USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S SOCIALIZATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined how social media platforms can be used to promote women's political socialization and participation. The study was conceptual in nature so data were collected through a review of existing literature. This position paper is however grounded on the agenda setting theory. The researcher argues that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, among others are effective avenues for political socialization and mobilization. The researcher also argues that for social media platforms to be used for political socialization, two strategies are needed. They are educating women on the political dynamics of Nigeria and testimonials from successful women politicians. Also, the use of social media for political participation can be done through three strategies like launching social media campaigns on the need for women to participate in Nigeria's political space. The second strategy is to use social media platforms to encourage women to support their fellow women and the last strategy is to use different social media platforms to coordinate the political participation of women. It is recommended that future studies should be conducted to examine the influence of social media on political participation among women in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2019 presidential election.

Keywords: Women; Political Socialization; Participation; Social Media;

Introduction

For what has been a close observation and from global perspective, there has been a steady but slow progress in the role played by women in politics because of men's nature and domination, thereby systematically outnumbering the women folk, especially in developing nations in Africa (Esidene, 2009)

This is particularly so because of patriarchal nature of most African societies where women are left to play the second-fiddle through certain cultural sentiments. As a result, there has been a persistent call by women, scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and various international organizations to take action and remove obstacles limiting women's entry into politics as women's participation in the political field is imperative for a lasting development in any human society (European Union, 2011)

There have been agitations from various international and national organizations for government of several countries to implement international instruments aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women (Emakhu, 2013). Nigeria has ratified one international instrument, the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, signed and ratified two regional instruments, the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa (Esidene, 2012) All these were geared towards giving the Nigerian woman a voice.

More so, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the provision of the Convention and Elimination of Discriminatory practices Against Women (CEDAW), provided that 30% of all positions in government be given to women (Ogbogu, 2012), but in spite of this, undertone of gender has hindered Nigerian women.

Women's involvement and participation in politics and electoral process throughout Africa has received so much academic attention (Okome, 1996). This constitutes an integral part of contemporary discourse on democracy and governance. Since the return to democratic path in 1999, the role of women in democratic affairs has assumed a center stage in public debates in Nigeria. However, opinions are still divided on whether the role of women is best suited in home fronts or they can equally engage in economic and political activities like their male counterparts (Luka, 2011).

In support of women's active socialization and participation in democratic and political processes in the society, it has been argued that a gender-blind politics cannot be said to be democratic neither can it be credible because equality is an essential part of a democratic government (Allah-Mensah, 2004). Hence, it has been noted that a state which embodies the culture of democracy is a state that embraces political participation, vibrant civil society, integration of women and minorities at all levels of government, protection and promotion of human rights (Bluwey, 1998).

The exclusion of women in politics has been identified in recent times as one of the major setbacks for economic development. The poor presentation of women in elective positions has been a major social development issue since the beginning of the current democratization process in Nigeria. Politics as a real world phenomenon is gendered (Ake Modupe et. al., 2019). Although different reasons have been advanced as responsible for the marginalization of women in the political space, low political socialization on the part of women is among the leading reasons and it is examined in this study. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to promote women's political participation without looking at their political socialization. Jaime-Castillo and Martínez-Cousinou (2021) aver that socialization is important because it enables individuals and groups to be mentally equipped to participate in the politics of their localities. What this means is that women require political socialization to be able to participate in the politics of their countries.

As a result of the centrality of socialization in promoting political participation, it is essential to consider agents of political socialization. Traditionally, the agents of socialization include the family, peers, religious institutions and mass media (Prot, Anderson, Gentile, Warburton, Saleem, Groves & Brown, 2015). However, social media platforms are important agents of socialization that can assist women to understand the politics of their countries. Through the instrumentality of social media, women will be able to understand terrains of their countries and be guided on how to take the appropriate decisions that will help them to take decisions that will guide them.

Based on the background above, the researcher decided to examine the usefulness of social media as a tool for political socialization and participation. It is hoped that this aspect of research is essential because it will offer empirical evidence that will advance debate on how to promote women participation in politics.

