1. SOCIAL MEDIA, PUBLIC SPHERE AND RESHAPING FEMINISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research aimed at determining whether the use of social media as a public sphere influenced the development of feminism in Nigeria, the extent to which Nigerian Feminism uses social media as a public sphere for shaping and reshaping Feminism, and whether there are additional ways in which social media platforms as a public sphere can be used to promote and reshape feminism in Nigeria. The Media dependency theory served as the theoretical framework for this study and a qualitative research strategy was employed to elicit primary data for a comprehensive understanding of the study. Using a purposive sampling technique, a questionnaire was used as the design instrument to recruit 656 respondents from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Findings show that social media has evolved into a new and effective public sphere that fosters and promotes Nigerian Feminism and feminist activism. The public sphere has had both positive and negative effects on Feminism in Nigeria. It is suggested that Nigerian feminists should seek more opportunities to engage with the public sphere of social media to stimulate and propagate Nigerian Feminism and make it more equitable and sustainable. Nigeria must bridge the ever-widening digital divide and illiteracy gap which contributes to the under-representation of feminists and marginalized women in Nigeria's social media public sphere.

Keywords: digital media, feminism, Nigeria, public sphere, social media

Introduction

Nigeria's history is full of heroes that helped the country gain independence. An examination of Nigeria's colonial past reveals the oppression of British colonial rulers and the heroism of many men. These accounts are preserved so future generations might learn about the brave male freedom fighters such as Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Herbert Macauley,

King Jaja of Opobo, etc. Yet, little is known about the effort of Nigerian women during the march to liberation. The 1929 Women's War, or Aba Women's Riot, started the Nigerian Feminist Movement. South-Eastern Nigerian market women protested against charging Warrant Chiefs, who they considered colonial lackeys. Due to the women's courageous opposition, colonial officials removed taxes (Enyioko, 2021). Ten years later, 51 Abeokuta market women protested foreign taxation. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti founded Abeokuta Women's Union. She spearheaded the Alake's abdication protest against taxation (Onajin, and Ofoego, 2014). These anti-colonial protests led to the independence movement. Women have been culturally, religiously, and historically maligned. So, some women regard Feminism as their savior, after years of being oppressed. During conversations around Feminism, males sigh and get irritated. Men try to keep women inside religious, cultural, and societal norms. African men are fierce in feminist arguments (Crowe, 2011) Women come to the conversation table with boxing gloves without an open mind. Their attitude is typical of oppressed, imprisoned women who defy norms, ranks, culture, and tradition to express themselves. This assault and defense by men and women have caused feminist problems in Nigeria. This response to Feminism in Nigeria is due to the term's diverse definition and use across regions and continents. West African beliefs, behaviors, and traditions are different. Nigerian women see men as growth partners, not foes.

Since women's oppression is global, Nigeria welcomed the Feminist Movement; it is crucial to note that Western and Nigerian Feminism vary from that of African Feminism. Alice Walker's Womanism inspired African Womanism (Izgarjan and Slobodanka, 2012). Alice Walker uses the word to describe Black women who care about everyone's well-being. Walker states that "Womanism" links women of color with the feminist movement at "the crossroads of race, class, and gender oppression". Ojoade states that Femininity is the virtue of traditionalists, whereas feminism is progressives wanting to become men, it is for this reason that some feminists such as Emecheta, Nwapa and Alkali renounce feminism calling themselves womanist (Fwangyil, 2011).

Nigeria's Feminist Movement has evolved despite criticism. Society understands the need to help African women from harmful traditional practices. People have become more aware of Female Genital Mutilation (clitoridectomy), polygamy and STDs, child brides and VVF, children and women trafficked for prostitution in foreign countries, sexual abuse and exploitation within and outside of marriage, and oppressive traditional rites widows are forced to undergo after the death of their husband. Northern Nigerian women are good Muslim wives, mothers, and professionals. Feminists have increased their understanding of the linkages between gender and the state's political economy by researching Nigerian women's public and private lives. They have motivated women to discuss gender

and political concerns. Lobbying and policy changes have improved gender equality in Africa and Nigeria. African feminists like Peju Alatise, Nike Ogundaike, and Otabong Nkanga claim that arts and entertainment encourage Nigerian Feminism.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research paper are to:

1. Examine whether the use of social media as a public sphere has influenced the development of feminism in Nigeria.

2. Determine the extent to which Nigerian feminism uses social media as a public sphere for shaping and reshaping feminism.

