

Challenges of Female Activists and the Use of Social Media for 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Bolanle Olayinka Idowu¹, Moshood Babatunde Abdul-Wasi², Olayinka Babatunde Adebogun³

¹Public Relations Department, Lagos State University of Science and Technology

²Political Science Department, Lagos State University

³Political Science and International Relations Department, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos

Abstract:

Social media have galvanising impact on feminists' issues, serving as tools for political communication and mobilisation. In amplifying gender equity in political seats, Nigerian female activists were often subjected to multiple barriers, hindering the attainment of the SDG5. Previous studies in communication of gender equity have focused on how the Nigerian female activists utilised the use of social media to raise this call. However, there is a dearth of literature on the challenges encountered by female activists while engaging social media for more women participation in politics. This study was, therefore, designed to examine the challenges encountered by female activists in the use of Social Media for 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria, with a view to establishing the extent of difficulties faced. Uses and Gratification and Patriarchy Hegemony theories were used as the framework while the qualitative design was adopted. Data reported 44.7 percent of Nigeria's social media users were female out of which existed Nigerian female activists. Fifteen female activists were purposively selected with snowball sampling also adopted. In-depth interview was adopted in eliciting responses using interview guide as research instrument. The findings reveal the female activists encountered cyber bullying and online threats, disinformation and misinformation, tribal bullying and patriarchal dominance, defamatory comments, hacking and account and suspension to the extent of having technical and financial barriers.

Keywords:

Female Activists, Social Network, Political Engagement.

I. Introduction

The role and position of women in Nigeria are being questioned. This kind of phenomenon does not only apply to Nigeria, other countries that are still thick with patriarchal culture have shown the same result. Lorber (2013) posits there is no country in the world where men and women are truly equal, the revolution which would make men and women to be truly equal has not yet occurred.

In line with this, Nigerian society still placed a patriarchal culture even though there is a guarantee in the law and the reality of United Nations Affirmative Actions of 35% for women representation into political elective and appointive positions (Moropefoluwa et al., 2024). The engagement of social media by Nigerian female activists would have aided the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which states men and women should be given equal rights and opportunities to thrive in any given society for even-development and peaceful co-existence, however, were faced with several obstacles during 2023 Presidential election.

Political participation is a voluntary activity undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies (Jacobs,

2023). These activities includes voting in elections, involvement in a political campaign, expressing political opinions, donating money to a candidate or political party, competing as a candidate, representing a particular political body, petitioning, protesting and working with other people on issues. All these activities have enhanced the political participation of the public, particularly women (Kaluarachchi, & Mendis 2020).

2013 European Parliament's report indicates new media have positive impact on female activists empowerment, allowing them to network with other women which build confidence, appeal to other women and peers through styles and issues that are directly relevant and attractive providing alternative power basis which might be of interest to mainstream politicians. Online political communication, especially through social media, allows politicians to have more control over their own messages and this works especially well for unelected or young women, whose status makes them less likely to be constrained by the political party apparatus (Aondover et al., 2025).

Datareportal in Digital (2023), reports 25.8 percent of Nigeria's total internet user base regardless of age used at least one social media platform in January, 2023. At that time, 44.7 percent of Nigeria's social media users were female while 55.3 percents were male. During the 2023 elections, a female senator, Aishatu Ahmad popularly known as Binani picked the governorship ticket of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) in Adamawa state and made use of social media to gain popularity even when the election results became almost a tug war between her party and the opposition party.

Unlike the 2019 Presidential election, the 2023 election campaigners used social media slogansto popularise their respective political candidates. There was Obidients movement, a team for the Labour Party Presidential candidate, the Atikulated Youth Force, a team for the People's Democratic Party (PDP)'s Presidential Candidate, and the Batified with links to the All-Progressives Congress (APC) Presidential aspirant. (Olabanjo, 2022).

Eesuola (2017) posits as neoliberalism changed the paradigm in the way the society is runs because it promotes the effort of the individual towards achieving desires goals to no limited extent, it has equally provoked actions and reactions from individuals and social groups who now lay claim to what they can do, rather than what the society proposes that they can, or should do, and this is what manifests in gender activism. The focus of female activism is to reverse and change the status quo in which men in the society are to be superior to women in certain issues and have more opportunities to do certain things than women. The affirmative action is still not feasible in Nigeria, the Nigerian female activists who were supposed to be at fore-front of this agenda were being faced with several challenges during engagements in their various virtual communities which hinders them from informing political actions during political discourse in order to boost the stimuli of other Nigerian women of solidarity against women marginalisation in politics.

