Social Media and Women's Political Advancement in Selected Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The crux of this study is to assess the role of social media in advancing women's political participation in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study employed a quantitative research method, collecting data from 120 respondents in the Karu, Keffi, Lafia, and Akwanga LGAs. It was anchored on Mobilization Theory. Findings revealed that social media has been utilized to enhance women's political awareness, amplify their campaigns, positively influence voting attitudes, and evaluate their performance within political parties. It has provided a platform for candidate selection, increased women's participation in political activities, and served as a channel for advocating political equality. However, the use of social media for women's political advancement faces challenges, including hate campaigns against female politicians and bullying of female political aspirants and candidates. The study concluded that while social media has transformed the political landscape for women, significant constraints remain. It recommended that women explore the advantages of social media to further their political careers.

Keywords: *Advancement, communication, politics, social media, women.*

Introduction

The innovation of social media, according to Women in Parliaments Global Forum, Facebook and the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy of the Harvard Kennedy School (2016), has changed the communications domain of all sectors, with the political arena one of the most to benefit from this communication breakthrough invention. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, YouTube,

Instagram, Quora, Digg, Reddit, Clubhouse, Flickr, Photobucket, to mention but a few have altered the way political actors interact with the people they govern, and the other way round (Women in Parliaments Global Forum, Facebook and the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy of the Harvard Kennedy School, 2016). The online communication era is a time that comes with digital communication platforms that can assist the female gender to be at par with their male counterparts in political activities. This was not completely possible with the conventional media due to some level of biases prevalence in the society, but the innovation of social media seems to have been bridging this gap because the social media are available for equal use by both men and women.

Data from Socialbakers (2020), cited in Nkoa et al. (2023), indicates that women constitute the majority on social media, with 58% of Instagram followers and 56.7% of Facebook followers being female. Social communication platforms such as Facebook, microblogs like X, and video-sharing sites like YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok have enabled women to advance their political ambitions. Kaur and Verma (2018) concluded in their study that social media was the primary source of information about political activities during the 2017 Legislative Assembly Elections in Punjab for both males and females, with males showing the highest engagement. Casteltrione (2016) agrees that social media provides female politicians, aspirants, and candidates the opportunity to present themselves and the policies they advocate for. Due to its low cost and the personal initiative that social media enables, it serves as an equalizer for women in political advancement, who have previously been at a disadvantage (Women in Parliaments Global Forum, Facebook, and the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics, and Public Policy of the Harvard Kennedy School, 2016). A document released by the European Parliament in 2013 affirms that online communication platforms can positively influence women's empowerment by allowing them to network with other women, create

online personas that build confidence, appeal to peers through relevant styles and issues, and provide alternative power bases that may attract mainstream politicians.

However, some studies have proved that the innovation of social media is negatively affecting women political activities as they are used to harass, bully and condemn their political activities (Fardouly et al, 2015; Tamplin et al, 2018; Szymanski, 2022). Therefore, the focus of this study is to assess social media and women political advancement in select Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars and organisations have conducted studies on social media and women political advancement and participation both in Nigeria and outside the country (Nnabuife, Nwolu & Ugochukwu, 2022; Abdu et al, 2018; European Parliament; 2013; Kaur & Singh, 2022). For instance, the study of Nnabuife et al dwelled on Intersection of facebook usage and women participation in politics. That of Abdul (2018) focused on exposure to facebook and its influence on women's political participation in Bauchi State, Nigeria. European Parliament (2013) investigated Women in decision-making: The role of the new media for increased political participation. While the study of Kaur and Singh (2022) was on social media inclusion and political participation of women in Nawanshahr Block of S.B.S Nagar District, Punjab. However, none of these studies has focused specifically on social media and women political advancement in Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga LGAs of Nasarawa State in 2024. This is the gap in knowledge that this study bridged.