3. Highlight additional effective ways in which social media platforms as a public sphere can be utilized to promote and reshape feminism in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The Media Dependency Theory guides this research. According to the Media Dependency Theory, the more a person relies on the media, the more valuable it is to them. Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur proposed this in 1976. This concept comes from the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory. People become media-dependent through use and enjoyment. When the media is an individual's only source of information, setting the agenda is easy. Agenda-setting controls individuals. Three principles are interconnected (Hyman, 2021). The theory of media dependency views media as an information system. The theory of media dependency emphasizes small, medium, and large systems and their components. This theory examines the interdependence between a society's political, economic, educational, religious, social, and media institutions. Allocation of resources and power determines macrosystem interdependence. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach connect the mass media system to the modernization theories of Comte, Spencer, Tonnies, and Durkheim. Premodern society relies on social networks and interpersonal connections for learning, behavior, and recreation. This strategy has transformed the media into a significant social information network. According to various theories like agenda-setting theory, uses and gratification theory and others, regarding the influence of the media, it disseminates propaganda, commercial marketing, and political campaigns. The media is the information system of society. People, businesses, and societies cannot function without the media (Joo-Young, 2017).

Second, media influence is contingent upon the interdependence of individuals, media, and social institutions (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). According to Emerson theory of power-dependency relations, actor A's dependence on actor B is proportional to A's goals and B's resources for achieving them. If A's objective

requires B's exclusive resource, B's strength increases, and the dependence between A and B increases. According to Emerson's media dependency theory, the interaction between humans and media is influenced by goal-resource dynamics (Krumpal et al., 2021).

The media are the fourth estate of society as a result of rapid social growth and the necessity for more information to survive in the modern world. When a society or individual insecurity increases, mass media impact expands more rapidly. Major societal crises and natural disasters increase people's reliance on the media. In an environment with high aspirations, people rely more on the media to eliminate the uncertainty. Individuals rely on the media because it is more likely to have crucial and exclusive environmental information (Moore & Meadows, 2016).

Dependency theories are castigated for lacking empirical evidence to support their claims. Few examples are given, but many exceptions, including South East Asia's newly industrialized countries, contradict their core-periphery concept. Dependency theories are abstract and employ homogenizing terms such as developed and underdeveloped, which do not fully represent the diversity within these categories. Another criticism is that the dependency school regards relationships with international firms as harmful, despite the fact that they may be necessary for technological transfer. Dependency theorists are chastised for constructing their theories on the foundations of the nation-state, capitalism, and industrialization. Some Eurocentric biases, such as the belief that industrialization and industrial capital are prerequisites for economic success, are embedded in dependency-oriented perspectives within educational systems. We cannot imagine economic progress outside of the state. Eurocentric prejudice ignores or downplays women's labor and the environmental risks of industrialization and resource overexploitation. The dependency theories have been chastised for failing to reflect modern socio-economic and political conditions. While many of the criticisms are valid, we must consider whether the core principles and ideology of dependency theory are still relevant (Joo-Young, 2017).

Literature Review

Social Media as a Public Sphere

Nigerians use social media platforms as a public sphere, where the pervasiveness of new technology significantly influences social phenomena, including political discourse. Social media's ability to revitalize Habermas' concept of the public sphere—a critical component of deliberative democracies—is evident. The expansion of online political discourse is driven by unrestricted access and diverse information inputs.

Due to the polarized nature of politics, social media should facilitate productive political discourse. There

have been extensive analyses of social media, civil discourse, and the public domain (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). In the open domain, according to Habermas, "private individuals band together as a public" to promote critical knowledge through rational discourse. The public domain in economics necessitates unfettered information, protected participation, and the absence of institutional control. As stated by Habermas, the dominance of corporate media has eliminated the public realm. There are only three components of the public sphere. Habermas argues that speaking groups can revitalize the public sphere. Speech groups place importance on communication. Strategic speech manipulates opinions, while communicative action seeks the truth Democratic deliberation and civil discourse are instances of communicative involvement (Jenkins, 2006). For Loader and Mercea (2011), the preservation of public space by these speaking groups is essential to the participatory democracy that propels social movements. The Internet is a public space, including social networks. Numerous scholars have studied this possibility, although the vast majority have just presented theories. Few empirical researches employed conversation analysis or other quantitative indicators to evaluate avoidant or participative behavior (Graham-Bermann and Miller-Graff, 2015).

According to British youth, Vromen et al. (2015), social media can facilitate constructive political debate as well as galvanize youths (Okocha & Chigbo, 2024). Social media platforms enable limitless engagement and dissemination of knowledge. Because the Internet is user-friendly, external influences have little effect on engagement and information acquisition (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Social media users can challenge narratives, study alternatives, and share ideas; consequently, rejuvenating the public realm (Loader & Mercea, 2011). Social media users can exchange information without the influence of traditional media. Social media have revitalized the public sphere because "the networked populace has greater access to information, more opportunities for public expression, and a stronger ability for collective action" (Shirky, 2011). Users communicate frequently despite the fact that "it is difficult to prevent online debates from degenerating into name-calling or gibberish." He urges other nations, especially the United States, to boost Internet and social media accessibility. Shirky lauds the public-hosting potential of "user-generated" knowledge. Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that the reliance of traditional media on blogs threatens the authority of corporate media. The authors cite research from the 2010 United Kingdom election that discovered a "growing network of 'citizen consumers' who actively evaluate political information". Competing expertise diminishes the authority of corporations or governments while promoting debate and justice. Movements on social media illustrate online communication activity.