Past studies, Olubela (2023), Omontese (2023), Dagunduro & Adenugba (2020) have been able to examine Nigerian women's participation in politics, social media and women empowerment and women's activists groups in the post-colonial period in Nigeria but there is a dearth of knowledge on examining the challenges encountered by Nigerian female activists while engaging social media during 2023 Presidential election, hence, this study seeks to examine the challenges encountered by Nigerian female activists in the use of social media for 2023 Presidential election.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 The Concept of Social Media

Social media are a means of interaction among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, comment, discuss and modify user-generated content (Chiluwa & Adegoke, 2013).

Adeiza (2016) defines social media as a group of internet-based applications that are built upon the ideology and technology of web 2.0 and allow the exchange of its content. They refer to the internet-based social websites like the Facebook, MySpace, x, etc., which allow users to interactively communicate with one another. Social media can also refer to those web-based and mobile-based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue between organisations, communities and individuals. On the social media, the users are not passive like in the case of television, radio and newspapers; rather they are active in the formation and exchange of information (Sweetser and Laricsy, 2008). Typical examples of social media include: x, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Myspace, Skype, Flip gram and Hi5. All these sites and applications have an interactive option that facilitates broadcasting and rebroadcasting of information. Aside from these websites, there are also applications that people are vended more accessible to, on smart phones and androids (Di Fátima et al., 2023).

According to Stieglitz (2014), the features are social networking, social interaction and participation, the use of social providers, openness and collaboration. These features are linked to the six classifications of social media postulated by the same author. The classifications are: Social Networks (x, Facebook, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn), Media Products Community (YouTube, Flickr, SlideShare); Blog Services (WordPress, Blogger); Information Community (Wikipedia and Wiki spaces, Google), which are also refer to as Collaborative Project; Virtual Community also called Virtual Game Worlds include Second Life and World of Warcraft; and Link Sharing Services (Digg and Digo). The social media are a body of packages that users find attractive and even hard to do without.

In the same vein, PLAC (2012) adds that, social media technologies take on different forms including magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, podcasts, pictures and videos, considering that social media come in diverse forms, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) cited in Abdel-Hafez & Xu (2013) tried to classify social media into six distinct categories:

- a. Collaborative Projects (e g. Wikipedia)
- b. Blogs and microblogs (e g. x)
- c. Content Communities (e g. YouTube)
- d. Social Networking Sites (e g. Facebook)
- e. Virtual game worlds (e g. World of Warcraft)
- f. Virtual Social Worlds (e g. Second Life)

2.2 Female Activism in Nigeria

Female's activism within various ethnic groups in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, with notable heroic leaders, like Moremi of Ife, Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin, Funmilayo Kuti from Abeokuta, Margaret Ekpo from Cross River and many others. The participation of Nigerian women in the Beijing Conference of 1995 led to a stronger voice for women in the political landscape. Several women's right groups have sprung up in the country over the years. Notable among them are the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS),

Women In Nigerian (WIN), Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), and Female in Nigeria (FIN). Majority of these women activists have actualised significant political, social and economic impact especially, on issues of gender equity.

These days, these women activists have metamorphosed to the new innovation of the new media in lending their voices. They are now using the social media to speak against women marginalisation in political and leadership positions with a tagged name of “female activists”, influencers (Keller & Berry, 2003). Social media influencers are usually active social media users who are knowledgeable in a particular field, highly connected, they command respect amongst their large number of followers. Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg (2010) explain that social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through posts, comments, blogs, posts, and the use of other social media. Abugu, (2015) asserts social media influencers have become very powerful groups on Nigeria social media sphere. They exert such a powerful influence on their large number of followers who rely on their informed analysis on important national discourses for their political decisions and otherwise.

2.3 Women’s Participation in Politics in Nigeria

Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts (Arowolo, & Aluko, 2010). This is not to say, however, that there has not been a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointments and elections but the participation is considered low considering the international standard of 35% benchmark. (UNWomen report, 2023).

Illoh, & Ikenna’s, (2009), research has shown that exclusion of women in the party executives contributes in no small measure to the marginalisation of women in politics, especially during party nominations. For the past 27 years, election of women into the National Assembly has not gone beyond 8.3%. Out of the 56 contestable seats in the Senate, only one woman was elected and 3 out of 442 were women in the House of Representatives. This report was the same in 1992 in the Senate where only one woman emerged as Senator out of 91 and 14 out of 593 in the House of Representatives (Muhammed, 2006).

