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Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Enquiry

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Editorial Note

It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility to the academic community that we finally able to bring this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Enquiry* (JSSME) [E-ISSN: 3106-3462] before you. The publication of this Volume 1, Issue 1, represents a momentous milestone in our collective efforts and shared quest to offer a truly inclusive, rigorous, and intellectually dynamic platform for scholarly debate across the social sciences and allied multidisciplinary fields.

The contemporary world is shaped by highly interdependent and complex political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental challenges that increasingly tend to confront mono-disciplinary clarifications, rather multidisciplinary analysis. In response, JSSME is founded on the principle that meaningful social research must transcend not only traditional disciplinary boundaries, but also methodological as well as geographical limits. The journal is dedicated to encouraging analytically sophisticated, empirically grounded, and socially relevant research that advances critical comprehension of complex social phenomena at local, national, and global levels.

The attainment of an ISSN and the assignment of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) from the first issue is a testament to the journal's dedication to scholarly integrity, international visibility, and the enduring availability of published scholarship. These milestones make sure that contributions published in JSSME are permanently identifiable, easily citable, and fully integrated into the global knowledge ecosystem, aligning the journal with international standards of scholarly publishing from its very inception.

This inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's multidisciplinary approach through a diverse contribution addressing critical contemporary issues. The articles together examine diverse aspects of grassroots political consciousness and institutional trust among the marginalized market women in Nigeria; analyze the political economy of environmental remediation in Niger Delta, shedding light on how governance failures and the elite capture compromises ecological justice; critically discuss the role of adaptable architectural designs in influencing the well-being and residential satisfaction of students in the Nigerian university environment; delve into the detrimental effects of unregulated tourism on the indigenous Mro community in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, while also promoting community-based strategies for sustainable tourism; explore the viability of crowdfunding as an alternative financing method for undergraduate entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, highlighting trust, transparency, and collaborative ecosystems; and investigate interdiscursive strategies in the Nigerian digital political communication, focusing on how political legitimacy and authority are discursively constructed through ceremonial texts produced on social media platforms. In sum, the contributions demonstrate the analytical depth, thematic diversity, and interdisciplinary scope which the JSSME aims to foster.

The Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Enquiry is committed to upholding a rigorous peer-review process, ethical publishing standards, and intellectual transparency. We welcome submissions from early career researchers as well as established scholars and from a wide geographical and intellectual background with diverse contexts. The journal, therefore, strives to amplify underrepresented voices and promote the production of knowledge that is both globally informed and locally grounded.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors who entrusted us with their scholarship for this inaugural issue, the reviewers whose careful, timely and constructive feedback ensured academic excellence, and the editorial and technical teams whose dedication and hard work made the publication of this issue possible. Their combined efforts have laid a strong foundation for the future growth and credibility of the journal.

We hope that as JSSME moves forward, it will become a dynamic platform for critical and rigorous enquiry, academic collaboration, and meaningful intellectual exchange. We welcome researchers, academics, and practitioners to engage with the journal as contributors, reviewers, readers, and partners in advancing multidisciplinary social science research that responds thoughtfully and critically to the most significant issues of the contemporary world.



Professor Dr. Md. Thowhidul Islam

Executive Editor

Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Enquiry

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An Appraisal of Political Beliefs and Trust-in-Government Among Market Women in Marginalised Communities in Ondo City

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in Nigerian politics remains depressingly low, yet Nigeria's political history shows that market women have not always been silent political actors. The study, therefore, investigated an appraisal of political beliefs and trust in government among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo city. Previous studies have largely concentrated on women's empowerment and political interest, with little attention paid to the political beliefs and trust orientations of market women. The study adopted a descriptive research design, with 210 market women randomly selected as participants. Data were collected using the Political Belief Scale (PB, $r = 0.94$) and Trust-in-Government Scale (T-I-G, $r = 0.81$). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Participants' mean age was 52 ± 1.05 years, and 21.1% were between 50–54 years of age. Results revealed a paradox: while political beliefs were high ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), trust in government was low ($\bar{x} = 2.47$), against the threshold of 2.5. These findings imply that although market women demonstrate strong political beliefs, their limited trust in government could hinder sustained participation in democratic governance. It is concluded that bridging this gap requires deliberate trust-building mechanisms. The study recommends the establishment of permanent liaison committees between local government councils and market associations (Iyalojas, cooperative leaders) to enable two-way communication on policy priorities, infrastructure needs, and market regulations.