Research Questions
This study sought answers to the following questions:
1. How can social media promote political socialization among women in Nigeria?
2. How can social media promote political participation among women in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework
According to Brook as cited by Ohaja (2003),"Knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. In every discipline there is a body of theories that provides the explanation for observable phenomenon in that field." This position paper is however grounded on the, 'Agenda Setting Theory'. The agenda setting theory was propounded in the 1968 by Maxwell McCombs's and Donald Shaw. They posit that media may not always determine what we think but what to think about. McCombs and Shaw contend that the media may not only tell us what to think about, they also may tell us who and what to think about, and perhaps even what to do about it.

The theorist posits that the media influence affects the order of presentation in news report about news events and issues in the public mind. The import is that the nature of the media's depiction of an issue or an individual determines to a large extent how the public will perceive such an issue or individual. The agenda setting theory assumes that if people are exposed to the same media content they will place importance on the same issues.

Contrary to this assumption, Aboagye (2010), states that people have different frames of reference, and therefore what one may consider important after filtering the issues through his frame of reference, is different from what another person considers as important. He argues that people are therefore not always likely to place importance on the same issues even if they are all exposed to the same media content. Also, the agenda setting theory fails to consider the personal interest of the individual. Any issues considered salient by the mass media and put in the public domain will not necessarily be

considered salient by the public.

This connotes that the audience consciously choose a media product that gives him/her gratification or that addresses his need and it is such issues he may consider to be salient. The agenda setting theory uses a scientific and not humanistic approach and in practical terms it is not able to stand the test of scrutiny since human beings are known to be very unpredictable. Lastly, the effect of agenda setting is weakened for people who have already made up their mind (Aboagye, 2010).

On the other hand, Adams, Harf and Ford (2014), in their review of agenda setting theory, notes that the agenda setting theory has held that the media agenda which refer to those items that the media deem important, is directly linked to the public agenda, or what the public deem important. This means that the stories shown by the media will eventually become important stories in the public's mind as well. Although the media is constantly changing and evolving, the agenda setting theory continues to prove in society today that people use the media in order to shape and frame current issues and stories happening all over the world (Adams, Harf and Ford, 2010).

This study is therefore linked to agenda setting theory as social media is a vital tool of informing and educating the public about the plight of women who are the focus of this study. The role of the mass media; the broadcast, print and online (social) media, in this case cannot be over emphasized, people need information and without communication through the media, information no matter how vital cannot and will not be easily disseminated.

Conceptual and Literature Review
Political Socialization and Participation
Political socialization is the process of internalizing the political norms of one's country. It is an indicator that determines the extent to which one is familiar with the political dynamism of his or her country. The common indicators of political socialization includes; an understanding of a country's political history, its leaders, party system, voting pattern, voting procedure, party dynamics, electoral bodies, campaign guidelines, qualification for verifying, qualification to contest election, legislative system, separation of powers, form of government, tiers of government and their powers as well as limitation, procedure

for registration of political partners among others (Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, 2020)

Political socialization is a very important indicator in measuring the political advancement of a country. For example, in a country where citizens are largely ignorant of the entire political dynamics, it will be very difficult for them to participate. Political participation is a product of political socialization. Political socialization is essential to a nation's collective advancement. Ahmond and Bingham cited in Ofoeze (2017) note that political socialization performs the following functions: shapes and transmits a nation's political culture, maintains society's culture from one generation to the other, has the capacity to transform a population or part of it, enables people to view and experience politics in different dimensions and also see rapid changes of extraordinary events and have the capacity of generating political culture even where none existed.

The above expressed views clearly suggest that political socialization is very instrumental in educating the populace on the appropriate political culture as well as promoting the desired change. Ugwu and Mgbo (2010) argue that since political socialization is the transmission of political culture, it is desirous for it (political culture) to be explained in any discourse on political socialization. Ugwu and Mgbo note "political socialization has been identified as the transmission of proliferation culture from one generation to another. If one must investigate the interplay of politics and socialization in political participation, the best place to commence is from the area of political culture."