It was also revealed in the study by Illoh and Ikenna (2009) that in the year 1999, of 978 contestable seats in the 36 Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving 12 seats for women representing 1.2%. There was upward movement in 2003 where women occupied 39 out of the 951 seats representing 4%. In 2007, women occupied 54 seats out of total 990 with the percentage of 5.5. In the House of Representatives, in the year 1999, out of total 360 seats, women occupied 13 representing 3.6%. In 2003, men occupied 318 out of 339 leaving 21 seats for women of 3.6%. Women’s participation also increased in 2007 with women occupying a total of 25 seats representing 7%. The same was reported in the Senate, where in 1999, women occupied 4 seats out of a total of 109 representing 2.8%. In 2003, men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7%. There was increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3%. In the 2023 election, women occupied 4 seats out of 109 senate members, representing 3.7% and 17 out of 360 House of Representatives members representing 4.7%.

Despite the argument that political participation of women in Nigeria increased in 2003 and 2007, it was however, restricted maximally to the appointive positions as none of the women who contested governorship election got elected. The 2023 general elections again, delivered low numbers of women in the National Assembly. Just like the 9th Assembly, the 10th Assembly has 3

out of 109 seats representing 2.7% in the Senate, 17 out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives, which represents 4.7% while 4.2% of the 469-members Assembly. In the 9th National Assembly, there were 8 female Senators representing 7.3% and 13 female members of the House representative representing 3.6%. Women got 15 out of 423 Senate, which represents 3.5%, the men got a total of 408 seats which represents 96.5% of the 423 Seats. The elected legislators include 98 out of 109 Senate and 325 out of 360 House of Representatives seats (Vanguard, March 8, 2023).

By and large, women are still being marginalised; it is believed that efforts should still be channeled towards awakening women into active participation in politics in order to realise the full capacity of Nigerian preponderant population. This becomes imperative as “irresistible” role of women is capable of building strong democratic institutions that are acceptable and durable” (Ayotola, & Adedeji, 2009).

2.4 Use of Social Media for Political Campaigns in Nigeria

There has been a growing recognition and utilisation of social media by the current Nigerian political and opinion leaders. In our present digital age, political campaigns are relying heavily on online communication platforms to gain support. Online campaigning can be just as hurtful as it is helpful, but social media in particular have the capacity to dampen the scope of politics (Jude, 2023; Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2025).

According to Patrut (2014), social media can mobilise riot-like behaviour, as the discussion of politics, including controversial topics and conversations, are easily accessible with the utilisation of online communication. With this easy access to political discussion, social media change voters’ perceptions of people towards the political candidates. Asemah & Edegoh (2012), posit that asides media being employed in national campaigns like COVID19, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and children immunisations, the media are also used for campaigns during elections. For example, during the 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria, the four major political parties I.e, All Progressive Congress (APC), People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP) and The New Nigeria People’s Party (NNPP), employed social media a great deal for their political campaigns. The essence of using the media for campaign are that, it was believed that mass media were persuasive in nature; they could be used to convince the audience to accept a particular idea, whether from the government or individual (Aondover et al., 2024).

Social media have become a formidable tool for social interaction and political electioneering today (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). It has continued to acclaim world relevance politically. It has made political participation easy, and political interaction has become cost-effective compared to traditional media like television, radio or newspapers. It has greater merits over conventional methods in mobilising the electorates and other political audience (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). This has made social media a new field of academic research for most researchers.

However, the 2011 general elections in Nigeria were considered the first of its kind in terms of the roles played by social media and the manner at which it influenced the outcomes of the elections (Nweke, 2023; Msughter, 2025). The 2015 general elections that produced Muhammadu Buhari as president of Nigeria has been commended locally and internationally as the most historic transfer of power in world’s most populous black nation with social media playing greater role (The Daily Times, 2015). Although, social media may have its flaws but its power of expediency enables citizens’ political participation possibly easier. It is used in

encouraging and appealing to people through their various social media platforms to go out and register, support candidates and eventually vote on elections day.

All political parties in Nigeria are harnessing the social media to campaign and advance their messages and manifestoes to supporters including advertising, mobilising and organising in all the states of the federation and fundraising (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and especially x are being used to let voters know how each party or particular candidate feel about important national issues ranging from security to power. Hence, social media have become even more powerful for campaigns elections than how it was utilised during the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections (Olusola, 2023). Subsequently, electorates who are not sure of whom to vote for, began to change their minds and conscience on voting a particular party or candidate based on the political discourse through the public sphere emanated from social media (Maradun et al., 2021).