Feminism in Nigeria

The genesis of feminism in Nigeria was a desire to improve the lives of women. Its roots may be traced

back to the pre-colonial era, when Nigerian women such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo emerged as politicians and feminist struggle pioneers. During the 1960s Nationalist struggle in Nigeria, these women and others advocated for equal rights and opportunities. 1948 witnessed the Aba (Southeastern Nigerian state) women's riot and the Abeokuta (Western Nigerian state) market women's protest against colonial taxation. Funmilayo, an advocate for women's rights, led these demonstrations (Madichie, 2011). Despite performing their civic duty, these ladies launched a protest that eliminated the excess tax system and battled against the unequal treatment of women (Oduntan & Mcintosh, 2011). These nationalist protests by women resulted in the founding of the National Women's Union in 1947, which evolved into the Federation of Nigerian Women's Society in 1953 (Strobel, 2001). Participating in political forums and individual encounters, the eleven union officials advocated for women's participation in the male-dominated political environment. According to Popoola, despite the sacrifices made by these women to ensure effective inclusion and active participation in decision-making, the aim remains unachieved as women continue to be a minority in positions of power and the target of 30 percent representation in the legislative branch has not yet been met (2021). Observers argue that the low quality of life of most Nigerian women is a result of the underrepresentation of women in politics. Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations treaty protecting women's rights, but patriarchy has allowed gender inequality to persist (Odumegwu, 2016).

The Impact of Social Media on Feminism

Although there are numerous waves of feminism, Western feminism and African and Nigerian feminism are separate. Ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities exist in Nigeria. Consequently, cultural and religious concepts and behaviors influence feminist attitudes. The worldviews of women vary based on their income, education, culture, and religion (Aina-Pelemo et al., 2021). Global feminists confront analogous difficulties. Examples include silence, religious and cultural indoctrination, seclusion, oppression, and the trivialization of women's plight. As a public forum, social media has helped battle the problems of feminism in Nigeria and around the world. The rise of digital technologies has simplified the organization of social movements. Advocates and champions of human rights and well-being now have greater access to information and can connect with broader audiences to share their messages.

Social media altered socioeconomic trends worldwide. They have transformed society and the way people live. According to Oso, social media platforms have spurred expectations for transformation and revitalization (2005). Social media facilitates rapid, low-cost knowledge dissemination and equal development. Platforms for social networking are 21st-century technology. Social media can challenge preconceived notions and marginalization, which inhibit growth. Social media has changed over the past

two decades. Never before had knowledge and abilities been so readily accessible, trade been so efficient, and people been so interconnected. Platforms for social media are viewed as a means to integrate excluded groups, such as women, into global society. Social media is a critical instrument for the collective mobilization, development, and empowerment of women. In spite of gender inequality, social media may empower women (Intel Corporation et al., 2012).

The social media platforms, as a public sphere, have not addressed all of the challenges of feminism, but they have played a part in shaping it. The hashtag movement has been the major instrument the Social Media platform has used in addressing issues that relate to feminism. Hashtags provide dynamic, user-generated labeling in social networks, facilitating users in identifying messages with a particular subject or substance. In 2007, Chris Messina tweeted about hashtags. It is currently prevalent in tweets and social media posts. Since 2007, users have employed the hashtag to convey new information, promote awareness, and unite individuals. The hashtag enables you to customize your messages to evoke emotion, advocate for social or political change, or earn audience acceptance or a following.

After the 2007 fires in San Diego, hashtags were used to convey emotion. Hashtags allow people without a voice to communicate more swiftly than using traditional media. The feminist movement acknowledges that social media evokes emotion and provides a voice to people who do not have one. Twitter's most powerful weapon is hashtags. Social media democratizes feminist activism, making it possible for anybody to speak out against sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny. Social media have made activism more accessible by decreasing distance and location. They give a place for public discourse, awareness, and (potential) change.