Political culture, according to Okeke and Ugwu (2010), consists of the ideas, traditions, assumptions and accepted rules of the game that make up framework within which the political system functions. Medubi (n.d) avers that the political culture of most countries will be aimed at achieving the following: to have a government that provides society's basic needs like shelters, security and food; to ensure the ability of that government to provide these without inconveniencing the citizens excessively; to ensure that the system of governance is acceptable to the generality of the people; to ensure that the peoples' ability to resist what goes against their political interest remains a right. It is

important to add here that even though Medubi appears to have focused more on the objective of political culture. His explanation provides insights into understanding political participation and by extension, political socialization.

Political socialization has remained a problem in Nigeria. Odoemelam and Aisien (2013) affirm that political socialization is yet to reflect what is obtainable in western advanced liberal democracies as seen in the United States of America or Britain. Odoemelam and Aisien attributed this to the fact that political parties have not encouraged public support for basic political structures, institutions and symbols of the political system

Political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. The active involvement of citizens, both male and female, in politics is what gives credence to a political system. It involves commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacity and make their presence felt (Agbaje, 1999 cited in Eze Michael 2016). The contemporary Nigerian political atmosphere has been male-dominated ever since the history of Nigeria politics. Marginalization of women in politics is as old as the Nigerian society and it predates her independence in 1960.

Oluyemi (2016) argues that the under representation of women gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society. Irabor (2011) adds that Nigeria's democratic culture is majorly characterized by ill factors such as marginalization, manipulation, oppression, rigging lawlessness, assassinations, illegalities, violence, male dominated party executives, money politics and innumerable social, cultural and religious issues and all these factors constitute barriers to women aspiring and contesting for elective positions in Nigeria.

This however doesn't mean that women have not fought to contribute their quota to the political and overall development of the nation. Women have been pivotal to the development of Nigeria even before independence. Ngara (2013) avers that Nigeria's pre-colonial atmosphere is replete with the exploit of Queen Amina of Zaria, who led armies to drive out invaders from Zaria; Moremi of Ile-Ife, and others who contributed immensely to the development of their society and left a footprint on the sand of history. Eze-Michael (2016) also notes that even before Nigeria gained

independence in 1960, women have been involved in politics.

For instance, there were movements led by great women such as Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Margret Ekpo, Janet Nwokedi, etc., that questioned the colonial Masters' policies towards the natives especially as it related to women. The 'Egba Women's Riot' in the West in 1946 and the Aba Women Riot' of 1949 in the East are examples of exploits made by these women movements. There were others such as Gambo Sawaba, Franca Afegbua and a handful of women who held the torch for Nigerian women in their time (*The Sun Online*, 2018, October 28).

After the country gained independence in 1960, she was under military rule for 29 years. Within this period, there was little or no room for women in politics. Nigeria's first republic, 1960 to 1966 was dominated by the menfolk, likewise the second and third republics which spanned from 1979 to 1983 and 1993 to 1999 respectively. The second and third republics recorded a little more women involvement than the first republic. During the second republic, two women were appointed Federal Ministers. They were Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akirinade and Mrs. Adenike Oyagbola, Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning respectively (Oluyemi, 2016). In 1983, during the Buhari led military regime, the first formal quota system was introduced as regards the appointment of women into governance.

The federal government directed that at least one female must be appointed as a member of the Executive Council in every state. All the states complied with this directive; some state even had two to three female members and in the early 1990s, two women were appointed Deputy Governors. These were Alhaja Latifat Okunu and Mrs. Pamela Sadauki of Kaduna State. The highlights of the third republic were the two felale Deputy Governors that emerged after the elections, namely: Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu for Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpeyong of Cross River State, Mrs. Kofo Buknor Akerele who was the only woman that won a seat in the senate, and Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita Giwa who won a seat in the House of Representatives for the Calabar Constituency (Oloyede Oluyemi 2020).