2.5 Nigerian Female Activists' Use of Media

Female activists and their movements need the media to popularise their agenda. Activism refers to the intense activities of person or group for the purpose of gaining certain values that are laden with social, economic and political flavours. From the point of view of political behaviour, activism often manifest in anti-establishment or radical group actions such as protests, demonstrations, rallies and strike (Eesuola, 2017; Aonover et al., 2024).

A female activist's movement consists an organised group of women to promote or to challenge certain social issues around them while demanding a transformation that will remove gender disparity. Women's activists' movements usually operate using several methods, like letter writing, demonstrations and solidarity movements, to air their grievances. However, their demands may also take some other forms including protests which sometimes lead to violence. (Dagunduro, 2020).

Since Nigerian women's activism has become driven by international donor, it has been labeled feminism (Dagunduro & Adenugba, 2020). Women activism in Nigeria has been around and active long before the recent stream of feminism that exists in Nigeria today, as far back as the pre-colonial and pre-independence periods. Female activism in Nigeria is not limited to groups alone, significant efforts have also been put up by individual women who made history in their activism. Notable among these women are Queen Amina of Zazzau, Efunsetan Aniwura and Ebele Ejaunu.

Women's activism in Nigeria took a major swerve during the independence period with women becoming more politically conscious, a higher representation of women in the public sphere and women's participation in political affiliations. These women gained so much popularity using the contemporary media of those days like indigenous radio, indigenous newspapers, letter writing and so on. The contemporary period of post-independence Nigeria witnessed the upsurge of more organised female activism addressing past and current issues that perturb the female welfare. Ironically, their organisational strategies have not been yielding corresponding effects on various social and cultural menaces that surround the existence of female folks in the country (Arowolo, & Aluko, 2010).

The continued resistance of colonial policies by Nigerian women ushered in different activist groups for women's emancipation, equality and empowerment, with the National Women's Union (NWU) of 1947 as the first female activists' group. The leading figures of the union were Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo, these two figures were among the

nationalists that fought for Nigeria's independence. This group brought about other women's activist groups in the country; as such an umbrella for women's organisations across Nigeria was formed in 1959 with the name National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS).

At post-independence, Women in Nigeria (WIN), was formed in 1982, Better Life for Rural Women was formed in 1987, Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) founded in 1995, Women Arise for Change Initiative was established in 2003, Women for Change Initiative initiated by the former first lady, by Dame Patience Jonathan in 2010, Female in Nigeria (FIN) founded in 2015 and so on. These groups expressed their grievances using the indigenous radio stations, newspapers and sometimes writing letters to the authority, also, through riots.

With the advent of social media, female activists now channeled the public sphere virtually in promoting their movements and agendas, in the 2023 Presidential elections, some of these activists embraced different political parties and candidates thereby, serving as agents of political communication. The *#Obidientmovement*, *#Batist* and *#Atikulated* were made popular by these female activists and their male folks.

2.6 Social Media and Political Communication

In recent years, social media are said to have an impact on the public discourse and communication in the society (Stieglitz, 2014). In particular, social media are increasingly used in political context. More recently, microblogging services e.g. x and social networking sites like Facebook are believed to have the potential for increasing political participation. x is an ideal platform for users to spread not only information in general but also political opinions publicly through their networks. Political parties, political foundations have also begun to use Facebook pages or groups for the purpose of entering into direct dialogues with citizens and encouraging more political discourse. Social media have arguably enhanced the communication process in a wide range of human endeavours and the political environment, no doubt are experiencing a great deal of the impact of the social media phenomenon (Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2012; Aondover et al., 2022).

However, the growing recognition and utilisation of social media and their application in the political process underscore the role which social media have assumed in the world today. In Nigeria for instance, the unwholesomeness reliance on godfatherism is gradually giving way to online tactical crafting and packaging of persuasive messages by campaign managers and political parties with an aim to consciously persuade Nigerian voters to vote in their candidates (Adeiza, 2016; Aondover et al., 2024).

According to Dunu & Uzochukwu (2018), the tremendous influence of the new media technologies have definitely furnished the communication industry with revolutionary positive changes unprecedented. According to them, Nigeria like other countries of the world has also benefited in terms of improved technology output, variety offerings, improved resources and quality output occasioned by social media. This art and science of information management through the social media seems to be gaining more grounds in our political landscape. Thus, political advertising is today carried online (Dantani, Wika & Maigari, 2017). The election campaign that saw President Goodluck Jonathan in 2011 was characterised by effective and efficient information management, by his ability to use online platforms to attract the electorates. He adopted an online information skill in his 2011 presidential election campaigns and actually became the first in Nigeria to use such strategy that had increasingly made an inroad into our electoral process and in the overall political environment (Olusola, 2023).

