

Social Media and Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract:- The advent of social media has increased social communication and technology interaction. Even with these benefits, using social media to encourage women to get involved in politics has not worked well. Social media has influenced several advocacy issues such as the #METoo movements, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, to mention a few. The goal of this study is to find out how much social media aided by new technology has changed women's political participation and to come up with a way to get more women involved in politics through social media. This study is anchored in feminist theory. This study used a qualitative research method, and secondary sources were used to gather the data. The study showed that social media had not made it easier for women to get involved in politics. This makes it harder to get equal numbers of women in politics. So, it suggests that women should get more involved in politics through social media by learning more about the need for fair political representation.

Keywords: Democracy, gender equality, Nigeria, political participation, social media.

1. Introduction

Most African countries, including Nigeria, have at least 30% of women in their political structures. Additionally, the 1993 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Actions, which supported international organisations' strong commitment to gender equality and closing the gender gap in the formal political sphere, have altered the political landscape of the world. One of the main reasons women haven't gotten all of the benefits is that they aren't well-represented in institutions and don't take part in making plans for their socio-economic development and well-being. Women are perceived as belonging in the house, being incapable of making wise decisions, and being unfit to participate in political activity (Ugwuegede & Dominica, 2021).

The United Nations Women (2020) said that only 25% of women around the world are in parliaments, which is up from 11% in 1995. Only four countries have more than 50% of women in their parliaments. Nigeria currently has 6.1% female participation in the legislature, although women make up half the country's population. Despite the many roles played by Nigerian women in politics, such as community managers or political activists, gender disparity still exists. The Beijing Conference advocates for at least 35% participation of women in politics for every attending nation, but it has not been achieved in Nigeria because national politics requires a lot of money, and many women do not have the same economic influence as men (Iloka, 2021). Women can leverage social media to raise funds and donations from campaigns. A political candidate's donations begin to rise as soon as they leverage social media for their campaign donations (Petrova & Sen, 2016).

The Women in Parliament Global Forum (2016) posited that social media with its technical interaction might be an equalizer for otherwise politically disadvantaged women due to its low cost and the significance that personal initiative plays in its use, potentially advancing women's engagement in politics. Heger and Hoffman (2019) opined that introducing social media as a brand-new medium for communication and engagement raised promises for increased political participation based on its allegedly lower bar, accessibility, and anonymity.

However, even with these technological developments and social media, women's political participation has not increased as expected. It is logical to ask the following questions: To what extent has social media helped make it easier for women in Nigeria to get involved in politics? How will social media increase women's political participation in Nigeria? The goal of the study is to find out how much social media has helped women get

involved in politics and to come up with a way to use social media to get more women involved in politics in Nigeria. Professionalism in the area of social media is highly necessary in society (Apeloko, Chukwudi, & Adekunle, (2023).

This study is structured into six parts. After the introduction, the second section discusses the methodology; the third section gives a theoretical framework; the fourth section offers a prelude to the study focusing on social media and conceptualizing political participation, and the fifth section examines the analysis and provides answers to the research questions posed. The closing section talks about the conclusion and recommendation.

2. Methodology

To address the research issues posed, this study used a qualitative research methodology. For this investigation, secondary sources provided the data. Books, journal articles, conference papers, publications, and online sources were the sources from which the secondary data were gathered. The issues raised in the study's backdrop were utilised to examine the data that was collected.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Political Participation

Political participation can be broadly defined as citizen actions that have an impact on politics. Since the famous funeral oration of Pericles (431 BCE), scholars and politicians have stressed the unique characteristics of democracy by emphasising the role that common citizens play in political affairs. A few of the actions that now fall under the category of participation include voting, protesting, contacting public officials, boycotting, going to party rallies, guerrilla gardening, blogging, volunteering, participating in flash mobs, signing petitions, buying fair-trade goods, and even staging suicide protests (Deth, 2021).

