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Interrogating Social Media's Influence on Women's Empowerment Programme Outcomes in South West, Nigeria

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ARTICLEINFO	ABSTRACT
	Introduction: Several studies on women empowerment have focused on the use of the media to campaign for women to be empowered, whereas little attention has been paid to checkmate the influence of social media use for empowerment programmes in the lives of women especially those in South West, Nigeria, aside from just raising awareness on women's issues. **Objectives**: To assess the benefits of social media usage among women beneficiaries. To identify challenges that may impede the effectiveness of such empowerment outcomes. To evaluate its influence on their participation and success in empowerment programmes. **Methods**: The study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically survey methods, to gather data on the influence of social media use on women's empowerment programmes outcomes in South West Nigeria using structured questionnaires administered to the sampled participants. The total population of the study for women in selected states is 8,250,204. **Results**: Findings from the study reveals that, women who participated in social media empowerment programmes got personal gains, particularly learning new things (mean = 2.85), feeling more confident and good about themselves (2.84), and being more aware of their rights and chances for empowerment (2.81). However, fewer respondents reported increased financial situation (2.39), project collaboration (2.20), and financial empowerment through grants and loans (mean = 2.12). Lack of time (25.7%), trouble validating information (46.1%), and unreliable internet access (50.6%) were the main obstacles. Overall, 69.4% of respondents had participated in such programs, and 76.4% of them expressed satisfaction with the results, compared to 37.7% of non-participants. participation and program satisfaction showed a weak but statistically significant link (Cramer's V = 0.206, χ^2 = 19.231, p <.001), indicating that social media participation had a beneficial impact on empowering outcomes. **Conclusions**: the study concludes that social media significantly enhances the outcomes of empowerment programmes among women in South West Nigeria. By providing platforms for information dissemination, skill acquisition and networking, social media serves as a powerful tool for improving women's access to resources, knowledge, and economic opportunities. **Keywords:** Social Media, Women Empowerment, Programme Outcomes, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), Southwest Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Human development activities have revealed that women, unlike their male counterparts, are the most deprived people in the world who have been prevented from fully deploying their potentials for rewarding activities due to constraints imposed by culture, race and religion (Oluwakemi, Györke & Gubacsi, 2023). These deprivations are manifested through abuse, molestation, violence, rape, poverty and ill treatments at home and in the work place. In a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious society like Nigeria, women are subjected to different dimensions of ill treatment on account of culture and religion. In most cases, they are constrained to a certain pattern of life and allowed to make limited life choices for themselves, including how they are socially or economically empowered (Omang, Okpa & Okoi, 2022). Although it has been reported that more females are going

Research Article

to school today, more women are serving in positions of leadership, laws are being reviewed or reformed to advance gender equality, to encourage women's education for self-decision making, for financial improvement and for benefiting from technological advancement. Yet these improvements have not adequately addressed the needs of women, as there are still challenges to overcome (Agrawal, Muchhal & Paithankar, 2022). Over the years, women still face discriminatory laws, customs and social norms that are pervasive in African societies (Tarabishi & Hassan, 2023).

Empowerment programmes are phenomena recognised globally; however, women's empowerment has gained more recognition and is termed a crucial factor in maintaining balance for sustainable development in a gender unbalanced world (Adam & Njoku, 2023). Generally, empowerment programmes are targeted at poverty reduction, economic transition/transformation and social stratification. In Nigeria, most especially the South West region, there have been varied empowerment programmes that have been implemented by government agencies at all levels, sometimes in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and International development partners to enhance women's socio-economic status, education, political participation and entrepreneurial skills. These empowerment programmes are sometimes limited in scope, but in recent times the social media has emerged as a tool for the dissemination of information, mobilization and networking with significant effect on such empowerment outcomes.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), Instagram and YouTube have changed how many people access information on developmental programmes. Within the context of women's empowerment programmes, these social media platforms serve varied roles, which include creating awareness, providing training resources, enabling peer-to-peer support, as well as fostering advocacy for gender balance. In some cases, these platforms have facilitated access to many opportunities for women, such as mentorship, marketing, thereby influencing good outcomes in empowerment programmes (Okoi et al., 2022).

Despite the huge opportunity social media presents, there have been numerous concerns regarding the level at which the platform contributes to the success of empowerment programmes among women in South West, Nigeria. While some scholars are of the view that social media enhances awareness, participation and networking, others argue on the challenge of digital illiteracy, misinformation, cyber bullying and unequal access to technology, which may serve as a hindrance to the effectiveness of these empowerment programmes (Thomas, Thompson & Nnana, 2022). Other factors, such as economic disparities and internet connectivity, are issues that could limit women's ability to fully exploit social media for empowerment. Irrespective of these concerns, there is a need to investigate the influence social media use has on the outcomes of women empowerment programmes in South West, Nigeria. The understanding of this relationship provides insights into how social media serves as an enabler or a barrier to achieving the desired objectives of these programmes. Existing feminist studies on women empowerment have focused on the use of the media to campaign for women to be empowered, whereas, little attention has been paid to checkmate the influence of social media use for empowerment programmes in the lives of women especially those in South West Nigeria, aside just raising awareness on women issues.