KEYWORDS

Political Belief, Trust-in-Government, Market Women, Marginalised Communities

1. Introduction

In many of Nigeria's marginalised communities, the rhythms of daily trade and communal solidarity are sustained by women traders, yet these rhythms scarcely translate into meaningful trust in state institutions or vibrant political agency. These women, often referred to as market women, are more than economic actors; they are the lifeblood of local commerce and community cohesion, controlling food distribution, regulating trade, and managing informal credit networks through cooperative structures. Despite this central role, they are rarely acknowledged as political actors in governance structures and are frequently reduced to passive recipients of electoral mobilisation (Ariyo & Jerome, 2018). Their exclusion is not just a question of representation but one that speaks to deeper distortions in Nigeria's democratic fabric, raising critical concerns about legitimacy, inclusivity, and the responsiveness of governance to the needs of all citizens (Dulani, 2023; Nwagwu, Iwuala & Ebeh, 2024).



The paradox of market women's position is striking. They are visible in the economic sphere, arriving at markets before dawn and leaving only after dusk, yet they remain largely invisible in the corridors of political power.

Beneath the vibrancy of market trade lies a muted political undercurrent, shaped by decades of neglect, unmet promises, and transactional encounters with politicians whose engagements often end once elections are concluded (Obeta & Ihechituru, 2025). This dynamic sustains a cycle of distrust, where political beliefs about the importance of governance coexist with deep scepticism about the capacity or willingness of state institutions to respond meaningfully to citizens' needs (Abolade, 2021). Political beliefs are central to understanding this paradox. Defined as enduring orientations and convictions about governance, authority, and the role of citizens in public life, political beliefs shape how individuals interpret political processes and their place within them (Almond & Verba, 1963; Eze & Mark, 2024). These beliefs are cognitive, affective, and evaluative: they embody knowledge of political systems, emotional orientations toward political actors, and judgments about what governance should be (Gumbi & Baba, 2024). Importantly, political beliefs are not fixed traits but evolving constructs shaped by socialisation, historical experience, and personal encounters with institutions (Dalton, 2014).

They are significant predictors of participation, civic engagement, and voting behaviour (Hooghe, 2011). Among marginalised women, political beliefs are often simultaneously shaped by agency and constraint. Market women may hold strong convictions about the necessity of governance, taxation, and regulation, yet their lived experiences of exclusion limit opportunities for genuine political influence (Radnitz, 2021). For market women in Ondo, political beliefs are informed by a blend of historical exclusion, cultural narratives, and transactional political encounters. Marginalisation theory suggests that structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, economic vulnerability, and political invisibility combine to erode trust, even among those most dependent on stable governance. Their political orientations are thus not merely the product of personal experience but outcomes of entrenched gendered socialisation. Beliefs about governance are shaped less by abstract ideological loyalties and more by material concerns such as taxation rates, market levies, infrastructure provision, and security arrangements.

For many, politics is approached with a pragmatic, instrumentalist orientation, where politicians are judged based on tangible benefits delivered rather than party affiliation (Okeke, 2019; Chandra, 2004). At the same time, political beliefs are not devoid of normative content. Traders frequently articulate expectations of fairness, accountability, and protection from government, even when such expectations are repeatedly unmet. Community memory reinforces this sense of entitlement. Historic episodes such as the Aba Women's War of 1929 and local protests against unfair levies remain powerful narratives, reminding market women that they have historically played active roles in challenging unjust governance. Political socialisation within markets further strengthens these beliefs. Market associations, headed by leaders such as Iya-Olojas, serve as hubs of political discussion and information dissemination, particularly during elections. Religious institutions and family networks also contribute, ensuring that even women with limited formal education are exposed to political discourse in everyday settings.

While political beliefs reveal how market women perceive governance, the question of trust in government exposes how they evaluate it. Political trust refers to citizens' confidence in the fairness,

integrity, and competence of political institutions (Norris, 2011; Levi & Stoker, 2000). It encompasses expectations that government will act in the public's best interest and deliver services effectively (Zilincikova, 2020). Theories of political trust diverge between institutional performance perspectives, which stress service delivery and promise fulfilment as determinants of trust, and cultural approaches, which emphasise historical experience and norms (Hetherington, 2005; Oloruntoba, 2021). In many African contexts, including Nigeria, both perspectives are relevant: colonial legacies of extractive governance persist alongside contemporary failures of state responsiveness (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Logan, 2017). In Nigeria, trust in government has been persistently low. Corruption scandals, policy inconsistency, weak service delivery, and extractive taxation reinforce scepticism across both rural and urban populations (Ariyo & Jerome, 2018).

For market women, distrust is grounded in the everyday realities of “taxation without service.” Levies collected from traders rarely translate into improved stalls, sanitation, or security. Government presence is often limited to regulatory enforcement, with officials appearing to collect dues or enforce fines rather than to engage in meaningful dialogue. This asymmetry constructs government as an extractive entity, rather than a partner in community development (Ayo, Mbarika & Oni, 2015). Patterns of distrust are further shaped by political representation. While Iya-Oloja leaders act as intermediaries between traders and politicians, their endorsements are often mediated by partisan loyalties or personal patronage. When traders perceive that their leaders' decisions reflect self-interest rather than collective priorities, trust in both leadership and government erodes. This experience echoes findings across African markets where political brokerage reproduces cycles of exclusion rather than empowering grassroots voices (Chukwuma, Akinremi, Gyimah-Boadi, Bratton, Mattes, Logan & Dulani, 2015).