Objectives of the Study
 i. Find out the types of social media used for women political advancement in Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga LGAs of Nasarawa State.

ii.   Ascertain the extent of women's use of social media for political advancement in Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga LGAs of Nasarawa State.

iii. Explore whether social media improve women's political advancement in Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga LGAs of Nasarawa State.

iv.   Assess the challenges of the use of social media for women political advancement in Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga LGAs of Nasarawa State.

Review of Literature
Conceptual Clarifications
Social Media
Social media are systems of networks and applications that use the Internet to create a website which is then linked through an electronic social system with other members who have the same concerns (Sánchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015). Social media are new forms of media that involve interactive participation. Social media is referred to a collection of web-based tools that enable the production and sharing of user-generated content, it builds on the conceptual and technological underpinnings of web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Apuke (2019) affirms that social media have expanded the horizon of communication and made the world smaller and communication process more rapid.

Women Political Advancement
In the first instance, the process of improving the institutions, attitudes and values that make up a society's or country's political system is known as political advancement (Okon, 2018). Okon and Akpakpan (2018) refer to political advancement as is a crucial part of any process or development that includes a greater degree of political structure stabilisation, specialisation, and differentiation as well as a greater degree of secularisation of political culture. Political advancement is concerned with the ability of the political structure to meet the evolving

needs of the populace (Park, 1984). Stated differently, the political advancement focuses on enhancing the institutions, attitudes and values that comprise a society's political development. Its main goal is to improve the people well-being by making appropriate use of natural and human resources and/or by advancing a country's social, political, cultural and economic institutions.

Therefore, women political advancement as relates to this study refers to the participant of women in political activities in Nigeria due to the open space characteristics of social media platforms. It Equally means the improved number of Nigerian women in politics as result of the invention of social media that allows them to form political discussion groups on either WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and the likes.

Social Media and the Female Gender Political Advancement
A new era in public mobilisation and response has been ushered in by the development of the Internet and corresponding advances in technology. Social media has shown to be an effective tool for raising public awareness of women's rights issues, inspiring global moves, and pressuring decision-makers to increase their commitments to gender equality (Loiseau and Nowacka 2015). Loiseau et al (2015) further contend that social media has the worldwide potential to reduce the gender gap in political involvement, pointing to recent examples from Turkey and India as evidence of how social media can cut through the barriers that frequently divide grassroots women's activism from the processes involved in formulating public policy. Social media has the power to advance women's rights and gender equality.

According to Shirky (2011) and (Loiseau and Nowacka 2015), social media has changed the way people interact and share their concerns with government authorities, traditional settings and how information disseminated across the globe. They argue that presently, through the innovation of the Internet communication platforms like social media, anyone can share ideas and content that affect women progress with a

worldwide audience, unlike the mainstream media. Women activists and supporters around the world have been able to communicate and share what they have, thanks to social media avenues like WhatsApp, Face, X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and the likes, as shown during the Arab Spring (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

The unparalleled political and awareness-raising potential of social media has also been leveraged by women's political rights activism. Participants in the Wikigender online discussion emphasised the value of social media in enabling gender activities to connect at a minimal cost both domestically and internationally. A younger generation of activists has been drawn to the rise of female bloggers in particular, and they are an important target audience for breaking down stereotypes and promoting gender equality (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015). This accounts for why the new media are increasingly being deployed to sensitise and galvanise women on political activities.

Challenges of the Use of Social Media for Women Political Advancement: An Overview

The female gender is the most susceptible to virtual violence like online harassment (Insightsia, 2024). Increased attention of women on social media often makes them the target of oppressive activities, this results in gendered barriers for women online as in public places. Social media has been used by harassers all in the name of making sure that women voices are not heard so as not to break the male dominated social norms. Data from the Economist Intelligence Unit, 4, 500 women representing 85% in 45 countries face cyber attacks (Meco & MacKay, 2022). Women who are into political activities are often targeted on the cyber space through negative things like hate speeches against them, hostility and disinformation, with stories and images that are not factual being circulated all in an attempt to depict them as stupid, unreliable and excessively sexual (Meco & MacKay, 2022). For instance, a study by Pew Research Centre (2019) revealed that more than 42% of women in legislative arms of governments across the globe encounter

abuses and gendered disinformation on social media. Another investigation by Fundacion Multitudes (2021) in Chile found that women who are into political activities are targets of hate and gendered disinformation that, notwithstanding its demoralising personal political implications, they are starting to see it as an inevitable consequence of political engagement.

