CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG WOMEN FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE 2023 NIGERIAN ELECTION: THE SCORESHEET

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Abstract

This paper investigated social media use among women in Nigeria for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election. Anchored on Stimulus Response Theory and Digital Divide Theory, and using a well-structured questionnaire validated by experts on a sample of drawn using Top Man's formula, the study discovered that although majority of women in Nigeria used different social media for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election, only a minor population (6.6%) used it to campaign for themselves and or their political party. This study also revealed that Facebook is the most used and preferred social media in political participation by women in Nigeria during the 2023 Nigerian election due to its wide audience reach. Findings further showed that lack of trust predominantly among rural women in online political information, fake news, inability to subscribe or buy data, access to digital devices and network and online trolling are the primary challenges that hindered active online political participation by women in Nigeria during the 2023 Nigerian election. In accordance with the findings above, this study recommended that there is need for sufficient training on digital media literacy to help citizen journalists and bloggers improve their fact checking skill.

Keywords: *Assessment; social media; women; Political Participation; 2023 Nigerian Election*

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized political communication in Nigeria, providing a platform for citizens to engage with each other and with political actors in unprecedented ways. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X formally Twitter, and WhatsApp are widely used in Nigeria, with over 100 million active users. Politicians and political parties use social media to connect with voters, share their campaign messages, and raise funds. Social media also plays an important role in voter education and mobilization. For example, during the 2019 Nigerian general election, social media was used to mobilize young voters who played a decisive role in the election of President Muhammadu Buhari. Social media was also used to expose corruption and electoral fraud.

Women are active users of social media in Nigeria, but they are also more likely to experience online harassment and abuse. A 2020 study by Amnesty International found that 37% of Nigerian women who have used social media to express political views have experienced online violence. Online violence against women can take many forms,

cyberstalking, threats of violence, and sexual harassment. It can have a devastating impact on women's lives, silencing their voices and discouraging them from participating in public life.

In the 2023 Nigerian elections, it was observed that there was a significant adoption of social media by political parties, individuals, organizations and most importantly, the electorate, for political discourse. Some of the messages came in the form of political advertising. Commenting on the usefulness of political advertising, Martins (2023) notes that the allocation of political advertising on social media is rising in western campaigns. Its audiences, unlike those of television, are no longer isolated and passive consumers of linear discourses from politicians; users can now interact, share, and merge political advertising with other messages. Ozioko et al., (2021) argue that before internet penetration, radio played a positive role in mobilizing women to participate in politics with the right contents.

Adegbola et al. (2019) mentioned that accessing news from social media and online news platforms relates to higher levels of political participation in Nigeria. They explained that social media have redefined methods of political communication in Nigeria, leading to a significant shift towards the use of technology in electoral processes.

Today, communication barriers have been reduced to the barest minimum as local events easily become global and vice versa through digital media. The big question is: how inclusive are women in Nigeria when it comes to political discourse and the new media?

The percentage of women who occupied political seats in Nigeria after the 2019 election was only 4% (Rahma, 2023) Without any difference, the same figure reoccurred (4%) after the 2023 general election in Nigeria. This no doubt does not just call for urgent global and research attention but also an indication that Nigeria has little or no plan towards achieving 35% affirmative action for women (Dana, 2023).

The number of women in national parliaments in the selected African countries indicates that Nigerian women made the list in the table with just 6%, while in Rwanda, almost half of the representatives are women with 48% (IPU, 2023). Note that the data for Nigeria is based on the 2019 election. In 2023, Nigeria conducted presidential, governorship, national, and state assemblies' elections. Of the 15,307 candidates who joined the race under the 18 registered political parties, males made up 89.8 percent, while female candidates represented 10.1 percent. This proves that of the total of 15,307 candidates who contested, only 1,553 were female candidates, and INEC results show that only 72 women got elected at the federal and state levels, while 1,487 lost (Dana, 2023). By implication, only 4% of women secured a seat after the 2023 Nigerian elections.

The 2015 and 2019 Nigerian elections received a huge boost because there was widespread social media attention for its role in informing, engaging, and empowering citizens in Nigeria and across Africa (Alhassan, 2018; Onyebuchi et al., 2019). Onyebuchi (2023) discovered that the majority of urban residents in Nigeria visit social media platforms sometimes on an hourly or daily basis, and 3 out of 10 people residing in Lagos State recently joined social media platforms because of the 2023 election in Nigeria. Meanwhile, a report has shown that only 23 percent of Nigerians and other Africans in rural areas used the Internet in 2022, compared to 64 percent of their urban counterparts (Temitayo, 2022).