Engaging in politics is essential to a healthy democracy. Johnson (2012) asserts that political engagement serves as a vital foundation for gender equality. Women and men are now officially equal in many democracies. They are now eligible to vote, run for office, and take part in elections. Women continue to be underrepresented in state and local legislatures, as well as in leadership positions.

Political participation could be viewed in a certain way. It includes increasing participation, and this includes (a) holding public or party office, (b) running for office, (c) going to a caucus or strategy meeting, (d) joining a political party actively, (e) volunteering for a political campaign, (f) attending a political meeting or rally, (g) giving money to a party or candidate, (h) getting in touch with a public figure or political leader, (i) displaying a bumper sticker or wearing a button, (j) seeking to influence someone else's vote, and (k) starting a political conversation (Isa and Yucel, 2020).

3.3 Gender and Political Participation

Even though political participation allows people to participate in governance and is relevant in a democracy, studies have shown that there are inequalities in political participation within populations (Bessant & Grasso, 2019; Giugni & Grasso, 2021). Achieving gender equality in politics is not merely about providing equal political seats to translate governmental policies, services, and budgets into tangible advantages for men and women from varied backgrounds. Chidozie and Joshua (2015) emphasized the importance of individual security, in other words, women's empowerment secures them from limitations that may occur. There must be a coordinated, whole-of-government commitment (OECD, 2019). In summation, all efforts will be improved by the government.

The European Institute of Gender Equality (2017) states that the "masculine" leadership style that permeates the internal cultures of many political parties and the prevalence of gender-based stereotypes continue to impede equitable representation. Throughout history, men have overwhelmingly held leadership roles. Because leadership calls for qualities and abilities typically associated with men, such as aggression, taking charge, and rational intellect, it is frequently assumed that men are capable of exercising leadership. Gender stereotypes are reflected in the organisation of cabinet portfolios and key administrative positions in ministries. Women are overrepresented in ministries with sociocultural duties, which perpetuates the myth that women are more qualified than males for occupations in the arts, sciences, and culture.

Men hold most portfolios related to fundamental state functions like defense, justice, and foreign policy.

Markham and Foster (2021) said that the range of issues talked about and the types of answers depend on how involved women are in politics. There are more women in national legislatures in nations with high civil rights and political liberty scores than in those with low scores. Higher living standards, better outcomes in access to education, and infrastructure, and Higher levels of female political leadership.

Research has indicated that the legislative preferences of legislators can vary based on their gender. There is also compelling evidence that policies prioritising the quality of life and considering the interests of women, families, and members of racial and ethnic minorities are made more frequently when more women are elected to public office (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer, 2010; Alder, 2018).

3.4 Social Media and Political Participation

Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) state that social media was termed "Web 1.0" and referred to the initial generation of the evolution of the internet; it was mostly focused on the passive consumption of static content posted on websites without any meaningful input or engagement from users or viewers.

Social media frequently describes cutting-edge media formats that promote interactive engagement. Before the development of social interaction networks, the media was in the broadcast age—mainly radio, television, movies, and newspapers—and there was no form of instant feedback when the news was being broadcast. The interactive age became large-scale with the rise of digital and mobile devices, and interactions on platforms became highly popularised (Manning, 2014).

Initially, social media mostly consisted of basic websites and technologies utilised solely by tech enthusiasts and computer scientists. Social media changed people's interactions and communication with corporations, governments, traditional media, and each other over time, growing into a massive industry. The emergence of social media disrupted traditional media's monopoly on message distribution since it is so much superior to it.

Traditional media only allowed for a monologue or, at most, a limited two-way tête-à-tête when Individuals used to share information or opinions on an organization through traditional media without using any interactive tools (Kasturi & Vardhan, 2014).

The dynamics of information diffusion, which were previously slanted against recipients, have been permanently transformed by the introduction of the internet and social media to the global information stage. Before, people didn't pay much attention to who was getting the information (Onyechi, 2018).