Abigail Locke from Bradford University stated that, when women advance, they are met with criticism, disparagement, and violence. Its visibility has expanded due to social media (University of Bradford, 2018). Despite this, women continue to express themselves online. In 2013, Tara L. Conley, in an interview with the Huffington Post, referred to Twitter as a breakthrough tool for female communication. If hashtags like #YouOkSis, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, #WhyIStayed, #RapeCultureIsWhen, #FreeMarissa, all of the #IStandWith tags, and tags that brought attention to the killings of black women like #RenishaMcBride and #SandraBland did not exist, the public debate would be very different. In 2014, after a shooting spree at UC Santa Barbara, #YesAllWomen originally appeared on Twitter. Elliot Rodgers killed six people and injured fourteen others on May 23, 2014. Rodgers murdered ladies who turned him down. He left behind a 137-page rant and a YouTube video about his forced celibacy and vengeance against women. In four days, 1.5 million women submitted accounts of sexual assault and abuse. #Metoo united women in their battle

against sexual abuse (Conley, 2015).

The Arab Spring of 2011 was organized via social media. When the government blocked journalists' and Internet users' access, social media supplied real-time news. According to UNDP's Christopher Wilson and UNC's Zeynep Tufeku, demonstrators exploited Facebook to organize and disseminate awareness. Social media platforms transmitted fresh information that governments were unable to regulate, impacting how individuals evaluated the participation, logistics, and success of protests (Abdelsalam, 2015).

As Mohanty and Samantaray (2022) put it, social media has contributed in the emergence of a new generation of tech-savvy activists by motivating individuals through personal narratives to generate shared experiences and cohesion. These tweets, images, and videos may not have become popular without the hashtag. The social media have established a virtual feminist arena in which women may discuss and criticize society. It connects women with feminists they otherwise might not have met. On January 5, Rahaf Mohammed tweeted that she was fleeing her family. 18-year-old Rahaf hid in an airport hotel room in Bangkok to flee her violent relatives. When Rahaf's request was translated by Mona Eltahawy, Twitter users responded with #SaveRahaf. Mr. Al-Shuaibi, the Saudi Arabian chargé d'affaires in Bangkok, reported that Rahaf's Twitter followers grew to 45,000 in one day. They ought to have taken her phone because Twitter altered everything (Mohammed, 2019). This analysis illustrates the feminist possibilities of social media. The post by Rahaf quickly went viral, her claims were verified, and she was awarded UN protection in Thailand and asylum in Australia. After confirming her statements, Canada granted her asylum. As a result of Rahaf's article, a number of Saudi women have expressed similar worries (Mohammed, 2022). Through social media, individuals are capable of instantaneous communication and dissemination of issues and solutions. Anyone with a smartphone and Internet access can tell their story. It bolsters the feminist women's community. For Flores et al., as women with comparable beliefs, experiences, and stories seek to educate others about feminism, it forms a temporary "intimate public" of solidarity. Women find comfort in each other's experiences. The feminist cause is aided by social networking (2018). Through shared experiences, meanings, or ideals, followers or users of social media build kinship (typically by utilizing hashtags) (Sebring, 2019).

Alyssa Milano recommended victims of Harvey Weinstein to use the hashtag #MeToo on October 15 to "emphasize the severity of the problem." This tweet popularized Tarana Burke's #MeToo hashtag; therefore, paving the way for the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns. The hashtag was launched in October 2017 to bring awareness to sexual assault and harassment in the workplace. By the end of the day, Milano's #MeToo tweet had been shared over 200,000 times. The next day, 500,000 tweets contained the term. In

the first twenty-four hours, more than 4.7 million Facebook users employed the hashtag (Martínez, 2021). Regulska (2018) in her research work explained that, #MeToo movement sparked global conversations on sexual harassment and assault. The advertisement generated discussion and action on salary gaps and sexual harassment. Iceland implemented Equal Pay Certification, whereas the United States Congress passed the ME TOO Congress Act, which forbids members of Congress from using taxpayer cash to settle sexual harassment or assault accusations. Since October 2017, the #MeToo movement has aided in the healing and discussion of sexual assault victims. The campaign resulted in the prosecution of perpetrators, including the United States Gymnastics team, as well as modifications to sexual assault and harassment laws and practices (Sayej, 2017).

Nigeria Feminist Activities on Social Media

Feminists in Nigeria disseminate their ideas via social media and hashtags. Using social media, Nigerian feminists have exposed instances of minor rape, sexual molestation in colleges, marital rape, gender fluidity, rape culture, sexual assault and molestation, consent, gender pay gap, sexuality, patriarchy, and sexism. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie encouraged global citizens to comprehend feminism in her TED X talk. In Nigeria, her talk ignited an online debate, with many condemning her views and others discussing feminism. In 2015, Florence Warmate's Abuja reading club discussed Adichie's TED book. 15 Nigerian ladies discussed their difficulties. Warmate Book Club created #BeingFemaleInNigeria and #BeingAWomanInNigeria the following day in order to collect women's stories of sexism and patriarchy in Nigeria. It was a huge response, and the turnout was outstanding (Zoker, 2015).