As political communication via digital media remains the main channel of communication between politicians and citizens during campaigns, its adoption, usage, and engagement in the 2023 Nigerian elections by women remain an important research area.

Objectives of the Study

1. Find out if women in Nigeria engaged in political participation using social media during the 2023 Nigerian elections.
2. Ascertain the types of political activities women participated and engaged in during the 2023 Nigerian elections using social media.

Research Questions

1. What are the social media women in Nigeria used during the 2023 election for political participation and engagement?
2. Which political activities did women in Nigeria participated and engaged in during the 2023 election using social media?

Empirical Review

The 2023 Nigerian elections highlighted significant gender disparities in political representation, underscoring Nigeria's ongoing challenges in enforcing treaties and laws designed to ensure women's active participation. Despite 92 female Senate candidates and 286 female aspirants for the House of Representatives, only 3 and 15 won their respective contests, reflecting deep-seated structural issues (Kowiyat, 2023; Chiamaka et al., 2023). The national assembly's failure to pass gender equality bills—which proposed affirmative action measures such as 35 percent appointed positions for women and 20 percent in party administration—further illustrates the systemic obstacles women face, as evidenced by 208 out of 290 lawmakers voting against the bill (Ugo, 2023; Debora et al., 2022). Several factors inhibit female political engagement in Nigeria. Research points to political party gatekeeping, conservative cultural norms, varying levels of competitiveness between executive and legislative positions, and the discouraging impact of repeated electoral losses (Nkereuwem, 2023). Political parties often hinder women's access to office by favoring male candidates through practices like intimidation, harassment, and even physical violence, including kidnapping and the use of tear gas during primaries (Okoosi-Simbine, 2012; Mercy, 2022). Additionally, favouritism persists, with male "godfathers" predominantly supporting their male counterparts, reinforcing traditional societal roles that prioritize marriage and family over political ambition for women (Chidinma, 2023; Peter et al., 2020). While global trends show increasing female engagement in politics, Nigeria has made little progress toward achieving meaningful representation (Orji et al., 2018). Scholars recommend that political parties adopt and implement gender quotas, and political actors advocate for the protection, financial and political empowerment of female politicians, alongside the review and implementation of laws that support women's growing interest in both elective and appointive political roles (Osimen et al., 2018).

Analyses of Social Media and Political Campaigns in Nigeria

Today, social media has emerged as a primary platform for political campaigns (Hang, 2020), reshaping the way news and political discussions occur. Digital devices, such as smartphones, have become central in accessing radio, TV, and print content, transforming these traditional media into interactive experiences (Nelia et al., 2018; Ryan, 2014; Kiguta,

2018). Despite these advancements, the political engagement of rural women remains underexplored. For instance, research indicates that 64.5% of women in Enugu urban do not use social media for political issues, highlighting a gap in political mobilization among rural populations (Ogbuagu et al., 2017). Additionally, while more than 85% of female legislators use social media—predominantly Facebook, with over 90% usage—usage patterns vary, and many women still face barriers to effective online political participation (Women in Parliaments Global Forum, 2016). Digital platforms offer significant benefits by enabling rapid communication and engagement. They allow political parties and candidates to reach large audiences quickly, share campaign narratives, and even provide a "behind-the-scenes" look at their activities (Andrea, 2018). However, these platforms are not without drawbacks. Studies have shown that while digital media enrich political engagement and debate, they are also used to incite conflict, intimidate opponents, and spread misinformation (Musibau, 2022). This dual nature has led to calls for enhanced digital literacy and greater responsible behavior online, especially among rural women who are less likely to access credible information (Wahyudin et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2018). In addition to issues of content credibility and misinformation, the overlap between social and traditional media has blurred the boundaries for news consumers, leading to mixed feelings about the reliability of online political information. Factors such as education, income, age, and gender significantly affect media use, with younger individuals and men generally showing higher levels of online political engagement (Bryan, 2018; Yulong et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, digital media has empowered women to participate in large-scale political movements and activism, as seen in campaigns like #EndSARs and the Bring Back Our Girls movement (Nnaemeka, 2021; Innocent, 2021).

