preferences through iterative engagement, while Chen, Li, Wang, Quintero, Yang, and Ji (2022) operationalize it via online engagement and sentiment metrics, highlighting the real-time evolution of collective sentiment. Kozitsin (2022) emphasizes that opinion is responsive to information received within social environments, illustrating how digital traces such as likes, comments, and shares provide measurable indicators of opinion formation.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, with algorithms influencing which posts are seen and how content aligns with user beliefs (Papa & Photiadis, 2021; AlKhudari, AlHajri, & Al-Khattab, 2024).

Algorithmic effects extend to civic participation, echo chamber dynamics, and content prioritization. Jung, Dai, and Albarracin (2023) argue that while social media facilitates online engagement, algorithm-guided exposure is necessary to translate digital activity into offline civic action. Classic media effects theories, including agenda-setting, priming, and framing, have been adapted to social media contexts, showing that platforms can both democratize issue visibility and concentrate attention on algorithmically amplified topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Feezell, 2018; Gilardi, 2022).

Research on misinformation highlights social media's complex influence on political communication. Misinformation spreads rapidly, reinforcing falsehoods, affecting issue salience, and sometimes altering electoral outcomes (Lazer et al., 2018; Cantarella et al., 2023). Empirical studies reveal conditional effects: exposure can produce opinion change for some users, while others experience reinforcement of existing positions (Bakshy et al., 2015; Lazer et al., 2018). Social media's impact is thus multifaceted, primarily shaping issue prominence, information exposure, and conditions for misinformation propagation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Feezell, 2018; Lazer et al., 2018).

Cognitive and network factors further influence how users engage with algorithmically curated content. Confirmation bias, network homophily, and engagement-driven personalization reinforce pre-existing beliefs (Ecker et al., 2022; Barberá, 2015). While Pariser's (2011) "filter bubble" thesis highlighted the risks of insular content, empirical research shows that algorithmic effects are modest compared to user choice, yet combined with homophily and cognitive bias, they reduce exposure to diverse perspectives (Bakshy et al., 2015; Pariser, 2011). Repeated exposure to belief-consistent content and social endorsement strengthens perceived plausibility, making corrective interventions less effective (Ecker et al., 2022; Lazer et al., 2018).

Overall, contemporary scholarship converges on a multi-causal account: platform algorithms, homophilous networks, and cognitive biases interact to shape public opinion. Knowledge of Facebook algorithms must integrate empirical, technical, and normative dimensions. Social media primarily influences attention and issue salience, but under specific conditions, it can also shape beliefs and behaviors, particularly by reinforcing pre-existing orientations and sustaining misinformation (Bakshy et al., 2015; Barberá, 2015; Ecker et al., 2022; Pariser, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Priming Theory, which explains how media exposure influences the salience of certain issues in the audience's mind and shapes the criteria used in evaluating political events and actors. The theory, developed by Iyengar and Kinder (1987), extends the agenda-setting function of the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) by proposing that repeated media attention to specific issues makes those issues more cognitively accessible, guiding public judgment and opinion formation. In digital environments, this mechanism is replicated and intensified by social media algorithms that selectively filter and amplify content based on user engagement and preferences (Gillespie, 2018). On Facebook, algorithmic curation determines which political information users are exposed to more frequently, thereby "priming" particular topics, emotions, or frames that influence how users form opinions. Research has shown that Facebook's algorithmic structure, by prioritizing engaging and emotionally

charged content, can heighten the prominence of certain political issues while diminishing others (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Lazer et al., 2018). This continuous exposure conditions users to rely on these highlighted issues as reference points in political evaluation. Consequently, for lecturers in Offa who are active Facebook users, algorithmic exposure to political content likely affects the salience of political issues and contributes to the shaping of their public opinions.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to collect data. The population of this study comprised one hundred and twenty-nine (129) lecturers drawn from selected tertiary institutions in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State, namely Summit University, Lens University, and the Federal Polytechnic, Offa. Since the population size was relatively small and manageable, a census sampling method was adopted, meaning all members of the population were included in the study. Data were collected through an online questionnaire where survey link was distributed via whatsapp, through the deans of faculties, who assisted in sharing links in their platform, to get necessary reach and allowing participants to conveniently respond at their own pace. The instrument was pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability before full deployment. Collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and means were used to summarize responses, while inferential statistics involving correlation and regression analyses were employed to determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables, as well as to predict the influence of the study variables.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic characteristics looked in the study include: Gender, institution, education qualification, academic rank and years of experience in lecturing. These results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent's Demographic

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	81	62.8
	Female	48	37.2
	Total	129	100
Institution	Summit University	32	24.8
	Lens University	58	45.0
	University of Offa	39	30.2
	Total	129	100
Education	M.Sc.	85	65.9
	Ph.D.	44	34.1
	Total	129	100
Academic Rank	Assistant Lecturer	48	37.2
	Lecturer II	32	12.4
	Lecturer I	16	24.8
	Senior Lecturer	20	15.5
	Associate Professor	13	10.1
	Total	129	100
Experience	1–3 Years	68	52.7
	4–6 Years	36	27.9
	7–9 Years	12	9.3
	10 Years and Above	13	10.1
	Total	129	100