OBJECTIVES

To assess the benefits of social media usage among women beneficiaries. To identify challenges that may impede the effectiveness of such empowerment outcomes. To evaluate its influence on their participation and success in empowerment programmes.

METHODS

The study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically, survey methods to gather data on the influence of social media use on women empowerment programmes in South West Nigeria, using structured questionnaires to gather data from the sampled participants. The total population of the study for women in selected states is 8,250,204. The population of the study is as follows:

Research Article

Table 1. Population of Women in the selected South West States in Nigeria.

Selected State	Number of Women in the State
Osun State	1,682,810
Ogun State	3,788,932
Oyo State	2,778,462
Total	8,250,204

Source: City population (2022).

Adopting Morgan's (1970) sampling formula with a confidence level of 95.31% and an error margin of 4.69%, the calculated sample size for the survey is 451. The sampling techniques employed were convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The reason for using these techniques was to get the exact representation of women who are exposed to social media and could respond to the questionnaire. Data derived from the survey went through computation using SPSS software, and the findings were displayed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, frequency counts, mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Table 2. Benefits of Women Empowerment Programmes on Social Media in South West, Nigeria

S/N	Statements	SD	D	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	σ
q1	My financial situation has improved as a result of my engagement in empowerment programmes	85 (18.8)	140 (31.0)	190 (42.1)	36 (8.0)	2.39	0.88
q2	I have been empowered financially through grants, loans, etc.	107 (23.7)	221 (49.0)	87 (19.3)	36 (8.0)	2.12	0.86
q3	I have gained new skills and knowledge from empowerment programmes	50 (11.1)	72 (16.0)	226 (50.1)	103 (22.8)	2.85	0.90
q4	My health and wellbeing have been enhanced due to my involvement in empowerment programmes	56 (12.4)	131 (29.0)	234 (51.9)	30 (6.7)	2.53	0.79
q5	I have developed greater confidence and self-esteem as a result of my engagement in empowerment programmes	49 (10.9)	59 (13.1)	257 (57.0)	86 (19.1)	2.84	0.86
q6	I have enjoyed support from communities and social networks	85 (18.8)	103 (22.8)	234 (51.9)	29 (6.4)	2.46	0.87
q7	I have gained more access to educational opportunities such as scholarships and online courses	71 (15.7)	167 (37.0)	170 (37.7)	43 (9.5)	2.41	0.87

Research Article

q8	I am more aware of my rights and women empowerment opportunities	50 (11.1)	60 (13.3)	268 (59.4)	73 (16.2)	2.81	0.84
q9	I have been connected to mentors and guidance sessions through empowerment programmes	57 (12.6)	168 (37.3)	145 (32.2)	81 (18.0)	2.56	0.93
q10	I have collaborated on projects and initiatives	57 (12.6)	270 (59.9)	103 (22.8)	21 (4.7)	2.20	0.71

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey, 2024*

This section analyses the benefits of engagement with women empowerment programmes on social media using 10 items on a Likert Scale. The ten items included financial improvement, financial empowerment through grants and loans, development of new skills and knowledge, enhancement in health and wellbeing, development of greater confidence and self-esteemed, support from communities and social networks, access to educational opportunities, more awareness of rights and women empowerment opportunities, connection with mentors, as well as project collaboration, and these items were numbered q1, q2, q3, … q10 accordingly.

The investigation showed that respondents most agreed on items q3 (I have gained new skills and knowledge from empowerment programmes), q5 (I have developed greater confidence and self-esteemed as a result of my engagement in empowerment programmes), and q8 (I am more aware of my rights and women empowerment opportunities) considering their highest mean values of 2.85, 2.84 and 2.81 respectively. These results suggested that the top benefits of engaging in women empowerment programmes were the development of skills and knowledge, the development of greater confidence and self-esteem, as well as more awareness of rights and women empowerment opportunities accordingly. However, the results demonstrated that respondents most disagreed on items q2 (I have been empowered financially through grants, loans, etc.), q10 (I have collaborated on projects and initiatives) and q1 (My financial situation has improved as a result of my engagement in empowerment programmes) considering their lowest mean values of 2.12, 2.20 and 2.39 respectively. The results therefore showed that the least three benefits of engaging in women empowerment programmes were financial empowerment through grants and loans, project collaboration, and improvement in financial status accordingly. The results, therefore, suggested that financial-related aids and practical empowerment programmes benefited the respondents the least.