The growing amount of social and technical interaction on the web is what makes the internet a good place to talk about politics. People can use it to get information, but they can also add information. People can now change the way they get information from the web and share it with other people in their social network. This makes it scalable. When people use the Internet in this way, political arguments and debates spread, and as a result, people work together. Online social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become the main places where people talk about politics, especially around elections. In addition to livening up the media landscape, networking sites significantly impact political, electoral, and popular culture decisions. Social media's evident influence has been shown to help people make important decisions, particularly while voting and evaluating information about representatives and policies (Calderaro, 2020; Sobechi, 2022).

One of the many benefits of using social media to get involved in politics is that it gives people a chance to fully and actively take part in political discussions by adding their voices to topics that are being talked about on social media sites. The platforms also make it easier for voters to judge political candidates and make the government more transparent. This is in line with the principles of participatory democracy, which see the media as places where people can debate and talk about politics. Also, social media gives people a chance to share their thoughts online, which can help politicians figure out what the people want and how they might react to public decision-making (Omotayo and Folorunsho, 2020).

4. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory

The feminist theory is adopted in this study to explain women's participation in politics. The feminist theory tries to improve the position of women in politics by challenging the basic ideas that have made politics a field dominated by men. In recent decades, feminism has been present in various forms worldwide and is beginning to have an impact there. One well-known feminist objective is to have more women hold elected office. Many people have criticized the predominance of men in professional politics and said that women's social experiences had given them specialized expertise that would be helpful in government (Smith, 2007).

Four waves have characterized the history of feminism. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of the first wave of feminism. Emerging possibilities in liberalism, socialism, and urban industrialism were to blame. This wave concentrated on suffrage. Typically, it is connected to the 1948 convention on women's rights. Techniques were derived from the role of women in the French Revolution, the temperance movement, and the abolitionist movement (Rampton, 2015).

Criticism of the first wave is believed to have shaped the second wave, also known as viewpoint feminism, which is seen to have been a reaction to it. Simone de Beauvoir stands as one of the most prominent members of the second wave. Norms and standards should no longer be based on the ideal of manhood and its "hierarchical, violent, and destructive structures," according to second-wave feminist assertions, which emphasise the necessity for societal transformation (Heger and Hoffman, 2019).

As a result, empowerment for perspective or second-wave feminists implies opposing current male-dominated political structures. The second wave of feminism shares with liberal feminism a binary and hierarchical notion of gender; it just seeks to undo that hierarchy (Frey & Dingler, 2001).

Instigated by post-colonial and post-modern concepts, the third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s. Concepts of "universal femininity," body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity were among the many that were thrown into disarray during this period. The return of young feminists to lipstick, high heels, and cleavage displayed by low-cut necklines, which the first two stages of the movement associated with male dominance, confused the mothers of the previous feminist movement (Rompton, 2015).

An era of political activism and social transformation aimed at advancing women's civil rights and social equality is known as the fourth wave of feminism. By adopting distinctive traits, priorities, and stances toward its time's leading social and cultural forces, the movement succeeds the first-, second-, and third-wave feminist movements. The early 2010s are usually regarded as the fourth-wave feminist period (Steinem, Brown, Nguyen & Tchen, 2022). The prevalence of the internet is one of the primary causes of the new wave of feminism. Feminist activists, especially young women, now find it simple to join the social movement and progress consciousness-raising thanks to online forums, blogs, and social media apps. Online anonymity was another choice, which would have made it easier for them to report sexual harassment, sexism in their personal and professional lives, and sexist and oppressive behaviors. The Women's March, which was organised in Washington, D.C., after Donald Trump was inaugurated in 2017, was also made possible by social media.

In a study by Heger and Hoffman (2019), political ideologies as feminist paradigms impact how gender differences interact with personality traits, including political efficacy and conduct, particularly in online political participation (OPP). It was found that feminism is more inclined toward online political participation. It was also hypothesized that there is political efficacy in online political participation because of feminism.

5. Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, women have struggled to gain relevance in various fields. Although many women have been able to make waves in fields like medicine, engineering, and journalism, to mention a few, they have not been able to gain relevance in mainstream politics. When politics started to affect the country's leadership, women found themselves up in arms against a political system that attempted to advance the interests of just the male on the false premise that the role of women was to cook and take care of the family. (Oboaye, 1997).