The consequences of low trust extend beyond scepticism. Disengagement from government consultations and resistance to regulations create a feedback loop in which limited participation hinders government understanding of community needs, further weakening trust. Yet, distrust does not always translate into apathy. Many market women remain politically attentive and actively critique governance, embodying what Norris (2011) describes as “critical citizenship.” They monitor political actions, hold discussions, and voice frustrations, even if they withdraw from formal engagement. This paradox illustrates how high political belief can coexist with low political trust—a dynamic central to this study. Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping trust dynamics. In Yoruba political culture, trust is often personal and relational. Politicians who establish genuine connections with traders, attend market functions, or fulfil promises tend to command higher levels of trust, even when broader institutional confidence is low. However, such trust is fragile, frequently undermined by unmet expectations and inconsistent engagement.

Examples abound across Ondo: in Ilaje, decades of unfulfilled promises to improve transport infrastructure have left traders deeply sceptical, while in Akoko, repeated petitions for market renovations remain unanswered despite formal acknowledgments. Such experiences reinforce perceptions of government as distant and unresponsive. Moreover, gendered power relations within markets constrain women's autonomy in political participation. Male patrons and political godfathers often dominate decision-making, limiting the influence of women leaders. National-level initiatives such as the 35% affirmative action policy have had little impact at the grassroots, as they seldom address the everyday realities of marginalised women traders. Civic education interventions, often led by NGOs,

are typically short-term and fail to sustain changes in trust or political engagement. Consequently, market women's political socialisation remains largely shaped by informal networks and sporadic patronage, rather than by structured civic empowerment (Okeke, 2019).

The persistence of low trust has significant implications for democracy in Nigeria. When women who anchor local economies remain excluded from governance, democracy becomes less inclusive and representative. Marginalised communities, accustomed to self-reliance in the absence of state support, may internalise distrust as a survival strategy, further normalising disengagement from formal politics. This entrenched disconnection between citizen belief in governance and confidence in governors reflects a profound democratic gap. Against this backdrop, the appraisal of political beliefs and trust in government among market women in Ondo City becomes critical. This study responds to the gap in the literature, as few works have examined the lived political orientations of grassroots women despite their economic centrality. It also addresses a theoretical gap by integrating insights from political trust theory, gendered political socialisation, and marginalisation theory to explain how women's economic agency intersects with their political worldviews. Thus, focusing on a demographic that sustains communities economically yet remains politically marginal, the study highlights both the resilience and fragility of Nigeria's democratic processes.

1.1 Objective of the study

Generally, this study did an appraisal of political beliefs and trust-in-government among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo city. Particularly, this study will examine the following.

1. To ascertain market women's political belief
2. To investigate market women's trust in government

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate political beliefs and trust in government among market women in Ondo City, Nigeria. The target population comprised adult market women aged 18 years and above who were actively trading at least three days per week. A multi-stage stratified purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure systematic and context-sensitive representation of the study population. The study area covered major trading hubs in Ondo West and Ondo East Local Government Areas of Ondo State, spanning both urban and peri-urban communities. At the first stage, the LGAs were stratified into four market clusters based on contextual characteristics such as market size and footfall, location and ward dispersion, and the degree of formal organisation. From each stratum, two markets were purposively selected using criteria of trading volume, safety and accessibility, and the presence of recognised traders' associations, yielding a total of eight markets. At the final stage, 210 market women were proportionately allocated to the eight markets according to relative market size. Within each market, participants were approached through a stall-intercept strategy during peak trading hours, ensuring diversity in terms of product lines, trading experience, and socio-demographic characteristics.

Data were collected using two validated structured scales. The Political Belief Scale (PBS; reliability coefficient $r = 0.94$) and the Trust-in-Government Scale (TIG; $r = 0.81$) were administered in interviewer-assisted format to accommodate literacy variations among respondents. Both instruments were based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The data

collection process took place over a six-week period between January and February, 2025, and respondents were given sufficient explanation regarding the purpose and voluntary nature of the study. The overall response rate was 96%, with minimal non-response due to the accessibility of participants within the market environment. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Department Quality Assurance on Research, and permission was also secured from market associations and local government authorities before data collection. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured by anonymising data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) to summarise participants' political beliefs and trust in government.

3. Results

Research question 1: What is the level of market women political beliefs?