Also, the three most popular political parties in the 2023 Presidential elections made use of social media a great deal. The Presidential candidate of the All-Progressive Congress who emerged the winner, had a particular political term coined from his name, his followers were known to be “*Batified*”, coined from Bola Ahmed Tinubu on social media. The People’s Democratic Party Presidential aspirants followers were known to be “*Atikulated*”, a term coined from his name Atiku Abubakar and the Labour Party Presidential aspirants’ followers were the *obidients* movement coined from his name Peter Obi. All these activities enhanced the popularity of the candidates through the social media (Nweke, 2023).

2.7 Social Media Influencers

The social media influencer concept was first used in the field of marketing to refer to influential social media users who serve as brand advocates on social media. Influencer content may be framed as testimonial advertising where they play the role of a potential buyer themselves, or they may be third parties (Oreoluwa et al., 2024). These third parties exist either in the supply chain (retailers, manufacturers, etc.) or may be so-called value-added influencers (such as journalists, academics, industry analysts, professional advisers, and so on (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

Although most of the literature on social media influencers focuses on marketing, it is important to note that the idea is embedded in the communication classic, *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld & Katz) a 1940 study on political communication that was also known as two-step flow theory which claims that the majority of people are influenced by secondhand information and opinion leaders. This shows the extent to which concepts, techniques or strategies can be adopted from field of marketing and applied to political communication and vice versa. Therefore, social media influencer is a concept shared by both marketing and political communication hence the concept of political marketing(Vitalis et al., 2023).

In the field of political communication, social media influencers simply refer to opinion leaders who exert their influence on public opinion formation through social media discussions on political issues and debates. It has become an emerging concept since politicians began to use social media tools for their political campaigns. Armstrong & Moulitsas (2006) assert that independent political bloggers that comment on day-to-day news, command more readership than traditional media. The initial public derision heaped by traditional media entities on these independent bloggers unaffiliated with traditional, professional newsrooms continues to wane as these bloggers gain respect among Web readers. Brown & Hayes, (2008) state that influencers do not force themselves upon an audience; they are an “opt-in” network. Their audience chooses to follow their blog or social media handle. Thus, their audience is engaged and is there, to hear about the topic being discussed. Hence, the need for a contextual fit.

However, Keller and Berry (2003) propose five attributes of influencers:

1. Activists: influencers get involved, with their communities, political movements, charities, they are also public campaigners and so on
2. Connected: influencers have large social networks
3. Impact: influencers are looked up to and are trusted by others
4. Active minds: influencers have multiple and diverse interests
5. Trendsetters: influencers tend to be early adopters (or leavers) in markets

Abugu (2016) cited Barry (2014) identifies four types of influencers on social media to include:

- a. Educators - Thrive on helpfulness and insightfulness
- b. Coaches - Thrive on helpfulness and engagement
- c. Entertainers - Thrive on engagement and inspiration

d. Charismatics - Thrive on insightfulness and inspiration

In Nigeria, social media influencers are identified and grouped along similar line. (Nweke, 2023). There are different categories of social media influencers in Nigeria. The categories include; Marketing, Human Right Activists, Entertainment/Celebrities, Politics, Charismatic, etc. However, since the focus of this is on political campaign, our attention will be on female activists' influencers only.

In rating top political social media influencers in Nigeria, most analysts concentrate more on the number of followers such individuals have on their account rather than the abilities of such influencers to determine the scope and focus of discussions on all subjects pertaining to politics or for a social movement on x, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. (Nweke, 2023). Prior to the 2023 General Election, NewsWireNGR published an article titled "NewsWireNGR Presents Influencers of the Nigerian x Handles the Politicians Are After For 2023 Elections". The article ranked Nigerian social media influencers in areas of politics and political public opinion formation in what most analysts considered as the most objective ranking (Olusola, 2023).

The medium used several criteria in its selection and it was not necessarily based on number of followers but on the ability of such overloads to influence the direction of discussion and opinion in different social media platforms from the x, Blogospheres, Facebook and WhatsApp. For the purpose of this study, fifteen female activists' influencers who used social media for 2023 Presidential Elections were selected, five were selected purposively and snowball sampling was adopted to identify the other ten, due to their large number of followers and engagements. These sampled influencers were interviewed on the issues encountered while using social media.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This section of work finds its strength on Uses and Gratification theory and Patriarchy hegemony Theory. These two theories have immediate relevance to this study with each theory expatiating vividly the peculiarity of different angles to the study hence, two theories

2.9 Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification theory was propounded by Elihu Katz in 1970. Katz with his two colleagues, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch continued to expand the idea. The theorists argue that individual users will continue to be engaged with social networking sites if their gratifications and needs are fulfilled by such tools. The uses and gratification theory which could also be called "utility theory" seeks to explain what function a particular kind of media content serves in a particular circumstance (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). Uses and gratification theory seeks to answer the question, what do the people do to the media? Who uses which content from the media and under what conditions and for what reason?