Studies also reveal that social media training sessions are increasingly being organized to help female politicians maximize these platforms during campaigns and in office, while many respondents express that access to digital devices is crucial for political socialization. Overall, while social media offers a transformative avenue for political engagement and civic participation, significant obstacles such as limited digital access, low trust in online information, and the persistence of traditional gender roles continue to hamper the full participation of rural women in Nigeria's political landscape.

Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored on two theories: Stimulus Organism Response Chain Theory and Digital Divide Theory.

The Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) Chain Theory explains the relationship between social media and political participation by highlighting how external and internal factors influence women's political actions. External stimuli - including social, economic, political, and technological factors - can either encourage or discourage political engagement, while internal factors such as social movements, attitudes, motivation, and belief provide the cues that drive participation. The "organism" represents the individual - how women perceive and process political content on social media, evaluating its credibility and integrating new information with their existing beliefs. This cognitive and emotional processing shapes their political responses, which may include actions such as registering to vote, collecting Permanent Voters Cards (PVC), voting, campaigning, engaging in political debates, or encouraging exposure to political content on social

media (stimulus) triggers internal responses (willingness, emotions, and perceptions) that ultimately lead to political participation (response), offering women a platform to engage in political scenarios from the comfort of their homes.

Digital Divide Theory, developed by Jan Van Dijk in 2005, posits that unequal access to digital technologies and the internet exacerbates existing social and economic inequalities. In the context of women's political participation, this divide affects access to political information, online engagement, and digital representation. Women with limited digital access may face challenges in obtaining political news and resources, thereby hindering informed decision-making. The theory also highlights that inadequate access to online political spaces can limit women's participation in discussions, activism, and mobilization, leading to their underrepresentation in digital forums where political decisions are made. Furthermore, digital literacy remains a crucial barrier, as women may require additional training to effectively use digital technologies for political engagement. Online harassment and gender-based violence further discourage participation, adding to the challenges identified in this study as impediments preventing women from fully leveraging social media for political engagement.

Methodology

To assess women's political participation and engagement in the 2023 Nigerian elections via social media effectively, this study adopted a descriptive survey using structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample of women drawn from all the women in Nigeria who reside in both urban and rural Nigeria.

In getting the sample size, we adopted Top Man's formula as follows.

$$n = \frac{n_1}{1 + \frac{n_1 - 1}{po\,p}}$$

And

$$n_1 = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where;

n= Sample size

e=Standard score for normally distributed population

P=Probability of success

q=Probability of failure

e= Sampling error or error margin

pop= sample population

Confidence level =95%

Error margin is 0.05 but Z-score is dependant in the value of the error margin.

Therefore, for error margin of 0.05, the Z-score is ±1.96

However, since the population is assumed normal, the value of p and q must be equal. Since

$p+q=1$, $p=0.5$ and $q=0.5$

Hence, $n_1 = \dfrac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$

$n_1 = \dfrac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{(0.05)^2}$

$n_1 = \dfrac{0.9604}{0.0025}$

$n_1 = 384.16 = 384$

$n_1 = 384$

Therefore,

$n = \dfrac{n_1}{1 + \dfrac{n_1 - 1}{po\, p}}$

$n = \dfrac{384}{1 + \dfrac{384 - 1}{110,811,240}}$

$n = \dfrac{384}{1 + \dfrac{383}{110,811,240}}$

$n = \dfrac{384}{1 + 0.000003456}$

$n = \dfrac{384}{1.000003456}$

$n = 383.999 = 384$

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected were presented and analysed below:

Table 1: Nigerian women who used social media for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	211	56.2
No	130	34.7
Not sure	34	9.1
Total	375	100

Source: Field work, 2024

The data in Table 1 presented the distribution of copies of the questionnaire among respondents who used social media for political participation and engagement during the

2023 Nigerian election. The table indicates that all the respondents sampled did not use social media for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election. One the one hand, it is safe to say that majority of the respondents (56.2%) used social media for political participation. This justifies the finding from Maria et al., (2024) that social media highly influenced the decision making of people during the Pakistan elections. On the other hand, the 130 and 34 respondents representing 34.7% and 9.1% of respondents who did not participate and or not sure whether the participated in online politics during 2023 Nigerian elections justifies the postulation of Digital Divide Theory that technology is widening the gap or will continue to create inequalities and disparities between the 'Have' and the 'Have-Not'.