Source: ***Researcher's fieldwork, 2025.***

The institutional distribution of respondents shows that lecturers were drawn from Summit University, Lens University, and the University of Offa, Lens University recording the highest participation (58), followed by University of Offa (39 lecturers) and Summit University (32 lecturers), indicating adequate representation across the selected institutions. In terms of educational qualification, most respondents held a Master's degree (85; 65.9%), while a smaller but significant proportion possessed a Ph.D. (44; 34.1%), reflecting a predominantly postgraduate-qualified academic workforce. The academic rank profile reveals that Assistant Lecturers constituted the largest group (48; 37.2%), followed by Lecturer II (32; 24.8%) and Senior Lecturers (20; 15.5%), while Lecturer I (16; 12.4%) and Associate Professors (13; 10.1%) formed the minority, suggesting that the institutions are largely staffed by early- and mid-career academics who are likely to be actively engaged with Facebook and its algorithmically curated political content.

Pilot Test Result

Reliability of the instrument was determined through pilot study, with the internal consistency method using Cronbach's alpha. This statistical measure assesses how closely related a set of items are as a group, indicating the coherence of the scale used. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable for confirming the reliability of the instrument. Table 2 showcase the result of the pilot study conducted.

Table 2: Reliability of scale items

Variables	No of items	Reliability test			
		Pilot study		Final	
		N	Alpha	N	Alpha
Social media usage	4	13	.750	129	.760
Awareness of fakebook algorithm		13	.911	129	.919
Facebook algorithms and public opinion formation	5	13	.830	129	.859
Facebook algorithm and belief	6	13	.851	129	.859

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025

The pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the research instrument before full data collection. The table shows the Cronbach's alpha values for each variable, both during the pilot test (n = 13) and after final data collection (n = 129). All variables recorded alpha coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability. In summary, the results confirm that the questionnaire items for all constructs were internally consistent and dependable for measuring the intended variables, validating the instrument's suitability for the main study.

Research Objective 1: To examine the level of social media usage among university lecturers in selected tertiary institutions in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State.

The first objective attempts to investigate the level of Facebook used by lecturers in Offa Local Government. Table 3 presents the result of the study.

Table 3: Level of Social media usage

Social Media Usage	*Level of Agreement					Overall		
	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	%
Facebook	3.1	3.1	37.5	21.9	34.4	3.81	1.06	76.2
Blogs	25.0	18.8	28.1	3.1	18.8	2.70	1.44	54
Instagram	3.1	21.9	18.8	28.1	21.9	3.47	1.19	69.4
Twitter	9.4	25.0	6.3	9.4	50.0	3.66	1.53	73.2
Total						**3.41**	**1.31**	**68.2**

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025.

*Note: 3 is the cut-off point between disagreement and agreement in this table, M: Mean, SD: standard Deviation, 1: Never (1%-20%), 2: Seldom (21%-40%), 3: Sometimes (41%-60%) 4: Often (61%-80%), 5: Always (81%-100%).

Result from Table 3 indicates that lecturers generally agree to using various social media platforms. Overall result shows a moderate frequency of social media usage (M=3.41, SD=-1.31). Specifically, respondents make the most use of Facebook (M=3.81, SD=1.06); Followed by Twitter (M=3.66, SD=1.53); and Instagram (M= 3.47, SD=1.19). However, the least used platform among lecturers is blogs, which recorded the lowest means score (M=2.70, SD =1.44). The data suggests that lecturers in Offa are active on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, which may serve both personal and academic communication purposes. However, the very low usage of blogs points to a preference for more interactive and instant platforms over long form publishing tool.

Research Objective 2: Level knowledge of Facebook algorithms among university lecturers in Offa Local Government

Table 4: Knowledge of Facebook algorithm

Awareness of Facebook Algorithms	*Level of Agreement Overall							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**M**	**SD**	**%**
I have heard about the term social media algorithm	15.6	3.1	3.1	18.8	59.4	4.03	1.49	80.6
I know algorithm works on Facebook	21.9	3.1	3.1	18.8	50.0	3.74	1.65	74.8
I know that Facebook uses my activities (likes, share, comment) to recommend content I see	3.1	3.1	9.4	6.3	78.1	4.53	1.01	90.6
I know that the content I see can be different from what others see	3.1	3.1	15.6	6.3	71.9	4.41	1.07	88.2
I have intentionally changed my social media behavior to influence my Facebook feed	6.3	3.1	31.3	21.9	37.5	3.81	1.17	76.2
I have modified my social media settings to customize my feed	6.3	3.1	21.9	12.5	56.3	4.09	1.22	81.8
Total						**4.10**	**1.26**	**82.0**

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025.

*Note: 3 is the cut-off point between disagreement and agreement in this table, M: Mean, SD: standard Deviation, 1: Strongly Disagree (1%-20%), 2: Disagree (21%-40%), 3: Neutral (41%-60%) 4: Agree (61%-80%), 5: Strongly agree (81%-100%).