Frida Kahlo (@wildfeminine_) tweeted, "My grandmother slept with her husband's body for three days to prove she didn't kill him #BeingFemaleInNigeria." The Facebook post titled "Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie triggered a conversation regarding feminism and gender roles. The Manifesto was composed in response to Ijeawele's appeal for aid in raising a feminist daughter. A visit to Twitter or Facebook in Nigeria reveals that the phrases 'feminist' and 'cooking' are regularly contested, producing questions like 'who should cook?' How much soup should a man buy for his wife? Cooking, changing names, menstrual hygiene, and child marriage are all trending subjects on social media. Online feminist action in Nigeria has produced results. The social media outrage over injustices led to the prohibition of some topics and calls to action: #SexForMarks (Bolwijn, 2018)

In exchange for improved grades, Professor Richard Akindele required five sex rounds from female students. It was captured on video and made accessible online. The professor was suspended following public uproar. The event inspired the social media hashtag #SexForMarks. Ochanya Obaje Elizabeth, 13

years old, died in 2018. Andrew Ogbuja, a lecturer for the Knights of Saint Mulumba, and his son Victor raped Elizabeth for five years. She passed away in October 2018 due to a vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) and other health complications. Using the hashtag #JusticeForOchanya, Twitter users submitted images of the suspected rapists. Nigerians through social media swung into action and signed the #JusticeForOchanya petition. Andrew was suspended from Saint Mulumba Knights (Edokwe, 2022). In 2018, young Nigerians made online charges of assault and rape. In Nigeria, hashtag feminism and social media facilitate the organization of women. On December 15, 2018, women protested against harassment in the Yaba and Tejuoso marketplaces. The Market March exemplifies how hashtag activism may increase awareness and exert pressure on lawmakers to reject sexism and misogyny (Dadas, 2017). Boko Haram abducted 276 girls in 2014, Ibrahim M. Abdullahi tweeted #BringBackOurGirls to advocate for the return of the remaining girls. Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton, and other celebrities encouraged Nigerian action by lending their support (Abdulkadir& Winnifred, 2018).

The use of social media will not eradicate all of the challenges of Nigerian women. Social media activism will not replace conventional advocacy, but it can amplify the voices of minorities. It amplifies a social media user's voice independent of their location, affiliation, or resources. Using the hashtag #feminism on social media enables a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of feminism. Hashtag feminism generates digital "safe spaces" where women can be exclusive while pushing for social inclusion. According to Dixon (2021), hashtag feminism offers many varieties of feminism a voice and redefines the activity of feminism in modern culture. Hashtag feminism is a virtual forum for victims of discrimination to voice their sorrow, stories, and isolation. Feminism in Nigeria is diverse: Nigerian feminist praxis shows how class, sexuality, disability, age, and other characteristics interact to promote gender equality throughout the many tribes, ethnic groups, and religious practices of Nigeria (Islam, Christianity, traditional religious traditions, or atheism). Feminists in Nigeria endure poverty, insurgency, breaches of human rights, miseducation, and corruption. These include 'wife subjugation,' gender norms, rape culture, property ownership, and the treatment of widows and female offspring (Aina-Pelemo & Jesutoye, 2014).

Research Methodology

The quantitative research methodology was chosen as the best option for the research design of this investigation, while a survey questionnaire was employed for the data collection. The questionnaire contains a series of questions meant to elicit information from the respondents who completed the survey. The questionnaire was created and distributed to respondents using Google Forms between July 12, 2022, and August 1, 2022. All of the people who took part in this survey were technologically savvy.

Nigeria is the study population. According to the World Bank (2020), Nigeria had a population of 206 million as at June 2020. Using the calculation of Yamane (1967) as cited by Glenn (2003), the sample size was 656 at a confidence level of 96% and 4% margin of error. The respondents were purposively selected from the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This was done to ensure that the results reflected observations from the North Central (NC), Northeast (NE), Northwest (NW), Southwest (SW), and Southeast (SE) regions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order to collect data on the three study concerns, a questionnaire was developed, and the results were grouped and presented according to the research's central questions. The collected data was represented using tables.

Table 1: *Age range of survey respondents*

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-30	251	38.3
31-40	227	34.6
41-50	111	16.9
51-60	51	7.8
61-70	16	2.4
Total	656	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The age range of participants in the survey is reflected in the table above. A total of 656 persons responded to the survey questions. 38.3% of respondents (251) were between the ages of 20 and 30 while 34.6% (227) of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40. 16.9% (111) who participated in the survey were between the ages of 41 and 50. A total of 67 (10.2%) respondents fell between ages of 51 - 70.

Table 2: *Showing disaggregation by gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	333	50.8
Male	323	49.2
Total	656	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The table above represents the percentage of respondents categorized based on gender with 323 males accounting for 49.2% of the total and 333 females accounting for 50.8%.