It also of important to note here that the 130 and 34 respondents representing 34.7% and 9.1% are no longer significant for this study; therefore, the study's psychographic analysis focused on the 211 respondents representing 56.2%.

Table 2: Social media used by women for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election

Social media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	109	51.7
WhatsApp	48	22.7
X	14	6.6
Instagram	27	12.8
Others	13	6.2
Total	211	100

Source: Field work, 2024

Table 2 shows that the most used social media platforms by women for political participation and engagement during the 2023 elections is no doubt Facebook 51.7% while WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and others were each below 25%. This implies that the platforms are new for political content (Maria et al., 2024)

Table 3: Types of political activities women engaged in using social media during the 2023 Nigerian election?

Political activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sharing political news articles	88	41.8
Sharing personal opinions or viewpoints	41	19.4
Campaigning for myself and my political party	14	6.6
Participating in online debate or discussion	20	9.5

	Frequency	Percentage
Sharing political memes and images	7	3.3
Supporting political party or candidate	14	6.6
Encouraging others to vote	27	2.8
Total	**211**	**100**

Source: field work, 2024

Data from table 3 reveal that women engaged in different political participation during the 2023 Nigerian election via social media at varying degrees but the participation level for all recorded below 45%. By implication, social media did not motivate women in Nigeria to take active participation during the 2023 Nigerian election.

Table 4: Challenges women encountered while using social media for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigeria election

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misinformation or fake news	95	45.0
Online harassment or trolling	20	9.5
Censorship or suppression of contents	7	3.3
Access to mobile device/network	7	9.6
Lack of trust on the information sources	20	3.3
Gender discrimination	14	6.6
Inability to subscribe/buy data	34	16.1
None of the above	7	3.3
All of the above	7	3.3
Total	**211**	**100**

Source: Field work, 2024

Results and Discussions

The study examined how women in Nigeria engaged in political activities on social media during the 2023 elections and the types of political activities they participated in. Findings revealed that while 56.2% of respondents engaged in political activities online, a significant 34.7% did not participate at all, and 9.1% were unsure if they had engaged. Facebook emerged as the most popular platform, used by 51.7% of respondents with varying degrees of frequency, while WhatsApp was used by only 22.7%, indicating a lower inclination towards political participation on that platform. Twitter and Instagram were even less popular among respondents, with 6.6% and 12.8% usage respectively.

Contextual analysis suggested that increased political advertising on social media and the role of these platforms in redefining political communication in Nigeria contribute to higher levels of participation. However, factors such as limited internet technology literacy may account for the considerable non-participation. In terms of the types of activities, only a small fraction of women used social media to directly campaign for themselves or their political parties. Most respondents used social media to share political news, express personal opinions, encourage voting, and engage in online debates. These findings indicate that while social media provides a platform for political expression, many women in Nigeria prefer to support other candidates or parties rather than campaign directly.

Trust in political information shared online was generally low, with rural respondents expressing greater skepticism than their urban counterparts. This aligns with previous studies highlighting the digital divide and the unreliability of online political content. Overall, the study, guided by the S-O-R chain theory and Digital Divide Theory, underscores that although social media amplifies women's political voices, significant challenges such as online trolling, affordability of data, and limited device accessibility continue to hinder full participation in political processes.

Conclusion

The use of social media for political participation has been a dominating research area in recent time but its adoption by women for political participation and engagement seems to be an emerging field of interest. Findings from the study suggested that all the elements sampled did not use social media for political participation and engagement during the 2023 Nigerian election. Also, there are various factors that hindered online political participation and engagement among women during the 2023 Nigeria election but fakeness, inability to buy data or subscription, online trolling and access to mobile device/network were the predominant.

This study adopted a survey research method and employed S-O-R chain theory and Digital Divide Theory and the results shows that social media has given women a platform where their voices could be heard politically but only a minor representation is leveraging on this opportunity to campaign for themselves and contest for a political position.

Recommendations

Going by the findings as outlined earlier, this study recommends the following:

1. Government, non-governmental organization and philanthropists should work in connection with internet providers to ensure that there is an increase in internet penetration in every part of Nigeria especially in the rural areas.
2. Nigerian women should be retrained and re-sensitized to understand that political participation is beyond encouraging others to vote, supporting a candidate or sharing political news article rather women should join in the race by belonging to a political party and contesting for political position.

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