Overall, Table 4 shows that respondents agree is a high level of awareness of fakebook algorithms (M=4.10, SD=1.26). Specifically, respondents know that Facebook uses their activities (likes, shares and comments) to recommend content they see (M =4.53, SD=1.01); know that the content they see can be different from what others see (M=4.41, SD=1.07); know that algorithm works on

Facebook too with (M=3.74, SD=1.65); and intentionally changed their social media behavior to influence their fakebook feed (M=3.81, SD=1.17). By implication, the study suggests that while lecturers understand the concept fewer of them actively change their opinion to affect their feed.

Research Objective 3: Influence of Facebook algorithm knowledge on Lecturers' public opinion formation

Table 5
Influence of Facebook Algorithm knowledge on Lecturers' public opinion formation

Models	B	SE	T	P
(Constant)	5.406	.656	8.240	<.001
POF	.688	.237	-2.907	.011

$F_{(1,375)} = 133.012$, P=.011[b], $R^2 = .360$
Dependent variable: Knowledge of Facebook Algorithm
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2025

The results reveal a statistically significant relationship between the knowledge of Facebook algorithm knowledge and lecturers' public opinion formation, The level of influence contributes 36% variance that lecturers' knowledge of Facebook algorithms is explained by their public opinion formation. The regression coefficient for public opinion formation (B = 0.688, SE = 0.237, t = -2.907, p = .011) indicates a significant predictive effect. The negative t-value suggests an inverse relationship, implying that as lecturers' reliance on public opinion formation increases, their level of knowledge about Facebook algorithms tends to decrease, or vice versa. This may reflect that lecturers who are more influenced by public opinion are less likely to possess deep understanding of how algorithmic systems shape information exposure. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Facebook algorithm knowledge significantly affects how lecturers form public opinions on political information.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined how Facebook algorithms influence public opinion formation among lecturers in Offa. The findings indicate that lecturers actively use Facebook and Twitter, underscoring the growing centrality of social media in contemporary professional communication. This level of engagement suggests that lecturers are not merely passive consumers but strategic users who rely on these platforms to extend scholarly interaction beyond formal institutional spaces. This observation supports Ellison and Boyd (2013), who argued that social media enhances connectivity, and Afolabi and Awogbenle (2020), who reported that Nigerian lecturers increasingly deploy social media for teaching, collaboration, and intellectual discourse. Consequently, social media can be regarded as a critical arena for academic engagement and opinion exchange among lecturers. Furthermore, the study reveals a high level of awareness among lecturers regarding Facebook's algorithmic operations, particularly the platform's reliance on user behaviour to curate content. This awareness reflects an emerging form of digital literacy that enables lecturers to critically interrogate political information encountered online. This finding aligns with Eslami et al. (2015), who noted growing user

awareness of algorithmic filtering, and Beam (2014), who associated such awareness with more critical news evaluation. However, the researcher observes that this awareness remains largely cognitive rather than behavioural, as many lecturers do not actively modify their online practices to counter algorithmic influence. This supports Cotter's (2019) assertion that users often recognise algorithmic systems without consciously resisting or reshaping their effects, thereby allowing algorithmic curation to continue subtly shaping public opinion. The results indicate that lecturers' awareness of Facebook algorithms significantly shapes how they form political opinions. This suggests that algorithmic literacy empowers lecturers to navigate content selectively, yet it also highlights a potential vulnerability as reliance on algorithmically curated content may inadvertently narrow their exposure to diverse perspectives. This interpretation aligns with Pariser's (2011) "filter bubble" theory and Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015), who argued that algorithmic curation can constrain ideological diversity. These findings underscore the need for lecturers to cultivate not only awareness but also critical engagement strategies, as limited algorithmic literacy may restrict openness to opposing viewpoints and reduce the breadth of political discourse accessed through social media platforms. Overall, the findings highlight that Offa lecturers are digitally literate but still influenced by belief systems when forming opinions. Promoting algorithmic and media literacy can help ensure more balanced and informed engagement with political information online.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that Facebook algorithms play a significant role in shaping how lecturers in Offa form public opinions on political information. The findings revealed that while lecturers possess substantial awareness of Facebook's algorithmic functions, this knowledge does not always translate into critical engagement with content. Instead, pre-existing beliefs remain the strongest influence on how political opinions are formed. The study further indicates that algorithmic filtering can narrow lecturers' exposure to diverse perspectives, reinforcing confirmation biases and limiting the scope of intellectual discourse. Therefore, Facebook's algorithmic design, while enhancing content personalization, simultaneously risks creating echo chambers that subtly influence users' political perceptions and beliefs.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that tertiary institutions and policy makers should provide training workshops on social media literacy, focusing on the practical manipulation of algorithmic settings, including algorithmic influence, content personalization, feed customization, and critical evaluation of information sources. This integration could occur through seminars, departmental workshops, or incorporation into professional development curricula, enabling lecturers to critically appraise political information on social media while maintaining independence of thought. Lecturers should actively seek information from multiple digital sources, including blogs, online journals, and academic networks. This approach will foster intellectual diversity, broaden the scope of political discourse, and support evidence-based opinion formation.

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