Nigerian women have historically been evident in activism despite living in a patriarchal environment. The accomplishments of women in pre-colonial Nigeria are numerous. Examples include Moremi of Ile-Ife, whose selfless leadership is lacking now, and Queen Amina of Zaria. She gave orders to her soldiers to expel invaders from Zaria. A group of Egba women protested taxation under the direction of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a crusader and opponent of authoritarian regimes. Other famous women leaders from our recent history include Margaret Ekpo, a well-known civil rights activist, and Hajia Gambo Sawaba, an advocate for the oppressed in northern Nigeria (Orokpo, 2017).

One way of sustaining democracy is by providing equitable representation of both men and women in politics. Abasilim, Gbervbie, and Osibanjo, (2019) laid emphasis on the importance of commitment towards goal achievement. The women require that needed commitment in politics. Even though women make up almost half of Nigeria's population, there are still not enough of them in politics. The Nigerian legislature still has less than 7% of women represented in its house (Statisense, 2020).

Several factors affect the participation of women in politics in Nigeria and can be structural, societal, or political factors. In Nigeria, political parties don't have structures that make it easy for women to take part in politics. The nominations and expressions of interest forms have exorbitant prices. In a country where there are still inequalities in employment, unemployment is rising, unpaid, and outright discrimination, women can't be able to afford the prices allocated by political parties. Also, indigeneity, culture, and religion, which are all parts of society, show that women are less important than men. Even women with specific educational qualifications still suffer from issues of sexism within the country, placing them at a disadvantage. The media also focuses much more on male candidates than female candidates. The assumption that women want what has traditionally been considered a man's leads to frequent gender-related electoral violence, threats, and hate speech against female candidates (Agbalajobi, 2021).

A progressive step towards eliminating discrimination against women's political participation was taken in the National Gender Policy of 2006. The policy called for the end of all practices that put women at a disadvantage, especially when it came to making decisions, and it supported women's empowerment on many levels. The approach also encourages affirmative action to get 30% of women to work in the legislative and executive branches of government (Orji & Agbayim, 2018). It is imperative to note that most policies are rooted in compensatory justice. However, affirmative action has generated divisive responses. Some people say it's a planned way to get both equality and compensation without force. Others say that it goes against the democratic idea that everyone should have the same chances and that women should have the same chances to compete as men. The effectiveness of protocols, norms, and quota systems to advance women into leadership is constrained by these divisive schools of thought (Agbalajobi, 2021).

Nigeria is ranked 181st out of 193 nations, achieving 30% representation. It is the responsibility of a country to strategise on the best way to achieve success (Chukwudi, Gbervbie, Abasilim, and Imhonopi, 2019). The facts provided indicate that Nigeria has a lot of ground to make up on the continent. It has been noted that the Nigerian affirmative action target of 35% representation and the Beijing standard of 30% is still far from being reached. Due to the low number of women in politics and the fact that democracy is a game of numbers, with a simple majority being the easiest way to make a decision (Olayinka, 2020), the few women who can participate in political decision-making must agree with, make concessions to, and compromise with their male counterparts. Social media could get more women involved in politics, make them more aware of and responsible for women's rights, and help them fight prejudice and stereotypes.

6. Increasing Women's Political Participation With Social Media

Social media use is now a commonplace aspect of many people's everyday lives worldwide. With a smartphone, one may stay in touch with friends and individuals all over the world even when they are not in physical proximity. Social media has evolved quickly over time and will continue to do so in fresh and surprising ways. Political action and democratic governance are greatly impacted by social media. It has radically altered the dynamic between political figures and state organisations. It has also altered the way that elections are contested and how

citizens engage in politics. Technology must be embraced towards achieving success in governance (Chukwudi, Bello, & Adesemowo, 2023; Duruji, Olanrewaju, Olu-Owolabi, Duruji-Moses, & Chukwudi (2021)

Despite these uses, social media has driven political engagement among people who were lackadaisical towards politics because it has helped their inclination toward politics, and recent discussions have brought and helped with the need to participate in politics (Gonzalez, 2018; Matthes, 2022). This cannot be exempted from enhancing women's political participation in Nigeria. Social media can now help women who are newly contesting elective positions to humanise themselves and make themselves accessible to the voters (Yildirim, 2020). Social media bridges the gap between women competing for elective classes and those voting for them. It is very cost-effective. Therefore, there is no need to gather massive amounts of money to be able to voice out what they need to get done for their constituents.