According to Asemah & Edegoh (2012), the theory talks about reciprocal gesture between the media and the media consumers. The media is useful to the society and the society is also useful to the media; hence, it is called uses and gratification theory. The theory is simply concerned with how people use the media for gratification of their needs. It propounds the fact that people choose what they want to expose themselves to.

Okorie & Namtira (2017) state that the Uses & Gratification arose originally in the 1940s and underwent a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. The approach springs from a functionalist

paradigm in the social sciences. It presents the use of media in terms of the gratification of social or psychological needs of the individual. The mass media compete with other sources of gratification, but gratifications can be obtained from a medium's content (e.g. Watching a specific programme), from familiarity with a genre within the medium (e.g. watching soap operas), from general exposure to the medium (e.g. watching TV), and from the social context in which it is used (e.g. watching TV with the family). U & G theorists argue that people's needs influence how they use and respond to a medium.

This theory is related to this study because it examines how people use the media and the gratification they seek and derive from the media. Female activists' make use of social media for different purposes including political campaign, public campaign, depending on the need. Uses and gratification theory seeks to answer the question, what do the people do to the media? Who uses which content from the media and under what conditions and for what reason?

Uses and gratification theory helps to divert from other media effect theories that question "what does media do to people? It helps to explain what do people do with media? The theory postulates that media is a highly available product and the audiences are the consumers of the same product. The people are not just passive receiver of message but active influencer to message effects, this is because they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media message on the basic of their need and believe. The uses and gratification theory take a more humanistic approach to looking at media use; it assumes that media consumers have free will to decide just as how Nigerian female activists' engaged the usage of social media that gratified the need for women's advocacy for political gender equity.

2.10 Patriarchy Hegemony

Patriarchy hegemony is a complex system approved by society by placing men in a central position (Adhetia, Agus & Yusro, 2023). Men enjoy patriarchy as it has benefited them in household chores, salary differences and the state position. Hegemony is the leadership and supremacy of a social class by using ideological influences agreed upon by certain social classes or the society.

Patriarchy hegemony refers to the dominance of patriarchal values and structures in society where male authority and power are normalised and perpetuated. This concept rooted in the work of theorists like Antonio Gramsci, highlights how cultural norms, institutions and social practices work together to maintain male supremacy and reinforce gender inequalities. Overall, patriarchal hegemony describes a system where male dominance is maintained not just through overt oppression but through subtler often accepted social practices and norms. Just like this practices have affected women participation in politics overtime in Nigeria, especially, the marginalisation of women party executives nominees and other political seats.

III. Research Methods

This study conducted in-depth interviews using interview guide with the selection of fifteen female activists who engaged in Presidential political campaigns on social media, five selected purposively while snowball sampling were adopted in identifying other ten members of the group to explore the challenges encountered while engaging social media for 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. To systematically analyse the data gathered from these interviews, a thematic analysis approach was employed. This method enabled the identification and presentation of key themes and sub-themes, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, NVivo 14 software was utilised to

generate graphical models that visually represented the in-depth interviewee ' actual words and insights. IDI FA1 represents Indepth Interviewee Female Activist 1 -15 in that order.

IV. Results and Discussion

The findings on the investigation of the challenges faced by female activists in the usage of social media for political engagement in Nigeria’s 2023 presidential election. The responses highlight a range of difficulties, from cyberbullying to technical issues. These are categorised into specific sub-themes for a clearer understanding of the obstacles encountered.