Furthermore, Caeiro and Tchintian (2021) posit that cyber despotism, persecution, threat, and ridiculing of women through written messages, phone calls, and releasing of offensive pictures and videos over social media are various hindrances to women's full enjoyment of their rights online. Felle (2023) concurs that women political actors usually encounter constant threats to their activities on various online communication platforms. A report given by North Atlantic Trade Organisation (NATO) in 2021 indicated that female serving in Finish government faced online attacks on X, with terms such as lipstick government', 'feminist quintet' and 'tampax' used to the female ministers. Cyber harassment against female politicians happen via the deployment of the social media avenues and are intended to undermine women's political legitimacy for reasons associated with their gender. Another report claimed that female gender in politics are frequently under attack with intimidation, bullying, hate speech, and other forms of violence and abuse online, and the effect of this act is that women stop from taking part in political activities (National Democratic Institute, 2022).

Empirical Literature

Kaur and Singh (2022) conducted a study on "Social Media Inclusion and Political Participation of Women in Nawanshahr Block of S.B.S Nagar District, Punjab". The study sourced for data from both primary and secondary sources. The research established that 95.4% of those who participated in the study used different social media platforms, but most of them neither visited the website of any political party nor shared or liked any political information. Data equally revealed that

most of the female students within the age categories of 15-29 years made use of these online communication platforms and engage in online political activities. 35.5% of female respondents do not have any interest in politics. The study, therefore, concluded that social media was an effective instrument to gauge the performance of female political development. The study, thus suggested that women should continue to explore the advantages offer by social media to fight for equal space in the political arena.

Another study was the one conducted by Alodat et al (2023) on "Social Media Platforms and Political Participation: A Study of Jordanian Youth Engagement". The study employed the survey research method. The results indicated that social media has a positive and significant influence on political involvement. It was further found that sexual category played key role in moderating the effect on the relationship between social media employment and engagement in political activities. Data equally showed that, gender positively moderates the effect of the regularity of social media use on political activities, while gender negatively moderates the effect of the purpose of social media usage on political participation. The study concluded that social media can be a dominant platform for motivating young minds to participate in political activities, but its effects are not always consistent and may depend on a number of factors, including gender. It was advocated that political actors and activists should consider how social media might engage young people in political action and come up with initiatives that primarily target particular groups based on their gender and purpose and rate of the use of social media.

Nnabuife, Nwolu and Ugochukwu (2022) focused on "Intersection of Facebook Usage and Women Participation in Politics". The researchers employed the use of the survey research design to obtain information from the respondents. The study was anchored on the technological determinism theory and framing theory. Finding of the study revealed that women make use of social media platforms. Result of the research

further showed that Igboist Page on Facebook do motivate women to take part in political dealings. The study concluded that social media platforms such as Facebook are good means for women to equal their male counterparts in political participation. The research advocated that the social media platform "Igboist Group" should increase the level of its education, enlightenment and sensitisation of its female gender as this will lead to more women involvement in politics. Also, women should ensure that the political awareness gained from "Igboist Group" translates to improved active participation in politics at various levels. Lastly, relevant government and Non-Governmental Organisations should deepen their efforts in enlightening women to take part in political activities by massively taping the huge advantage offer by the social media and other online platforms.