Social media has developed into a remarkably effective tool for politics in Nigeria. According to statistics, 33 million people used social media in Nigeria in January 2021. Nigeria has a social media concentration of over 40% of the population, or close to 90 million people, with a cell phone access rate of over 48% and an internet connection rate of 36%. In the country, there were 89 million registered voters as of 2021. Since most voters probably have access to social media, online and social media have nearly replaced all other forms of media as virtual ways to talk about social and political issues (Dadaku, 2022). In Nigeria, the impact social media has had has helped with participatory politics, and this can be seen during the #BringBackOurGirls campaign to speak up concerning the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in 2014 and the most recent #EndSARS protest against police brutality in Nigeria. Social media encourages individuals to actively participate in politics. as a portion of communication and information. Social media will aid in accelerating the flow of information due to information and communication technology (ICT), encouraging accountability, openness, and transparency in governance as well as information sharing amongst various government departments and agencies, arms, and ministries, as well as civil society organisations (Alfakoro, Ismalia, and Ayodeji, 2020; Chukwudi, & Ojo, 2023).

More attention is paid to female politicians' looks and families than to their male counterparts. Their gender is brought up more often, and their aggressive behavior is emphasized (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Social media can provide more information about women than their perceived stereotypes. It will give them more access to the constituents who vote for them. Encouraging women's participation is very important and it will help in the promotion of the democratic process (Chukwudi, Okoya, Adebajo, & Adekunle, 2023).

For social media to do its job as an advocate as well as it can, everyone needs to have equal access to and use of new technology. Gender advocates could help women use social media better by teaching them how to run effective online campaigns, such as using hashtags, tracking impact, finding target audiences, and making compelling messages. Strategic partners may be able to close the policy loop and change how the public knows about important women's rights issues and decision-making processes through social media (Loiseau & Nwoacka, 2015).

Social media campaigns can draw from and work with regional movements for women. Campaigns can be scaled up, especially when combined with social media and traditional media. Men and other non-traditional partners can also help message and aid campaigns get more attention locally and around the world. Social media has admittedly improved political awareness. This shows that more and more people in Nigeria are joining social media networks. This is likely to make people more politically aware and educated, which will encourage them to vote. People who were previously inactive on social media are now regularly active, directly engaged, and devoting more time to political discussions. Men and women alike can use social media as a forum to exercise their right to free speech and participate in public life as responsible citizens. It provides an opportunity for female candidates and politicians to introduce themselves to the public and demonstrate their values (Adeniyi and Onyechi, 2021).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media and its technical interaction have helped bring important biases and problems related to gender into the spotlight. Yet, women's political participation in Nigeria does not significantly increase within the decision-

making bodies. Though social media has had a significant effect on political participation in Nigeria, it does not reduce the effects of the stereotypes that society has caused. Despite the National gender policy provision in 2005, attaining 35% representation was not feasible because of cultural, political, economic, and religious factors. This study also posited that social media would provide a platform for women contesting for political offices to campaign and raise funds for their elections. It is in light of this that the study recommends:

First, equitable representation of both genders in democracy is paramount. Thus, political education should be intensified to show the importance of equity to encourage women's political participation.

The availability of mobile devices will better equip women with the technical know-how for expansion and improved technical interaction.

Second, discussions around achieving equitable representation should be encouraged. Platforms encouraging these discussions should be created and pushed to help citizens' political education.

Finally, proper use of social media should be encouraged to reduce the false information being propagated.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors do not have any conflicting interests.

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