

Chapter 22

Mobile-Based Social Media Platforms and Women Mobilisation for Political Participation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There is volume of literature and growing studies on the roles and responsibilities of conventional mass media and to some extent computer-based social media in enhancing political engagement, mobilisation and participation in developed and emerging democracies such as Nigeria. However, a few studies exist that provide insight about the intersection between mobile-based social media platforms and political mobilisation and participation in various democracies (liberal and non-liberal, developed and developing). It is therefore pertinent to examine such relationship especially from Nigeria's perspective as emerging democracy that is struggling to mobilise and absorb people from all sectors and sections to ensure acceptance and institutionalisation of democratic ideals in the country. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to examine the roles, significance and application of mobile based social media platforms that can only be registered and used on mobile phones. The chapter also evaluated strategies and techniques required to enrich engagement, mobilisation and participation in democratic processes particularly in the Northern part of the country through these mobile-based social media. Thus political actors can use mobile based social media to engage and mobilise youth and women to participate keenly in political discourse, electioneering, policy formulation and implementation at various levels.

INTRODUCTION

There are volumes of scholarly literature that examined the relationship between conventional mass media and democracy in Nigeria and across the globe especially that democracy is the most widely propagated, practiced and relatively accepted system of government in the 21st Century. Democracy especially

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7669-3.ch022

liberal, western-style propagates inclusive governance from campaign, election and to the constitution of a government. This system of government flourishes through the power of media and its utilization.

According to Entman (1988) media irrespective of categorization - offline and online; old and new – especially news media are seen “as civic educator and guardian of democracy”. Thus, democratic political system utilizes soft power of media and other communication apparatus in order to mobilise able, disable, marginalized, vulnerable people among others such as women in order to understand and actively or passively participate in political processes. In other words, media make “democracy more direct and deliberative and represent community agenda” (Howard, 2006, pp. xxi).

In Nigeria for instance, media played significant role in ensuring that the country was liberated from the bondage of colonialism. Media was used to mobilise literate people for self-independence in the late 1950s up to 1960 when eventually Nigeria got her independence from British colonisers. This function of the media remains paramount in theory and practice. Since then media has been used as an instrument of mobilising people irrespective of gender differences, social status, regional background and belief system in order to participate in the process of democratizing Nigeria.

With regard to women mobilisation to participate in Nigerian politics, women are yet to be adequately involved through conventional media not even talk of new media. With little thing done via conventional media, these new media can add to it. Hence this calls for the utilisation of social media to mobilise more women who are few that have so far climbed to political zenith in Nigeria political system. Women who actively participate in politics at grassroots level as a result of media sensitization are very few and those who are permitted to participate in political discourse could have been much fewer.

The invisibility of massive women political mobilisation and participation is very worrisome in the northern part of Nigeria where religion and tradition on one hand, and lack of access to television, newspapers and even new media to some extent on the other, have been hindering the effective and efficient women mobilisation to participate actively in politics. In other words, women are mainly mobilised to vote during elections but they hardly participate in pre, during and post-election discourse that can impact in policy formulation and implementation.

However, for the few women who have been mobilised and involved in political discourse, they hardly make their views visible and influential due to inadequate access to political information to them in the conventional media particularly in northern Nigeria and other parts of the country in a relative term. Conceivably, that is why Ogwezzy-Ndisika (2011, 2004) separately argued that women lack political power and money to get been covered in the media. In fact, messages are barely meant to galvanize women to participate in politics. It is along that line perhaps, critics of the conventional media (such as Bagdikian, 1983; Fallows, 1996; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Bennett & Entman, 2001; Barnett, 2002) believed that there is absence of serious debate in the conventional media and voters are left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans making them disinterested and cynical about politics.

Women, therefore, are very invisible in the political activism and leadership. Media, in that regards should be used appropriately and effectively in making women visible and active in politics and governance particularly in northern part of the country where the number of women is growing astronomically. The ratio of male and female, according age, are: 0-14 years: 43.2% of the population (male 39,151,304 and female 37,353,737), 15-24 years which constitute 19.3% of the population (male 17,486,117 and female 16,732,533); 25-54 years which constitute 30.5% of the population (male 27,697,644 and female 26,285,816); 55-64 years which constitute 3.9% (male 3,393,631 and female 3,571,301); and 65 years and over constitutes 3.1% of the population (male 2,621,845 and female 2,861,826) (Indexmundi, 2014).

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