Table 3: Showing disaggregation by Nigeria's geopolitical zones

Geopolitical Zones	Frequency	Percentage (%)
North Central	223	34.0
South-South	172	26.2
South East	111	16.9
South West	83	12.7
North West	35	5.3
North East	32	4.9
Total	656	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The number of respondents from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones is represented in the table above. The highest were from the North Central with a total of 223 (34%). Respondents from the South-South region accounted for 26.2% (172) while 16.9% (111) were from the South East region. Respondents from the Southwest region made up 12.7% (83), while those from the North West and North East regions accounted for a total of 10.2% (67) of the responses.

Table 4: Showing dis-aggregation by educational attainment

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor Degree	375	57.2
Master Degree	144	22
O'Levels	64	9.8
Diploma	44	6.7
Ph.D.	29	4.4
Total	656	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The survey included 656 participants, with 9.8% (64) holding O-level certificates while 22% (144) had Masters. The highest number of respondents were 57.2% (375) with Bachelor degrees and the lowest were PhD. holders accounting for 4.4% (29) of the respondents.

Table 5: *Showing disaggregation of the different social media platforms respondent use.*

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	581	88.6
Medium	45	6.9
Tik Tok	239	36.4
Snapchat	230	35.1
Telegram	431	65.7
Reddit	30	4.6
Pinterest	192	29.3
WhatsApp	642	97.9
Messenger	393	59.9
LinkedIn	339	51.7
Instagram	515	78.5
Tumblr	13	2.0
Twitter	372	56.7
YouTube	484	73.8
WeChat	17	2.6
Viber	13	2.0
Discord	37	5.6
Vimeo	15	2.3
None	1	0.2

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Respondents' use of social networking platforms, according to the above table, shows that WhatsApp accounted for the most used platform with 642 (97.9%) responses. This was followed by Facebook with 581 (86.6%) participants selecting this platform. Over 70% each of the respondents surveyed also claimed they used Instagram and YouTube while 65.7% (431) of the participants said they used Telegram. Similarly, over 50% of the respondents said they used Messenger, Twitter and LinkedIn. Users of Reddit, WeChat, Vimeo, Viber and Tumblr accounted for less than 5% of those surveyed. While 0.2% (1) of the respondents claimed they were not on any of the platforms listed.

Table 6: *amount of time respondents spent on social media on a daily basis.*

Time spent on social media in a day	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Sure	191	29.1
Three Hours	108	16.5
Two Hours	99	15.1
Five Hours	90	13.7
One Hour	68	10.4
Four Hours	52	7.9
Above 5 Hours	45	6.9
Not on Any Social Media Platform	3	0.5
Grand Total	**656**	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

According to the data gathered from the 656 respondents, 10.4% (68) spent one hour, 15.1% (99) spent two hours, 16.5% (108) spent three hours, 7.9% (52) spent four hours, 13.7% (90) spent five hours on the social media platforms to which they belonged. Only 0.5% (3) did not belong to any social media platform. The highest response came from 29.1% (191) of the participants who had no idea of how much time they spent on social media platforms a day.

Table 7: *Perception of social media as an effective public domain in Nigeria and ability to stimulate and promote feminism and feminist initiatives in Nigeria.*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Social media has evolved into a new and more effective public domain in Nigeria.						
Frequency	400	226	23	7	0	656
Percentage (%)	61	34.5	3.5	1.1	0	100
Social media platforms stimulate and promote feminism and feminist initiatives in Nigeria.						

Frequency	144	336	151	23	2	656
Percentage (%)	22	51.2	23	3.5	3.5	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

When asked if social media platforms have evolved into a new and more effective public sphere or domain, 61% (400) of respondents strongly agreed that social media platforms have evolved into a new and more effective public sphere. 61% agreed that social media platforms have evolved into a practical public domain. Only 1% (7) disagreed with this statement.

Furthermore, regarding the question of whether or not social media platforms stimulate and promote feminism and feminist initiatives in Nigeria, 51.2% (336) of those who participated in the survey agreed with the statement that social media platforms in Nigeria do promote and stimulate feminism and feminist initiatives in Nigeria. 22% (144) of the respondents strongly agreed that feminism and feminist activities are stimulated and promoted by social media platforms, while 23% (151) of respondents were neutral.

