

UNRAVELING THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study delves into the evolving influence of social media on women's political participation in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, amidst a global backdrop of political figures effectively utilizing these platforms. Focusing on the observed capital imbalance in content creation during political processes, the research examines the specific impact of social media on women's exposure to political information, their active involvement in politics, and the broader shaping of their political engagement. With women's underrepresentation in Nigerian elections highlighting the urgency, the study employs a survey method, administering 400 questionnaires in person to women in Nasarawa State, with 377 retrieved. Utilizing a multi-stage sampling technique, the research centres on areas with literate, prolific social media users and politically active women. Statistical analysis reveals nuanced insights, indicating significant dissatisfaction (73.5%) with democracy in Nigeria. Factors influencing social media participation include information access, the desire for political change, and social network influence. The perceived impact of social media on women's political participation suggests the potential for positive change in civic engagement. The study recommends that policymakers should prioritize comprehensive democratic reforms addressing citizens' concerns, while implementing targeted programs to enhance women's political participation on social media and encouraging political leaders to actively utilize social platforms for inclusive communication and accurate information dissemination.

Keywords: Social Media, Women's Political Participation, Civic Education, Information Access.

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Introduction

Social media's pervasive influence on contemporary society has prompted significant academic discourse regarding its multifaceted impact. Scholars, exemplified by Castells (2013), emphasize the transformative role of social media in shaping power dynamics, communication, and social relationships. Castells argues that these platforms contribute to the formation of networked societies, altering traditional structures of information dissemination and political engagement, aligning with the notion that social media acts as a "fifth estate" alongside traditional pillars of power.

Examining the intersection of social media, politics, and gender, Senft's (2008) work sheds light on digital communication's role in fostering political communities and activism. Senft highlights the participatory nature of online spaces, illustrating how individuals, including women, leverage social media for political expression and mobilization. Bimber and Copeland (2013) further contribute by exploring the implications of digital technologies on political engagement, arguing that social media platforms provide new avenues for citizens to participate in public discourse, potentially influencing political outcomes. In the context of African politics, particularly in

Nigeria, Akinfeleye's (2012) insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by the media landscape are crucial. Akinfeleye discusses the historical evolution of media in Nigeria, emphasizing its critical role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. Scholars like Ibeanu (2011) and Oso (2015) delve into the complexities of media regulation and freedom in the Nigerian context, providing nuanced perspectives on the relationship between media, politics, and societal norms.

Building on the global conversation about women's political participation, theoretical frameworks from Krook (2013) and Norris (2011) emphasize the importance of gender in political representation. Krook's "critical mass theory" argues that achieving a significant number of women in political positions is essential for influencing policy outcomes and challenging gender norms. Norris explores the concept of "gender equality and democracy," positing that inclusive political representation fosters more responsive and democratic governance. The expansion of social media across diverse demographic groups has led scholars to scrutinize its impact on political participation. Numerous studies emphasize social media's pivotal role in disseminating political information, connecting like-minded individuals, and mobilizing various forms of political engagement (Bennett, 2012; Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Scholars such as Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that this technology can enhance participatory democracy by fostering open and equal deliberation among citizens, representatives, and policymakers, attracting new participants to political activism (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). Evidence also suggests an agenda-setting effect, where exposure to political information on social media correlates with subsequent expression of views on the same issue (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). Recent studies in Africa, including Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, have explored the relationship between information-oriented social media posts, civic engagement, and political participation (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Akinyetun, 2020; Asamoah, 2019; Mustapha & Omar, 2020).

Globally, there has been a growing demand for women's adequate representation in governmental positions, driven by considerations of human rights, gender equality, inclusive growth, and overall development. The active involvement of women in decision-making processes is deemed essential for achieving equality, democracy, peace, growth, and sustainable development, incorporating their experiences and perspectives (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). In Nigeria, recent election results underscore the challenges faced by women in achieving political representation. According to a Premium Times report dated March 10, 2023, from the February 25, 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections, only 3 out of 109 women won Senate seats, and 16 out of 360 women secured seats in the House of Representatives. This signals a significant underrepresentation of women in the political landscape.