Nigeria is in its fourth republic and the political space is still dominated by men. According to Ajayi, (2015), elections and

democratic practice in the fourth republic is also characterized by irregularities and ill factors such as electoral practices, political intolerance, economic mismanagement, high level of intimidation, using political office as gateway to personal enrichment, political thuggery and violence, godfatherism, lack of intra party democracy, insecurity, manipulation of religion and ethnicity to achieve selfish ambitions and other countless misdemeanors. These factors constitute some of the barriers hindering women participation in politics in Nigeria. Arowolo and Aliko (2010) characterized these factors as "impediments preventing women from actively participating in politics and governance" Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013, p.40) states that although women constitute the greater number of registered voters in any of the elections held in Nigeria, they are yet to experience full representative positions.

Review of Empirical Studies

Under this segment of the paper, the researcher reviewed some empirical studies that are related to the current study. For example, in a bid to determine how to promote political socialization, Agboola (2013) did a study on the effects of level of education on the acquisition of political knowledge about Nigerian leaders.

Survey research design was adopted for the study with interview as the instrument of data collection. A total of 1,320 school children from Kaduna, Nigeria and Oyo States were sampled for the study. The result of the study revealed significant statistical relationships between levels of education and acquisition of political knowledge about Nigerian leaders.

Poor political mobilization of Nigerians towards the political system has cost the country sustainable national development and absolutely lack of commitment. Goldstein and Ridout (2002) identified three main elements of political mobilization in their work which affect voters turnout among the citizens as; aggregate rate of mobilization, effective mobilization contact, and change in targeting of mobilization. The researchers argued that mobilization carries with it the power to promote individual participation and the more intense it is the more effective and convincing it is, the more it gets people to participate in a process or vote. In other words, a decline reduces its net effect. A study conducted

by Kernell and Jacobson (2000) cited in Kalyango and Adu-Kumi (2013) revealed that the major reason for poor voter turnout was a decline in political mobilization by parties, candidates, and groups such as labour unions. This therefore makes political mobilization essential for political participation. Political mobilization is supposed to be part of a deeply rooted political culture. Anazodo and Uche (2002) note that political culture cannot be totally separated from the culture of the people.

Although their assertion (Anazodo and Uche, 2002) was not supported by empirical facts, one can argue that the passive involvement of Nigerian women in governance and their perceived ignorance on the political dynamics in Nigeria has done the nation more harm than good. Women can only participate in politics if they are politically socialized.

Similarly, Lukuman, (2014) added a new dimension to issues concerning political participation in Nigeria. The researcher through an explanatory study argued that patterns of leadership influences political participation. Ismaila (2006) however in a study found that level of education significantly influences political participation. The problem with both studies is that they did not focus on Nigerian women. The researchers also did not examine how social media could be used to promote political socialization and participation. This is more so that social media have become very common among 21st century women

A Look at Social Media

Social media are networking sites that allow both the sender and receiver to share information instantaneously. Udeajah and Gever (2015) aver that social media are websites that enable users to share content as receivers and senders. Nwanfor, Odoemalamn, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze (2013) define social media as those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate contents, distribute and search for information online. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Linkedin, Blog, Instagram, and Youtube among others. The number of people that access and utilize social media keeps increasing by the day. As at January 202 there were at least 31.6 million social media active users in Nigeria (Statista, 2023).

Social media have become part of the twenty – first century society. Virtually everything in the society today has been affected by society media. Businessmen and women use it to advertise their products, religious organizations use it to spread the gospel, and most frequently, politicians use it to sell their political ideas and achieve their political objectives. This partly explains why Nwabuzor and Gever (2015) posit that social media are for the people and the people are for social media.