Table 8: *Showing disaggregation by respondent's opinion of feminist use of social media as a public sphere.*

Respondent's opinion of feminist use of social media as a public sphere.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Advocate for the rights of women	491	74.8
Share their plights	437	66.6
Amplifies the voices of women	421	64.2
Identify with other women experiencing misogyny	383	58.4
Establish and cultivate feminist movements	357	54.4
Promote Solidarity	333	50.8
Develop a safe network for marginalized women	332	50.6
Not Sure	26	4
Skip	11	1.7
None	7	1.1

Source: Field Survey, 2022

When asked how Nigerian feminists use social media as a public realm, the following responses were given: 437 (66.6%) respondents said Nigerian feminists use social media platforms to share their plights. This is followed by 421 (64.2%) responses which said Nigerian feminists use social media platforms to amplify the voices of women. 382 respondents or 58.4% said Nigerian feminists use social

media to identify with other women who experience misogyny, while 357 (54.4%) agreed that Nigerian feminists use social media platforms to establish and cultivate feminist movements. A total of 332, or 50.6%, opined that Nigerian feminists use social media platforms to develop a safe network for marginalized women. Majority of the participants (491 or 74.8%) were of the opinion that Nigerian feminists use social media to advocate for the rights of women.

Figure 9: Showing ways social media shapes feminism in Nigeria

Ways social media shapes feminism in Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Giving women a platform to speak out	527	80.3
Fighting Gender Based Violence	446	68
Social media has opened a new frontier for women's rights organizing	405	61.7
Sheds light on sexism across industries	354	54
Creates and Promotes Social Movements	342	52.1
Change the conversation	187	28.5
Positively	184	28
Negatively	54	8.2
Not sure	36	5.5

Source: Field Survey, 2022

According to the above table, 354 (54%) respondents believe that social media platforms, as a public sphere, shapes feminism in Nigeria by shedding more light on sexism across industries. It provided a platform for women to speak out, according to 547 (80.3%).

405 (61.7%) of the respondents stated that social media has opened up a new frontier for women's rights organizing while 446 participants surveyed (68%) believed that social media as a public sphere has aided the fight against gender-based violence. According to 184 (28%) of those surveyed, social media has changed the conversation for feminism in Nigeria with 342 (52.1%) agreeing that it creates and promotes social movements, 184 (28%) respondents said social media as a public sphere has positively contributed to shaping feminism in Nigeria.

On the contrary, 54 (8.2%) respondents said social media use has negatively contributed to shaping feminism in Nigeria while 36 (5.5%) said they were unsure of how social media has contributed to shaping Nigeria Feminism.

Table 10: *Showing the disaggregation of respondent's opinion of online violence against Feminism in Nigeria.*

Ways Social Media as a Public Sphere to Shape Feminism Has Exposed Women to Online Misogyny and Violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hate Speech	413	63
Trolling	300	45.7
Image -based sexual abuse	297	45.3
Rape and Death threats	269	41
Stalking and Stalking by Proxy	259	39.5
Retaliation against Supporters of Victims	244	37.2
Cross-Platform Harassment	217	33.1
Mob attacks/Cyber mobs	183	27.9
Not Sure	107	16.3
Google Bombing	83	12.7

Source: Field Survey, 2022

According to the pivot table above, online feminism has exposed women to various forms of violence. Over 50% of the respondents, that is, a total of 431 believed women were subjected to hate speech as a result of social media. 300 (45.7%) respondents, agree that online feminism has exposed women to online trolling. This is followed by 297 people, or 45.3%, who believe that online feminism has made women vulnerable to image-based sexual abuse. A total of 269 (41%) said online feminism has exposed women to rape and death threats while 259 (39.5%) of respondents believed online feminism has resulted in women being stalked and stalked by proxy.

In comparison, 244 (37.2%) of the respondents admitted that online feminist supporters of victims have been subjected to cyberbullying with major retaliations including 217 (31.1%) of the respondents who believed that online feminism has exposed feminists to cross-platform harassment. Similarly, 183 respondents, or 27.9%, agreed that social media as a public sphere has exposed feminists to mobs and cyber mob attacks. Of the 656 respondents, only 82 (12.5%) respondents believed that social media has exposed feminists to google bombing, while 107 (16.3%) of the respondents were unsure of the consequences posed by social media to violence against feminists.

Discussion of Findings

The study's objectives were divided into three categories. The first goal was to determine whether the

use of social media as a public sphere has had an impact on the development of feminism in Nigeria. The second goal was to determine how Nigerian Feminism uses social media as a public sphere to shape and reform Feminism. Lastly, it meant to determine whether there are more effective ways for social media platforms to promote and re-frame feminism as a public sphere in Nigeria.

The first goal was to determine whether the use of social media as a public sphere has an impact on the development of Femininsm in Nigeria. Although social media is a new form of media that is still being studied to be understood, it has become an effective and efficient public sphere that stimulates and promotes the growth of feminism in Nigeria over the last decade and more. Social media has evolved into a public realm, a place where people can freely discuss and identify social problems and exert influence over political actions. It has also become a convenient forum for exchanging ideas, opinions, and information about public affairs and the generation of communicative solutions. The findings confirm that social media as a public sphere has significantly shaped and continues to shape Nigerian Feminism, both positively and negatively. Some of the ways social media as a public sphere has shaped Nigerian Feminism include shedding more light on sexism in all industries, expanding platforms for Nigerian feminists and their supporters to speak out and effect change, opening a new frontier for women's rights organizing, combating gender-based violence, and promoting social movements. This supports Garman's (2019) assertion that the public realm is where citizens exchange ideas, engage in debate, and reach a consensus. This location could be used for a gathering (for example, a town hall meeting). It can also be an infrastructure for transmitting and receiving information and ideas and validates Boizot's (2019) argument that there are several disadvantages of promoting social media as a public sphere: many women who could benefit from online feminism lack the necessary financial resources, Internet access, digital knowledge, and so on.