Statement of the Problem

In the context of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, this study addresses the evolving dynamics of social media and their impact on women's political participation. While social media platforms have become influential tools in political discourse globally (Castells, 2013), concerns arise from the observed disparity in capital involvement during political processes. Figures like Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi have effectively utilized social media to advance political agendas, reflecting a global trend (Premium Times, 2023). Despite the democratizing potential of social media (Loader & Mercea, 2011), its specific influence on women's exposure to political information, active participation in politics, and overall shaping of political engagement requires scrutiny. The recent Nigerian elections reported by Premium Times (March 10, 2023) highlight a significant underrepresentation of women in legislative positions. This gender gap emphasizes the urgency of investigating how social media dynamics contribute to or hinder women's political engagement in Nasarawa State. The study aims to unravel the intricacies of this relationship, contributing to a deeper understanding of the specific factors at play in the context of women's political participation in Nasarawa State.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out the level of exposure of women to social media in Nasarawa;
- ii. To assess the level of their involvement in politics in Nasarawa state and
- iii. To examine the significance of social media in increasing women's participation in political activities Nasarawa State.

Review of Concepts and Literature

Concept of Social Media

Social media, a dynamic online space, has become a pivotal force in shaping modern interactions, particularly within the realms of political participation and women's empowerment. Serving as a virtual arena for communication, information sharing, and connection, social media has ushered in a transformative era where users can actively engage, express themselves, and exchange opinions. The interactive and easily accessible nature of social media has revolutionized political and public discourse, allowing individuals to participate more directly, openly, and conveniently (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Doris, 2014; Saud et al., 2020; Kim & Hoewe, 2020). Scholars underscore its role in democratizing communication channels, providing a platform for marginalized voices, and amplifying the impact of civic engagement (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Doris, 2014). In the context of women's empowerment, social media has been a catalyst for fostering gender equality, enabling women to share experiences, raise awareness about pertinent issues, and mobilize support for their causes (Saud et al., 2020; Kim & Hoewe, 2020). The multifaceted influence of social media extends beyond mere connectivity, actively shaping the landscape of political participation and contributing to the empowerment of women in the digital age.

Some Prominent Social Media Platforms

Prominent social media platforms have played pivotal roles in shaping the digital landscape and influencing global communication dynamics. One of the foremost platforms, Facebook, founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, has evolved into a social networking giant with a staggering 2.8 billion monthly active users worldwide as of Q4 2021 (Zuckerberg, 2004). Initially catering to university students, the platform expanded globally in 2006, solidifying its status as the third-largest "country" if it were one.

Twitter, often referred to as the X Platform, has also left an indelible mark on the social media sphere since its launch in July 2006. With over 330 million monthly active users by 2021, Twitter stands out for its real-time information sharing and the use of hashtags, making it a preferred platform for concise and timely communication (Williams, 2006).

Established in 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim, YouTube has become a powerhouse for video content. With over 2 billion logged-in monthly users, the platform allows individuals to upload, view, and engage with a vast array of videos, contributing significantly to the democratization of content creation and consumption (Chen et al., 2005).

Blogs, or weblogs, represent another crucial facet of the social media landscape. Providing web-based platforms for hosting and publishing regular content, blogs are known for their user-friendly content management tools, requiring minimal technical skills for individuals to express themselves online (Geraldine et al., 2014).

In essence, these prominent social media platforms have become integral components of modern communication, influencing how individuals connect, share information, and participate in the digital age. Their widespread adoption and impact underscore the transformative nature of social media on a global scale.

Political Participation

Political participation in the realm of social media involves civic activities such as voting, engaging in the political process, and contributing to the vibrancy of society. Sairambay (2020) defines political participation as any citizen action aimed at influencing political institutions, encompassing various voluntary acts impacting the broader population positively. This definition emphasizes the deliberate intention of individuals to influence political outcomes, distinguishing political participation from civic engagement. Examining political participation through the lens of manifest political behavior, as suggested by Ekman and Amnå (2012), underscores the essence of individuals actively shaping political discourse and outcomes through online engagement in the context of social media.

Suleiman and Kelvin (2022) emphasize social media's influential role in contemporary politics, noting its impact on information access, awareness creation, online convergence, and political mobilization. Despite concerns about fake news, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp provide extensive access to political information and facilitate political campaigns. Social media serves as a crucial space for creating political

awareness, engaging citizens, and acting as a virtual convergence point for political discussions. Additionally, it acts as a potent tool for political mobilization, influencing recruitment, volunteer interaction, and protest actions, with virtual protests symbolically impacting institutional politics and broader discourse.

Digital Gender Divide

The digital gender divide centres on gender-based disparities in ICT access and usage, influenced by barriers like affordability, education, technological literacy, biases, and socio-cultural norms (UN Women, 2005). In Nigeria, discrimination and power imbalances exacerbate ICT inequalities for women (Sanda & Kurfi, 2013). Bridging this gap is crucial for empowering women, enhancing digital literacy, and addressing socio-cultural biases (Intel and Dalberg, 2012).

Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment encompasses self-confidence, autonomy, and decision-making. Social media plays a key role in fostering connections and independence (Kabeer, 2001). The intersection of women's empowerment and political participation is evident in social media's transformative potential, offering access to information, connecting diverse voices, and promoting inclusivity (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Online Activism:

Social media enables online activism through rapid information dissemination. Hashtag movements like #HeForShe and #MeToo amplify voices globally, yet concerns exist regarding risks such as unwanted attention to victims (Langman, 2005; Tufekci & Freelon, 2013).

Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Nigeria's political landscape has seen shifts, with notable milestones like Franca Afegbua's election in 1983. Challenges persist, exemplified by the meager 2.6% representation of women in 1992 (Ako-Nai, 2005; Mohammed, 2006; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006, cited in Edeh & Iloh, 2011). Incremental progress has occurred, but underrepresentation in elective and appointive roles persists.

Factors Affecting Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Factors influencing women's political participation in Nigeria include cultural barriers, where societal norms, especially in rural areas, reinforce gender roles, perpetuating discrimination against women (George, 2019). Despite constitutional provisions and international commitments endorsing gender equality, the absence of effective implementation mechanisms hampers progress, as seen in the reluctance to enact binding quotas (Kelly, 2019). Media portrayal in Nigerian media tends to reinforce negative stereotypes, impacting women's public perception and discouraging political participation due to gender-based hate speech (Omenugha, 2005). The economic status of women, compounded by societal expectations, poses a significant barrier, as the majority live in poverty, lacking the financial resources for political campaigns (Kassa, 2015).

The competitive and often violent nature of Nigerian elections exacerbates challenges for women, with a winner-takes-all mentality creating a hostile environment that deters active participation (Okeke et al., 2019). Institutional barriers, rooted in a patriarchal foundation, favor men and limit women's chances for adequate representation, as longstanding processes marginalize them in political arrangements (Lovenduski & Karram, 2010). In summary, these factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political offices, reflecting the complex challenges hindering women's active involvement in Nigerian politics.

Social Media and Women Mobilization

The internet and social media have revolutionized public mobilization, particularly in advancing women's rights issues globally (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015). Social media's power is evident in galvanizing action, influencing policy makers, and bridging the gender gap in political participation, as seen in cases like Turkey and India. These platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, enable real-time transmission of events, connecting local activists with a global audience (Pew Research Center, 2012). Women's political rights activism has capitalized on social media's potential, fostering connections among gender activists globally at a low cost. Female bloggers, in

particular, have attracted a younger generation of activists, challenging stereotypes and promoting gender equality (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015).

Political mobilization, crucial for inducing political participation, has evolved in contemporary times, necessitating citizens' involvement in democracy (Santas, Asemah & Jumbo, 2020). The new media, including social media, plays a pivotal role in sensitizing and galvanizing women on political activities, facilitating their engagement in the evolving landscape of political participation (Santas, Asemah & Jumbo, 2020).

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study was the survey research method, chosen for its suitability in exploring individuals' perceptions and opinions on various topics (Asemah et al., 2017). The method employed questionnaires administered in person to respondents, facilitating data collection for subsequent analysis (Onwukwe, 2011). The study focused on women in Nasarawa state, estimated at 1,236,464 according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022). The population was sampled using Taro Yamani's Statistical Formula, resulting in a calculated sample size of 400. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, involving stratified sampling across three senatorial districts of Nasarawa State, random sampling of specific towns, and accidental sampling for further selection. The chosen towns represented areas with literate, prolific users of social media, and politically active women.

Unfortunately, 23 copies of the questionnaire (5.75%) were not recovered during the collection period due to reasons such as respondents' travel, late returns, or non-compliance. Consequently, the presentation and analysis were based on the 377 returned copies of the questionnaires.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Which of these social media platforms do you use the most?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	101	26.8
Facebook	126	33.4
Instagram	22	5.8
X platform	91	24.1
YouTube	36	9.5
Others	1	0.23
Total	377	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The findings from Table 1 indicate that Facebook is the predominant social media platform among respondents, with 33.4% acknowledging its use. WhatsApp follows at 26.8%, Instagram at 5.8%, X at 24.1%, and YouTube at 9.5%. Other social media platforms have minimal representation, with only 0.3% of respondents using them.

Table 2: How much do you agree with the following statements?