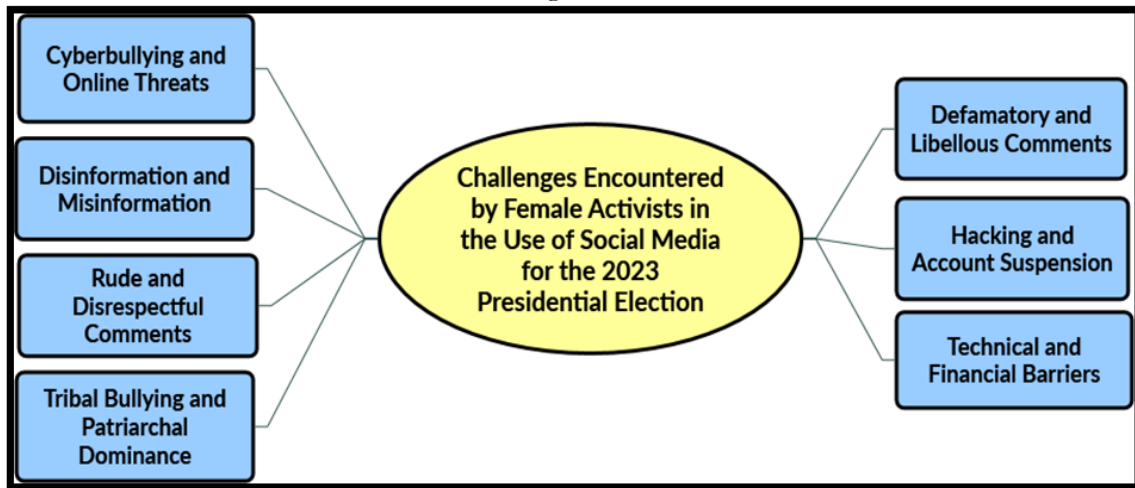


Figure 5.1 Challenges encountered by female activists in the use of social media for the 2023 presidential election.

Source: Researcher’s Indepth Interview, 2024

4.1 Cyberbullying and Online Threats

One of the most prominent challenges reported by several respondents was cyber bully and intimidation from opposing parties or individuals online. IDI. FA1 highlighted the prevalence of cyber threats, stating, "Cyberbullying was a major challenge experienced by female activists, observed cyber threats, bullying and all forms of intimidation when using social media." This reflects the hostile digital environment female activists often face, especially when engaging in political discourse.

Similarly, IDI. FA9 experienced cyberstalking and backlashing from users supporting opposing candidates, stating, "There was a lot of back lashing between me and other social media users supporting opposing candidates." This highlights how activists like IDI. FA1 and IDI. FA9 are frequently targets of aggressive online behaviour.

The responses from IDI. FA1 and IDI. FA9 suggest that cyber bully and online threats were significant challenges during the election. These forms of intimidation aimed to silence female activists or deter their engagement, demonstrating the toxic nature of online political spaces.

4.2 Defamatory and Libelous Comments

Another serious challenge was the spread of defamatory or slanderous comments, as experienced by IDI. FA2. She shared, "I encountered so many defamatory allegations, libelous and slanderous statements. Someone even called to rain curses on me, on top of election

matters." This shows how online platforms became arenas for personal attacks, rather than constructive political debates.

IDI. FA3 faced legal action due to her social media activities, explaining, "I was sued due to election brouhaha for writing a seditious statement. Some opposing party lawyers came to my house claiming I incited public uproar." This highlights the real-world legal repercussions some activists faced due to their online political engagement.

Defamatory and libelous comments, along with threats of legal action, posed substantial obstacles for female activists like IDI. FA2 and IDI. FA3. These challenges aimed to discredit them and create a sense of vulnerability in their political participation.

4.3 Tribal Bullying and Patriarchal Dominance

The intersection of tribalism and patriarchy was also identified as a challenge by some respondents. IDI. FA10 reported experiencing tribal bullying, stating, "The opposing parties' supporters were abusing me for not supporting my tribal man. They often used my tribal language to abuse me online." This points to the way political differences were linked to tribal loyalty, turning social media into a platform for tribal attacks.

Similarly, IDI. FA8 noted the patriarchal dominance she faced, stating, "I faced war against feminism day in and day out during the electioneering. The patriarchy statements and men dominating the political space are a challenge for me." This reflects how gender and political activism intersected with traditional patriarchal norms.

Tribal bullying and patriarchal dominance were prominent barriers for activists like IDI. FA10 and IDI. FA8, who were confronted with cultural and gender-based discrimination. These obstacles not only discouraged women from participating but also reinforced harmful societal norms.

4.4 Technical and Financial Barriers

In addition to social challenges, technical and financial barriers were common. IDI. FA6 reported facing network issues, stating, "I faced challenges when using social media for the 2023 presidential election, sometimes the network signal was bad in my area." This demonstrates how infrastructure problems can hinder digital activism, particularly in areas with poor internet connectivity.

IDI. FA7 added that subscription costs were another challenge, explaining, "Subscription cost during the political engagement for the election went high. I was always subscribing at every point in time so as not to lose touch with my followers." This highlights how the financial burden of maintaining a social media presence during the election became a challenge for activists.