In the same vein, Abdu, Al-Sadique, Halilu and Aliyu (2018) explored "Women Exposure to Facebook and Its Influence to their Political Participation in Bauchi State, Nigeria". The study employed multiple regression analysis to analyze the relationship between Facebook use, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality, political interest and offline political participation among the women. Results of the study revealed that Facebook use, interactivity with political figures, perceived Facebook information quality and political interest significantly correlated with women's offline political participation. The study further found that social media allowed women who are marginalised in political activities to interact with friends and political figures about political issues, share and express their opinions, which encouraged them to vote or participate in political party activities.

Theoretical Framework
The study is supported by the Mobilisation Theory. Although this theory is not spefically a social media theory, but it has been used to examine or analyse how social media influences modern activism and collective actions. Thus, according to this theory in line with the focus

of this study, social media can be a powerful instrument for promoting political engagement (Dunu and Uzochukwu 2015). The theory emphasises that social media provides political activities with a remarkable opportunity to connect with their supporters and disseminate information about political activities and initiatives (Casteltrione 2016). Consequently, the theory states that people can be persuaded to take part in a political activity that otherwise they might have heard about them. Social media can be used in the context of this study to connect women in Nasarawa State, Nigeria with women political ideologies that align with their own and to spread the their political engagements such as rallies, protests, campaigns, meetings, workshops, to mention but a few (Mandrysz 2016). So, by creating a sense of community and shared purpose, social media can inspire women to get involved in politics. Social media platforms include tools that can make it easier to communicate and share ideas. Furthermore, tools like liking, sharing, and commenting on Facebook postings, for instance, may be helpful for expressing support or opposition to a particular political stance or contentious subject.

As relates to the thrust of this research, the Mobilisation Theory because it explains how social movements organise, gather resources and take collective action to achieve their goals (women advancement) by emphasising resources, political opportunities, framing, networking and strategies.
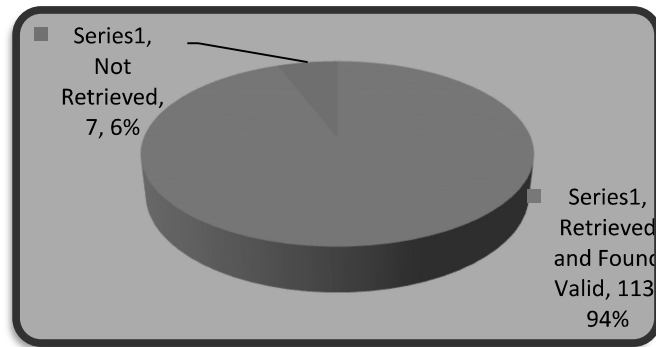
Methodology
The study made use of quantitative research method. Quantitative research refers to the process of collecting and analysing numerical data to describe, predict or control variables (Phandari, 2020).
The study population covered 30 adult women that have knowledge of the use of social media for political activities in each of the studied local government areas (Karu, Keffi, Lafia and Akwanga). The sample size for the study is therefore 120. The adoption of purposive sampling
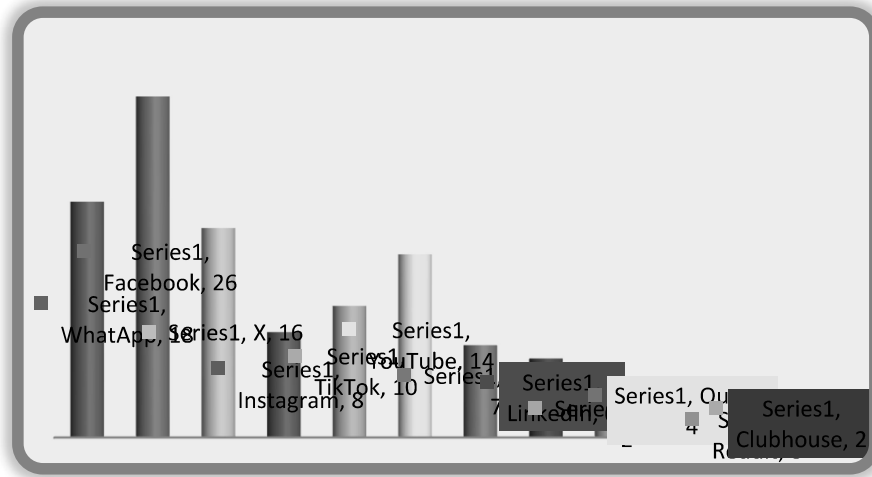
method was used in the selection of adult population with the understanding that they would possess the requisite cognitive capacity to give answer to the research questions. Data was presented through the use of frequency and percentage charts, and mean deviation calculations. Opinions were measured using the Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D) scale.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The researchers distributed a total of 120 copies of questionnaire and retrieved 113, and found valid for analysis. Percentage representation of this is as shown in the Figure 1 below.
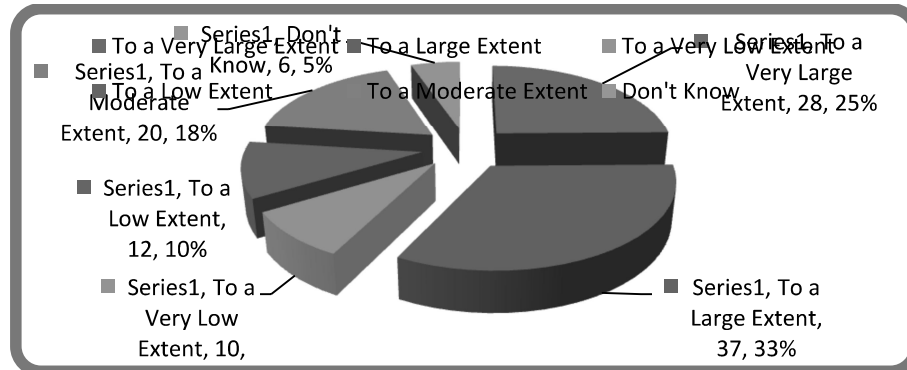