The least standard deviations of 0.71 and 0.79 in q10 (I have collaborated on projects and initiatives) and q4 (My health and well-being have been enhanced due to my involvement in empowerment programmes), respectively, indicated that responses were most clustered around the mean values. However, the highest standard deviations of 0.93 and 0.90 in q9 (I have been connected to mentors and guidance sessions through empowerment programmes) and q3 (I have gained new skills and knowledge from empowerment programmes) demonstrated that respondents' opinions were most scattered beyond the mean values.

Table 3. Challenges in using Social Media in relation to Empowerment Programmes

Challenges in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes	n	%	Rating
Lack of access to reliable internet	228	50.6	1st
Information overload	72	16.0	5th
Privacy concerns	75	16.6	4th
Difficulty in verifying information	208	46.1	2nd
Lack of time	116	25.7	3rd
Others	8	1.8	6th

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey, 2024*

Research Article

This section investigates the challenges facing respondents in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes. The results of the investigation revealed that lack of access to reliable internet (50.6 %) was the first challenge facing respondents in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes. The second challenge faced by respondents in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes was difficulty in verifying information, as confirmed by 46.1 % of the respondents. Third, lack of time was considered a challenge in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes and 25.7 % of the respondents affirmed it. The fourth and fifth challenges faced by respondents in using social media in relation to empowerment programmes were privacy concerns (16.6 %) and information overload (16.0 %). Summarily, the results indicated that lack of access to reliable internet, difficulty in verifying information, lack of time, privacy concerns, and information overload were the challenges faced by respondents in using social media concerning empowerment programmes.

Analysis of Hypothesis

There is only one hypothesis for this study, which tests the significant relationships and strength of the relationships between two variables. Hence, the researcher used a 99% confidence level and a Pearson correlation test for the analysis.

The following research hypothesis is tested in this study:

H_O: *There is no significant influence of social media use on the outcome of empowerment programmes among women in South West Nigeria.*

Table 4. Association between Engagement of Women in Empowerment Programmes on Social Media and Outcomes

			Outcome			Total
			Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	
Engagement of women in empowerment programmes on social media	Yes	Count	7	138	168	313
		% within engagement	2.2%	44.1%	53.7%	100.0%
		% within outcome	33.3%	65.7%	76.4%	69.4%
		% of Total	1.6%	30.6%	37.3%	69.4%
	No	Count	14	72	52	138
		% within engagement	10.1%	52.2%	37.7%	100.0%
		% within outcome	66.7%	34.3%	23.6%	30.6%
		% of Total	3.1%	16.0%	11.5%	30.6%
Total		Count	21	210	220	451
		% within engagement	4.7%	46.6%	48.8%	100.0%
		% within outcome	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.7%	46.6%	48.8%	100.0%

Cramer's V=.206, χ²=19.231, df=2, p=0.000 (Source: Researcher's Field Data, 2024)

This section analyses the association between women's engagement in empowerment programmes on social media and the outcome of women's empowerment programmes. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4. The results showed that in total, 220 respondents were satisfied with the outcome of the empowerment programme on social media (48.8 % of the total respondents) and of these, 168 engaged in women empowerment programmes (76.4 % of the total were satisfied with the outcome of their engagement in women empowerment programme on social media) and 52 did not engage in women empowerment programmes (representing 23.6 % of the total respondents that were satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme). Moreover, 21 respondents were not satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme on social media (4.7 % of the total respondents) and of these, 7 engaged in women empowerment programmes on social media (33.3 % of the total that were not satisfied with the outcome of their engagement in women empowerment programme on social media) and 14 did not engage in women empowerment programmes (representing 66.7 % of the total respondents that were not satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme).

Research Article

Furthermore, 210 respondents were neutral about the outcome of women empowerment programme on social media (46.7 % of the total respondents) and of these, 138 engaged in women empowerment programmes on social media (65.7 % of the total that were neutral about the outcome of their engagement in women empowerment programme on social media) and 72 did not engage in women empowerment programmes (representing 34.3 % of the total respondents that were neutral about the outcome of women empowerment programme).Additionally, the results showed that among the 313 respondents (representing 69.4 % of the total respondents) who engaged in women empowerment programmes on social media, 168 respondents (representing 53.7 % of those who engaged in women empowerment programme on social media) were satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme, 138 respondents (representing 44.1 % of respondents who engaged in women empowerment programme on social media) were neutral about the outcome of women empowerment programme on social media), and 7 respondents (2.2 % of respondents who engaged in women empowerment programme on social media) were dissatisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme.