The study's second objective, was to determine the extent to which Nigerian Feminism utilizes social media as a public forum. The results of the survey indicate that Feminism in Nigeria uses social media as a public forum to propagate Nigerian feminist agendas in the following ways: As stated previously, one of the most significant obstacles confronted by Nigerian feminism is the lack of channels for women to communicate their plight in a manner that will result in social transformation. Due to cultural, religious, social, and other interferences, the suffering and challenges of Nigerian women are not fully known; however, using social media as a public sphere has enabled more women with internet access to share their plights, identify with other women experiencing misogyny, develop a safe network for marginalized women, and raise discourses that birth political changes, by shedding more light on sexism across industries. It provides a platform for women to speak out as respondents stated that social media has opened up a new frontier for women's rights organizing. Social media, as

a public sphere, has played a pivotal role in the fight against gender-based violence by reshaping the conversation and fostering the creation and promotion of social movements. This finding supports OECD's (2018) argument that social media is a critical instrument for the collective mobilization, development, and empowerment of women.

Thirdly, the study sought to determine whether social media platforms as a public sphere can be utilized as additional ways to promote and shape Feminism in Nigeria. The survey results indicate that social media as a public sphere affects Feminism. However, Feminism in Nigeria can use social media in other ways to shape and reshape Nigerian Feminism.

This study supports 1976's Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur's media dependency theory. According to the theory, the greater a person's media spending and consumption, the greater the media's influence on them. From the study, many individuals spend more than one hour per day on social media platforms, and an even more significant proportion do not monitor their usage. Consequently, the feminist movement gains influence proportionally to the amount of time Nigerian feminists and feminist supporters spend using social media as a public forum to promote themselves, their initiative, and their propaganda. As Bennet and Segerberg (2012) explain, social media facilitates productive political discourse due to the polarized nature of politics. To promote critical knowledge through rational discourse, Habermas stated in 1976 that "private individuals band together as a public''. According to Loader and Mercea's (2011) hypothesis, social media as a public sphere is crucial to the participatory democracy that drives social movements. The results of the survey validate Loader and Mercea's hypothesis.

These findings suggest that social media has evolved into a powerful and relevant public arena that can serve Nigerian Feminism positively, however, it also has the capacity to have various adverse effects on feminists and their supporters such as online trolling, rape, death, image sexual abuse stalking and stalking by proxy, cyberbully, mobs and cyber mob attacks, google bombing, and cross-platform harassment.

Conclusion

These results indicate that social media has evolved into a functional public sphere that has substantially impacted the development of Feminism in Nigeria. Nigerian feminists have risen to exploit the effectiveness of social media platforms as public forums. It has been established that social media platforms are a reliable public sphere that can shape and reshape Nigerian Feminism. It has

become a viable substitute for the conventional physical public sphere. It has provided Nigerian Feminism with an outstanding opportunity to evolve and continue to evolve. Nigerian Feminist can now share their plight and reach millions of people in a matter of minutes; they now use social media to form a safe network for women experiencing marginalization.Through sharing sensitive information, advocacy campaigns, organizing protests, discussing, analyzing, and deliberating on issues across geographies, the new public sphere creates opportunities for Feminism, it's supporters, government and relevant parties to come together to combat women oppression and marginalization. New challenges and constraints must be met as it is now accessible via various social media platforms. In conclusion, despite all that social media as a public sphere has afforded Nigerian Feminism, this new public sphere's capacity to shape Nigerian Feminism remains underutilized.

Recommendations

The subsequent recommendations will support and enhance the use of social media platforms as an effective public sphere for the propagation of feminism in Nigeria:

1. CSOs, NGOs, civil societies, and communities must collaborate to safeguard digital platforms and human rights in order to circumvent restrictive social media measures.

2. Many marginalized women are under-represented in social media public space due to the digital divide. Authorities should bridge the digital divide.

3. Feminists must use these platforms responsibly to empower women and ensure good governance and accountability.

4. The Nigerian government should enact policies that effect systemic change in order to transform women's online advocacy into real and lasting change.

5. More researchers should contribute to Nigerian feminists' understanding of how to use social media as a public sphere more effectively to promote Nigerian feminism.

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