Figure 1: Response Rate Analysis

Series1, Facebook, 26
Series1, WhatApp, 18
Series1, X, 16
Series1, YouTube, 14
Series1, TikTok, 10
Series1, Instagram, 8
Series1, LinkedIn, 7
Series1, Clubhouse, 2

Figure 2: Types of Social Media Used for Women Political Advancement

The rate of social media use among the respondents is an indication that these digital communication platforms have been found useful for the women to advance their political career.

To a Very Large Extent
To a Large Extent
To a Very Low Extent
To a Moderate Extent
Don't Know
To a Low Extent

Series1, Don't Know, 6, 5%
Series1, To a Moderate Extent, 20, 18%
Series1, To a Very Large Extent, 28, 25%
Series1, To a Low Extent, 12, 10%
Series1, To a Very Low Extent, 10,
Series1, To a Large Extent, 37, 33%

Figure 3: Extent of Women's Use of Social Media for Political Advancement

Findings in the Figure above can be inferred that the employment of social media for women political development in Nasarawa and Plateau States, Nigeria is growing.

Table 1: Impact of Social Media on Women Political Advancement

Option	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Rating	Decision
Social media positively affects women's political consciousness	86	27	0	0	0	4.7	Accepted
Women's political involvement is influenced by the use of social media in political campaigns	80	33	0	0	0	4.7	Accepted
Women voting attitude is influenced by social media	98	15	0	0	0	4.8	Rejected
Social media can act as a tool to gauge the performance of political women in parties	91	22	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted
Social media has impacted the selection of suitable female political candidates	94	19	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted
Social media has increased the number of women in politics	74	39	0	0	0	4.6	Accepted
Social media are good means for women to equal their male counterparts in political participation in no distance time	45	54	6	2	6	4.1	Accepted
Social media allows women who are marginalised in political activities to share their	82	31	0	0	0	4.7	Accepted

experiences with other women with a view to coming out strongly next time	

It could be inferred from the Table above that social media has become a veritable platform for amplifying women political development.

