

Feminism, Leadership, and Social Media: The Feminists From the Nigerian #EndSARS Protests

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ABSTRACT

Social media (SM) has provided everyone with a tool to air their unhindered views, especially in conservative societies. This research analyzes the 1,090 tweets of certain Nigerian feminists/activists during the 13-day October 2020 #EndSARS protests. The analysis investigates the content of the women's tweets thematically by identifying their most used words vis-a-vis their corresponding values. These words were then used to interpret the messages being conveyed, how SM impacts feminist leadership, and the temperaments of these women. The analysis also compares the social classes of the women based on their profiles, the intersection of feminism, political activism, and how SM has become a tool for unhindered feminism.

KEYWORDS

#EndSARS, Feminists, Leadership, SM, Twitter and Women

INTRODUCTION

SM has driven a record increase in activism and feminism. This research analyzed the impact of SM (Twitter) on feminism, women's activism, and leadership in Nigeria. It focused on some major feminists of the October 2020 13-day #EndSARS protests. A thorough analysis of their 1,090 tweets revealed some traits of feminist leadership concerning socio-political activism in the age of SM. The findings were then compared with some earlier events and literature, for correlations and new developments. These protests saw Millennials and Generation Zers take to the streets to demand a Nigerian Police Force (NPF) reform and the immediate dissolution of the notorious Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS), accused of murder, rape, and robbery. Millennials (born between 1984 and 1996) and Generation Zers (born after 1997) are both regarded as youths (Bresman and Rao, 2017).

Feminism has no single globally accepted definition because of differing (mostly women) definitions (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014 as cited in Ogletree et al., 2019). Some definitions are popular nonetheless. Miley Cyrus describes feminism as not being scared of anything while Emma Watson, described feminism as a "belief that men and women should have equal rights" (Ogletree et al., 2019). Definitions from celebrities are important because they are key SM influencers. Feminism may be defined as the advocacy of equality of opportunities, rights, and benefits for women and men possessing similar abilities. A feminist is a woman who demands similar opportunities and benefits as a man with whom she shares similar abilities.

In 2005, Crosby and Bryson defined leadership as “the inspiration of others to undertake collective action in pursuit of the common good”. Leadership is an ethical process in which leaders and followers cooperate in reciprocal ways (Rost, 1991). Leadership is knowing what to do (Martins, 2020). “A leader gives articulation to the imagination of the people” (Peterson, 2017) and acts on them. Leadership is a unique ability to solve challenges yet to occur.

SM are the “various electronic tools, technologies, and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange” (Hamilton, 2009 as cited in Luo et al., 2015). It is also a series of networked online spaces that enable computer-proxy communication designed to share and exchange information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). The rest of the paper includes a broad literature review, the methodology adopted and why, data/results, and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a dearth of studies on SM and feminism because it is still an evolving subject. Female activism and leadership via SM were well pronounced during the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt, which led to the regime’s removal (Barghouthi, 2016). Barghouthi’s focus was on Nawara Negm’s blog, “The Popular Sarcastic Front”. The blog showcased Negm’s social-political stance and its theme was, “Freedom is for those who carry their lives in their hands”. Negm is a privileged Egyptian journalist, author, editor, and translator with over 700,000 Twitter followers and 15,000 to 20,000 daily readers pre-revolution (Barghouthi, 2016). Barghouthi’s analysis of Negm’s communication strategy and expression revealed a specific choice of words and language. These were used to identify patterns and understand her innate characteristics responsible for mobilising millions of Egyptians to protest.

Barghouthi’s study revealed that SM avails social activism to everyone, a divergence from Muslim women’s insurmountable activism barriers. The youths’ mastery of SM makes it difficult for regimes to control freedom of expression and SM optimises freedom of speech, especially in conservative societies. Feminists are now judged by their work rather than gender. Barghouthi concluded that Negm demonstrated an exceptional form of feminism that could never have succeeded without SM. Her achievements showcased how Muslim women can directly assume authority outside explicitly religious spaces. Tufecki (2018) also posited that the Arab Spring would have been impossible without Twitter to rally individuals.

Feminist Hashtags: Social Movements and Female Activism

According to Della Porta and Diani (2006), social movements are groups of individuals who collectively confront dominant social-political paradigms and revisualise new paradigms. The goal is to actuate social transformation by increasing consciousness about the ills of some social conditions. This stirs new discourses that challenge systems and/or structures that preserve social injustice, thereby reassessing the exigency of a social issue, defining and coordinating actions for change (Jasper, 1998). SM is essential for social action and organisation (Tufecki, 2018). Hashtag campaigns on SM have deposed traditional concepts of social movements, reshaped traditional strategies for mobilizing people, and expedited more extensive outreach, advocacy, and prevention models by social service agencies.

Feminist hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo, #WhyIStayed, and #MaybeHeDoesntHitYou have created awareness on the prevalence of gender-based violence, GBV (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). #MeToo and WhyIStayed attracted record attention, critically analysed the structures and systems that espouse gender inequity, and provided a haven for survivors to narrate personal experiences. They adopted a qualitative methodology to analyze tweets from the hashtags above. The research investigated GBV survivors’ meaning-making processes and broad properties of feminist-based hashtags like #WhyIStayed. They utilised supervised machine learning and qualitative techniques in the exploration of corollary research questions.

Their findings explicitly examined the use of collective action frames in the #WhyIStayed movement. They used Twitter’s application programming interface (API) to acquire 61,725 tweets

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