Technical barriers like poor network signals and high subscription costs made it difficult for some activists, such as IDI. FA6 and IDI. FA7, to maintain their social media engagement consistently. These infrastructural limitations can impede the effectiveness of digital activism.

4.5 Disinformation and Misinformation

Several activists faced challenges related to the spread of disinformation. IDI. FA11 encountered deceitful content aimed at discrediting her candidate, stating, "I was faced with disinformation, with deceitful contents to discredit my supported candidates, and I also gave it to

them back-to-back, especially the Obi-dunce." The term "Obi-dunce" reflects the derogatory comments used in political discourse, showing how disinformation can manipulate narratives.

Disinformation played a significant role in the challenges faced by activists like IDI. FA11, where false or misleading content was used to undermine the credibility of candidates and stoke political tensions. This reflects the broader issue of fake news on social media platforms during the election period.

4.6 Rude and Disrespectful Comments

The issue of rude and disrespectful comments was frequently mentioned. IDI. FA12 pointed out, "They don't even care who is on the other side. They talked as if they were referring to their mates, so rude and disrespectful." IDI. FA13 similarly mentioned, "I was faced with a lot of dragging during the 2023 presidential election. They dragged me, and I also dragged nonsense out of them."

This reflects the combative nature of online interactions, where female activists were often subjected to disrespectful language and hostile exchanges.

The challenges of rude and disrespectful comments underscore the toxic online culture that female activists had to navigate. These interactions reflect the larger issues of disrespect and the diminished value placed on women's voices in political spaces.

4.7 Hacking and Account Suspension

One respondent, IDI. FA15, faced hacking issues, noting, "My x account was suspended for some time and later reopened during the 2023 presidential electioneering." This illustrates how some activists had their digital platforms compromised, which could disrupt their ability to engage in political discourse.

The hacking of accounts, as experienced by IDI. FA15, highlights the vulnerability of digital platforms. Activists faced threats not only from online users but also from cyber attacks aimed at silencing them or limiting their digital reach.

The findings from the research question reveal that female activists encountered a broad range of challenges while using social media during the 2023 presidential election. Generally, the study investigates the extent of the multifaceted difficulties that female activists encountered, ranging from cyber security issues to social and cultural barriers, in their efforts to engage in political discourse on social media during the 2023 election.

V. Conclusion

This study, challenges of female activists' and the use of social media for 2023 presidential election in Nigeria exposes the menace behind this slow progress about increased number of women in political and other leadership positions, revealing the reality of the female activists neglecting feminism agenda which states equal rights for all gender? They rarely promote the advocacy due to several barriers during engagement in their various virtual communities. They were hindered by multifaceted difficulties, affecting the promotion of gender equity in political space amongst women which would have boosted their stimuli for more women inclusion in political seats for 2023 election. Even if the nation failed to attain 35% affirmative action by UNWomenReport, 2023 and National Gender Policy, 2023, in this era, she should at least move

from 8.6% as it were to a commendable percentage with female activists at the forefront for gender equity advocacy.

In addition, the Nigerian female activists engaged social media a great deal for 2023 presidential election but not using it in gratifying the need against gender disparity in political space. They were faced with online challenges affecting their primary roles as feminism agenda and became a tool in the hand of political actors.

Their feeble reality in this misdemeanor will no doubt slow down the agitation for increased in number of women in political seats. Their contents and posts ought to channel this cause; this would have been a sign of advocacy for awareness creation in the psyche of Nigerian women in general. Dow and Condit (2005), assert, to be considered feminist, theories or other scholarship should be focused on making a contribution to the larger goal of justice in relation to gender.

Recommendations

The study suggests that there is a need for a more concerted effort in encouraging the use of social media by Nigerian female activists during electioneering, law enforcement agencies should implement the law against cyber bullying, tribal-bullying, disinformation, seditions and the likes. The cybercrime Act, 2015 should be implemented by the government against any offenders which will surely serve as a deterrents to offenders of the law.

More so, Nigerian female activists should be encouraged to embrace political leadership by engaging women in Government empowerment to cushion the effects of technical and financial barriers during electioneering. This acts build up growth in promoting sustainable development goal 5, maintaining gender equity and the United Nations Affirmative Actions of atleast 35% women representatives for her member states across the globe.

National Assembly should also initiate policies through the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), a political quota system of the number of female to male in party executives appointive and elective positions at the party level and even in primary election in alignment with the United Nations directives for her member states.

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