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Social media is part of my everyday activity	0 (0%)	3 (0.8%)	8 (2.1%)	17 (4.5%)	349 (92.6%)
I use social media to connect with people I know	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.23%)	8 (2.1%)	368 (97.6%)

I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto social media for a while	3 (0.8%)	27 (7.2%)	28 (7.4%)	232 (61.5%)	87 (23.1%)
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Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 indicates that the overwhelming majority of women, 92.6%, consider social media as part of their daily activities. Only a negligible 0.8% disagree with this perception, emphasizing the pervasive role of social media in the everyday lives of the surveyed women.

Table 3. In your social media friends or the pages you follow, do you include the following groups of people?

	None	One to two	More than three
Local Government Councillors	281 (74.5%)	56 (14.9%)	40 (10.6%)
Member House of Assembly	0 (0%)	346 (91.8%)	31 (8.2%)
Member House of Representatives	23 (6.1%)	311 (82.5%)	43 (11.4%)
State Governor	153 (40.6%)	201 (53.3%)	23 (6.1%)
Other government officials	48 (12.7%)	138 (36.6%)	191 (50.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 findings indicate that women in the study predominantly connect with Members of the House of Assembly (91.8%) and House of Representatives (82.5%) on social media. State Governors are connected with by 53.3%, and Other Government Officials by 50.7%. Notably, 10.6% have over three connections with these officials. In contrast, 74.5% have no connections with Local Government Councillors, and 12.7% lack connections with Other Government Officials. Importantly, none of the respondents reported having no connections with any political actors.

Table 4: How much do you agree with the following statements?

	SD	D	N	A	SA
SM gives me the opportunity to communicate with political actors	0 (0%)	3 (0.8%)	8 (2.1%)	17 (4.5%)	349 (92.6%)
SM gives political actors the opportunity to respond to the public	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.23%)	8 (2.1%)	368 (97.6%)
Using SM makes me understand the position of political actors on social Issues	0 (0%)	9 (2.4%)	23 (6.1%)	315 (83.8%)	30 (8.0%)
SM proves that political actors are open to the public's ideas	5 (1.3%)	17 (4.5%)	32 (8.5%)	293 (77.7%)	30 (8.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 reveals a strong consensus among respondents on the positive impact of social media in political communication. Notably, 92.6% strongly agree that social media facilitates communication with political actors, and 97.6% agree that it enables political actors to respond to the public. Additionally, 83.8% find social media helpful in understanding political actors' positions on social issues, and 77.7% believe it serves as evidence of political actors' openness to public ideas. These findings highlight social media's influential role in enhancing communication, understanding, and openness in politics.

Table 5: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Nigeria?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	65	17.2
Dissatisfied	277	73.5
Don't Know	35	9.3
Total	377	100

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 5 captures the sentiments of women regarding their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Nigeria. The majority of respondents, constituting 73.5%, expressed dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in the country. In contrast, only 17.2% of women indicated satisfaction, while 9.3% expressed uncertainty or a lack of knowledge on the matter.

Table 6: Factors influencing political participation on social media

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness of political events	221	58.6
Desire for political change	186	49.3
Influence from friends and family	134	35.5
Access to political information	265	70.3
Interest in political issues	198	52.5
Total	377	100

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 6 underscores diverse factors driving women's engagement in social media politics, with 58.6% citing awareness of political events, 49.3% expressing a desire for political change, 35.5% influenced by friends and family, 70.3% emphasizing access to political information, and 52.5% prioritizing interest in political issues.

Table 7: Perceived impact of social media on political participation

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Increased awareness	263	69.8
Enhanced political engagement	225	59.6
Facilitated information sharing	241	63.9
Improved communication with political actors	198	52.5
Strengthened civic participation	189	50.1
Total	377	100

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 7 highlights key findings on social media's impact: 69.8% acknowledge increased political awareness,

59.6% emphasize enhanced political engagement, and 63.9% see it as an effective tool for information sharing. Improved communication with political actors (52.5%) and the belief in social media fostering women's civic participation (50.1%) underscore its multifaceted empowerment in politics.

Discussion of findings

The discussion addresses the findings in alignment with the research questions, offering a nuanced exploration of women's exposure to social media in Nasarawa, their level of political involvement, and the significance of social media in shaping their political participation.