Many political parties and their candidates have used social media for election. A study conducted by Pew Research Centre (2015) reported that 66% of social media users (39% of American adults) have engaged in one of eight civic or political activities with social media, 38% of those who use social networking sites (SNS) or Twitter *"like" or promote material related to politics or social issues* that others have been posted, 35% had used social networking sites *to encourage people to vote.*

34% used the tools to post their own thoughts or comments on political and social issues, 33% used the tools to repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else,31% used the tools to encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue, 28% used the tools to post links to political stories or articles for others to read, 21% belong to a group on a social networking site that is involved in political or social issues, 20% used the tools to follow elected officials and candidates for office.

The problem with this study is that Pew did not give details on the methodology, the population and sample among others. It is essential to observe here that even though researchers have acknowledged the importance of women's political socialization and participation as well as the increasing access to social media, there exists the problem of scanty literature on the strategies to be adopted in using social media for the purpose of promoting women's political socialization and participation.

Methodology

This study made use of a qualitative method whereby data were collected with the use of secondary materials like books, journals and other internet sources. The researcher decided to make use of qualitative data because the study was a position paper that required the collection of data from secondary sources.

Discussion of Findings

The literature above points to the fact that social media platforms have critical roles to play in promoting the political socialization of women. Through the instrumentality of social media, women will be able to gain political socialization. The specific role of social media in the attainment of political socialization is through educating women regarding the political space. Social media platforms could be used to educate women on the dynamics of the polity.

This can be done through the creation of group social media platforms so that women can be easily reached. For example, there is a popular group Facebook in Nigeria called Sexology that is meant for women in Nigeria to discuss issues related to their health and other issues related to their well-being. This can be done with politics too. With the creation of such group social media platforms, experienced women will educate the younger ones on issues that relate to the body polity so that they can learn. Another strategy for using social media for political socialization is through testimonials from successful women politicians.

Few women who have been successful in politics could be added to social media groups to give testimonies that will assist other women to also aspire for higher political positions. In Nigeria, there are few women who have made names in politics such women could be used to give testimonies that will encourage other women. Example of successful women politicians in Nigerian include, Remi Tinubu, who is a three-time senator from Lagos State; Oby Ezekwesili, who was a former Minister of Solid Minerals (2005-2006) and later the Minister of Education (2006-2007); Stella Oduah, who was a senator and former minister of Aviation, Gbemi Saraki, who was a former senator and current minister, among other women who have made impact in Nigeria's political space. Overall, the point to note here is that social media platforms could be used to assist women to acquire political socialization.

Social media platforms can as well be used to promote women's political participation. Through the instrumentality of social media women can be

encouraged to participate as voters, as political party candidates and as top party officials. This can be done using three strategies. The first strategy is by launching social media campaigns on the need for women to participate in Nigeria's political space. The message in such a campaign will need to focus on the advantages of women's participation in politics to the overall development of the country.

The focus should be on what the nation stands to benefit from women's participation in politics and not make it look like a competition between men and women. When this is done, it is possible that even some men will be willing to take part and support the campaign. The second strategy is to use social media platforms to encourage women to support their fellow women. This is important because most Nigerian women are not always willing to support their fellow women. Therefore, a social media group will be created to counsel women on the need to support their fellow women. When women support their fellow women, it will be easier for them to improve their participation beyond just casting their votes but also aspiring for political offices.

The last strategy is the use of different social media platforms to coordinate political participation. Different women make use of different social media platforms. It will be good for any efforts aimed at promoting women's political participation to make use of different social media platforms so that as many women as possible could be reached. Examples of some of the social media platforms that could be considered include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, among others. The individuals who should champion the use of social women's participation in politics include gender activists, non-governmental organizations, women's groups, political groups and public opinion groups.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others are effective avenues for political socialization and mobilization. The researcher also concludes that for social media platforms to be used for political socialization, two strategies are needed.

They are educating women on the political dynamics of Nigeria and testimonials from successful women politicians. Also, the use of social media for political participation can be done through three strategies like launching social media campaigns, encouraging women to support their fellow women and using different social media platforms. Despite the contribution of this study, it was not based on empirical evidence. It is recommended that future studies should be conducted to examine the influence of social media on political participation among women in Nigeria.

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