Table 2: Challenges of the Use of Social Media for Women Political Advancement

Option	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Rating	Decision
Hate campaigns against female politicians on social media	97	16	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted
Bulling of female political aspirants, candidates and others on social media	105	8	0	0	0	4.9	Accepted
Use of stereotypes contents against women political actors on social media	93	20	0	0	0	4.8	Rejected
Use of propaganda contents against women politicians on social media	95	18	0	0	0	4.8	Accepted
Social media is used by harassers to silence women political activities so that they will not break the misogynistic social norms	103	10	0	0	0	4.9	Accepted

Use of fake profiles to tarnish female politicians thereby hampering women political advancement	107	6	0	0	0	4.9	Accepted

It could be deduced from the finding in the above Table that social media has continued to be a tool in the hands of women political haters, as they used it to malign women political growth.

Discussion of Findings

From the data collected for the study, it was found that the respondents used various social media platforms for their political advancement. These platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Blogs. Others are Quora, LinkedIn, Reddit, Flickr and clubhouse (see Figure 2 above). The dominant of the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, X, YouTube and Instagram may not be unconnected with the fact that they are the most used social media platforms for various activities across the globe. The study of Nnabuife, Nwolu and Ugochukwu (2022) corroborate this finding that women made use of social media platforms.

Findings of the study also revealed that the study population employs social media for their political development to a considerable extent (see Figure 3 above). The research further established that social media has been deployed to increase women political consciousness, amplify their political campaigns, positively influence their voting attitude and to gauge their performance in political parties. It has acted as a good platform for the choice of candidates, increased their numbers in political activities, as well as it acts as an avenue for women to continue to push for political equality and to share their experiences with other women (see Table 1 above). This finding aligns with the study of Abdu, Al-Sadique, Halilu and Aliyu (2018), who found that social media allowed women, who are marginalised in political activities to interact with friends and

political figures about political issues, share and express their opinions, which motivated them to be actively involved in political party activities. Equally in consonant with the finding of this research is that of Kaur and Singh (2022), who concluded that social media was a helpful tool used to measure the performance of female political growth. The result of the study also justifies the adoption of Mobilization Theory, which states social media has the potential to be an influential tool for encouraging participation in political activities. The theory emphasises social media gives political activists the exceptional chance to network with potential supporters and share news about political events and activities.

The research also discovered that the use of social media for women political growth is challenged by numerous factors. These include the deployment of social media for hate campaigns against female politicians, bulling of female political aspirants, candidates, ministers, parliamentarians, among others, and use of stereotypes contents against women political actors. They are also faced with constraints on social media such as use of propaganda contents against them, use of social media by harassers to silence their political activities so that they will not break the institutionalised prejudice of social norms set against them, and use of fake profiles to tarnish their political image (see Table 2 above). Caeiro and Tchintian (2021) finding corroborates that that cyber despotism, persecution, threat, and ridiculing of women through written messages, phone calls, and releasing of offensive pictures and videos over social media are various hindrances to women's full enjoyment of their rights online. Felle (2023) concurs that women political actors usually encounter constant threats to their activities on various online communication platforms.

Conclusion

The focus of this study has been on social media and women political advancement in select Local Government Areas of Nasarawa and Plateau States, Nigeria. Upon analysis of data, the study concludes that

social media has changed the political narrative of women, as it has increased and amplified their voices in political activities. But this is not without challenges, as the women are targeted with hate speech, bullying, use of stereotype and propaganda contents and harassment through social media platforms.

Recommendations

1. Despite of the challenges that women encounter in using social media for their political advancement, they should continue to explore the advantages of social media to deepen their political activities.

2. Owners and operators of social media platforms should come up with stringent measures to either block or adopt other best sanctioning methods on people who promote hate speech, harass, and bully women political activities.

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