Also, the results showed that out of the total 138 respondents (representing 30.6 % of the total respondents) who did not engage in women empowerment programmes on social media, 72 respondents (representing 72.2 % of respondents who did not engage in women empowerment programme on social media) were neutral about the outcome of women empowerment programme on social media), 52 respondents (representing 37.7 % of those who did not engage in women empowerment programme on social media) were satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme, and 14 respondents (representing 10.1 % of respondents who did not engage in women empowerment programme on social media) were not satisfied with the outcome of women empowerment programme.

Generally, the findings showed that those who engaged in women empowerment programmes (69.4 %) were more satisfied with the outcome (76.4 %) than those who did not engage. Also, those who did not engage in women empowerment programmes (30.6 %) were more pessimistic about the outcome (66.7 %) than those who engaged. This indicates that engagement in women empowerment programmes improves the outcome of women empowerment programmes. The results of Cramer's V showed that the relationship between the engagement of women in empowerment programmes on social media and the outcome of empowerment programmes was 0.206, indicating a weak association (Field, 2024), and Pearson Chi-square showed that the association was statistically significant $\chi2(2) = 19.231$, p< .001.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the assertion of media theorist McLuhan (1964) is upheld by the findings of this study. His emphasis was on the medium as being the message, meaning that how an idea, opinion or information is received or sent is as important as the details of the message. In other words, the means of sending information, whether visual, written, oral or musical has a way of influencing how the society receives and perceives that message. In this case, the women are more familiar with the Facebook platform, and the NGOs reached them through that medium.

Communication is extremely important for women's development and the media has been playing a significant role, Rosencrance, (2023) accepted that the media has been very instrumental in supporting the movement for women's emancipation and empowerment, focusing on the neglect and marginalisation of women in the society though not to the desired level because the frequency of media use for women empowerment programme is generally low because of the commercialised nature of the traditional media. The media is known as a powerful agent of change and an important medium to advocate for gender equality and uplift the status of women (Dominick, 2011).

The media has a great influence on people, and as a responsibility, should be used to remodel stereotyped images of women and their roles in society with adequate information. Studies have revealed that women's exposure to the media may likely change some socio-cultural norms and gender stereotyping (Jesmin & Amin, 2017). Findings revealed that all (100.0 %) of the respondents used social media, thereby indicating digital literacy among the study sample. Musaeve (2021) stated that the media has a powerful impact on how the world is viewed as most people would not know about recent happenings beyond their immediate environment except through the media.

Research Article

The media is an essential force in the promotion of national development and fostering education, it has a way of capturing the attention of people on issues for a longer time and could direct the world's mind on trending issues (Asemah, 2020). Although there are contrary opinions on media effects on human changes, the importance of the media to society cannot be overemphasised. In other words, the more people are exposed to information through the media, the more their views about the world around them are shaped or re-modeled towards desired change. More NGOs with women empowerment initiatives can subscribe to more social media platforms and use them frequently to empower more women as it will serve as an information fulcrum towards continuous improvement and development among the female gender.

Social media is the arrowhead of new media and has played a significant role in how humans communicate or conduct their affairs in the 21st century by facilitating global social exchanges and causes. Lister et al, (2009) specified that the new media paved the way for multi-dimensional changes in the world of communication, creating a way for immediate response and intractability, surpassing the restrictions and boundaries of the old media, collapsing the world into a global village and opening avenue for improved means of reaching a large heterogeneous audience. Social media are communication techniques used for social interaction with a highly accessible and scalable function (Sanusi, Adelabu & Okunade 2014). Supporting this position, the study's findings established that one of the major roles of social media in facilitating access to empowerment programmes for women was to raise awareness, and this was confirmed by the majority (76.4 %) of the respondents.

The study concludes that social media significantly enhances the outcomes of empowerment programmes among women in South West Nigeria. By providing platforms for information dissemination, skill acquisition and networking, social media serves as a powerful tool for improving women's access to resources, knowledge, and economic opportunities. Women who actively use social media for empowerment programmes report greater engagement, improved entrepreneurial skills and stronger social support networks. To effectively address the challenges faced by women in Nigerian society due to traditional and religious practices, as well as to harness the potential of social media for empowerment, the study recommends:

1. Efforts should be directed at improving women's access to education, healthcare, and economic resources. Government policies must prioritize skill acquisition and capacity-building programmes tailored to reduce gender inequality and enhance women's quality of life.

2. NGOs and media campaign planners should leverage on popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to disseminate empowerment programmes. Creative strategies that utilize visually appealing and engaging content will improve information accessibility and impact. Exploring additional platforms with high engagement can further expand the reach of these programmes.

3. Governments must collaborate with NGOs to provide affordable and reliable internet access, while NGOs should design tailored digital literacy programmes to overcome specific barriers faced by women. Ensuring open communication channels for information verification will build trust and encourage active participation in empowerment initiatives.

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