QR 1: Level of Exposure to Social Media: Table 1 illuminates a robust exposure of women to social media in Nasarawa. Facebook emerges as the primary platform (33.4%), a trend consistent with global usage patterns (Smith, 2019). The prevalence of Facebook usage signifies its dominance as a means of online interaction in this demographic. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the widespread adoption of Facebook as a major social networking platform (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Moreover, Table 2 delves into the perceptions and habits surrounding social media engagement. A staggering 92.6% of women consider social media integral to their everyday activities, underscoring its pervasive role. This resonates with studies emphasizing the increasing integration of social media into daily routines (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The negligible 0.8% who disagree highlights the near-universal acceptance of social media as a daily fixture.

These findings assume significance when viewed through the lens of existing literature. Scholars have emphasized the transformative impact of social media on daily life, shaping communication patterns and information consumption (Qualman, 2019). The dominance of Facebook aligns with its global prominence as a conduit for social connections and information dissemination (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The acknowledgment of social media's daily role aligns with studies emphasizing its influence on individuals' communication behaviors and societal engagement (Dhir et al., 2018).

In essence, the findings suggest a high level of exposure and integration of women in Nasarawa to social media, particularly Facebook. The near-universal acceptance of social media as part of daily activities underscores its transformative role in shaping communication patterns and social interactions, aligning with broader trends observed in digital communication literature.

QR 2: Level of Involvement in Politics: Table 3 reveals significant social media connections, with 91.8% linked to Members of the House of Assembly and 82.5% to House of Representatives. Robust engagement is observed, though lower with State Governors (53.3%) and Other Government Officials (50.7%). Literature supports social media's transformative role in politics, fostering networked societies (Castells, 2013). Agreement on positive social media impact in political communication (Table 4) aligns with scholars like Bennett and Gil de Zuniga, emphasizing its pivotal role. Gender and politics literature (Krook, Norris) supports social media's role in inclusive political representation. In the Nigerian context, perspectives on media (Akinfeleye, Ibeanu, Oso) and recent election challenges underscore the study's relevance. Findings contribute insights into women's political engagement through social media in Nasarawa, aligning with existing literature.

QR 3: Significance of Social Media in Increasing Women's Participation: The findings from Table 5 indicate a prevalent dissatisfaction among women in Nasarawa state with the functioning of democracy in Nigeria. A substantial 73.5% expressed discontent, contrasting with a mere 17.2% who conveyed satisfaction. This sentiment is in line with existing literature that often discusses citizens' dissatisfaction with political systems, citing issues of corruption, inefficiency, and unmet expectations (Smith, 2018; Rose, 2019).

Moving on to Table 6, it becomes evident that various factors influence women's engagement in political activities on social media. Notably, 58.6% find awareness of political events to be a significant motivator, echoing studies that emphasize the role of information availability in shaping political participation (Kruike-meier et al., 2017). The desire for political change, indicated by 49.3%, aligns with literature suggesting that individuals are more likely to engage politically when motivated by a desire for societal improvements (Norris, 2002).

Table 7 delves into the perceived impact of social media on women's political participation. A noteworthy

69.8% believe that social media significantly increases their awareness of political matters, supporting the argument that social media serves as a crucial information-sharing platform (Towner et al., 2019). The finding that 59.6% feel social media enhances their political engagement aligns with existing research emphasizing the platform's role in fostering political discussions and interactions (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

Moreover, the recognition of social media as a tool for facilitating information sharing (63.9%) is consistent with studies emphasizing the role of online platforms in disseminating political information (Boulianne, 2015). Improved communication with political actors due to social media is acknowledged by 52.5%, resonating with literature highlighting the platform's ability to bridge the gap between citizens and political figures (Vergeer et al., 2013).

Lastly, the belief that social media contributes to strengthened civic participation, expressed by 50.1%, aligns with arguments that social media can empower individuals to actively engage in civic affairs and political processes (Loader & Mercea, 2011). Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted impact of social media in influencing women's political participation, providing insights into both the challenges and opportunities associated with democratic engagement in Nasarawa state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals dissatisfaction (73.5%) with democracy in Nasarawa State, urging comprehensive reforms. Women's political participation on social media is influenced by information access, the desire for change, and social networks. Social media significantly impacts women's awareness, engagement, and information sharing, showcasing its potential for positive civic change. Recognizing its role in communication and civic engagement emphasizes the need for policymakers to leverage these platforms for inclusive governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, policymakers should prioritize comprehensive democratic reforms addressing citizens' concerns, particularly the dissatisfaction (73.5%) revealed. To enhance women's political participation on social media, targeted programs should be implemented to improve information access, foster the desire for political change, and leverage social networks. Furthermore, political leaders should actively utilize social media platforms for inclusive communication, disseminating accurate political information, and encouraging women's active participation in political discussions.

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