Table 1: Mean response of market women political beliefs

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std.
1	The government should provide more support for women's businesses.	110 52.6	69 33.0	24 11.5	6 2.9	3.35	.79602
2	Market women should prioritize economic empowerment over political engagement.	97 46.4	63 30.1	29 13.9	20 9.6	3.13	.98608
3	The current political system represents the interests of market women.	92 44.0	48 23.0	36 17.2	33 15.8	2.95	1.11700
4	Women's participation in politics is essential for gender equality.	83 39.7	78 37.3	27 12.9	21 10.0	3.07	.96342
5	Market women should focus on their businesses rather than politics.	93 44.5	56 26.8	26 12.4	34 16.3	2.99	1.10722
6	The government should increase funding for women's empowerment programs.	120 57.4	65 31.1	15 7.2	9 4.3	3.42	.80499
7	Market women's associations should be involved in political decision-making.	61 29.2	75 35.9	57 27.3	16 7.7	2.87	.92572
8	Political leaders understand the needs of market women.	90 43.1	75 35.9	30 14.4	14 6.7	3.15	.90697
9	Market women should support female political candidates.	77 36.8	49 23.4	48 23.0	35 16.7	2.80	1.11147
10	The political system is fair and just for market women.	83 39.7	50 23.9	43 20.6	33 15.8	2.88	1.10672
11	Market women's political engagement can bring about social change.	93 44.5	60 28.7	34 16.3	22 10.5	3.07	1.01414
12	Women's political participation is crucial for democracy.	83 39.7	65 31.1	27 12.9	34 16.3	2.94	1.08599
13	Market women should prioritize collective action over individual success.	86 41.1	56 26.8	41 19.6	26 12.4	2.97	1.05330
14	The government should provide training for market women in politics.	71 34.0	70 33.5	42 20.1	26 12.4	2.89	1.01543
15	Market women's political beliefs align with their business interests.	27 12.9	49 23.4	104 49.8	29 13.9	2.35	.87651
16	Political engagement is essential for market women's empowerment.	94 45.0	51 24.4	35 16.7	29 13.9	3.01	1.08529
17	Market women should support policies promoting gender equality.	87 41.6	52 24.9	46 22.0	24 11.5	2.97	1.04873

18	The political system needs to be changed to benefit market women.	56 26.8	60 28.7	56 26.8	37 17.7	2.65	1.06020
19	Market women's political participation can improve their socio-economic status.	89 42.6	63 30.1	28 13.4	29 13.9	3.01	1.05829
20	Market women should engage in politics.	60 28.7	40 19.1	65 31.1	44 21.1	2.56	1.11721
Weighted Average: 2.95. Threshold: 2.5							
SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree D: Disagree SD : Strongly Disagree							

Table 1 revealed the mean response of market women political beliefs. It has a weighted average of 2.95 as against the threshold of 2.5. By implication, market women political beliefs.

Research question 2: What is the level of market women trust in government?

Table 2: Mean response of market women's trust in government

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std.
1	I trust the government to protect my business interests.	12 5.8	108 51.9	78 37.5	10 4.8	2.60	.722
2	The government is responsive to the needs of market women.	3 1.4	3 1.4	107 51.4	95 45.7	1.59	.600
3	I believe the government has market women's best interests at heart.	2 1.0	2 1.0	24 11.5	180 86.5	1.16	.463
4	The government is transparent in its dealings with market women.	43 20.7	113 54.3	42 20.2	10 4.8	2.91	.772
5	I trust government officials to keep their promises.	66 31.7	76 36.5	55 26.4	11 5.3	2.95	.891
6	The government provides adequate support for market women's businesses.	33 15.9	34 16.3	82 39.4	59 28.4	2.20	1.024
7	I feel confident in the government's ability to address market women's concerns.	47 22.6	110 52.9	41 19.7	10 4.8	2.93	.783
8	The government is fair in its treatment of market women.	56 26.9	83 39.9	53 25.5	16 7.7	2.86	.903
9	I trust the government to provide accurate information.	56 26.9	111 53.4	28 13.5	13 6.3	3.01	.811
10	The government prioritizes market women's needs over other groups.	40 19.2	95 45.7	59 28.4	14 6.7	2.77	.835
11	I believe the government is committed to empowering market women.	52 25.0	79 38.0	55 26.1	22 10.6	2.77	.944
12	The government is accountable to market women.	31 14.9	43 20.7	97 46.6	37 17.8	2.33	.937
13	I trust government policies to benefit market women.	38 18.3	39 18.8	84 40.4	47 22.6	2.33	1.021
14	The government values market women's contributions to the economy.	53 25.5	106 51.0	33 15.9	16 7.7	2.94	.849
15	I feel heard by the government as a market woman.	33 15.9	40 19.2	79 38.0	56 26.9	2.24	1.021
16	The government addresses market women's grievances effectively.	44 21.2	56 26.9	78 37.5	30 14.4	2.55	.982
17	I trust the government to protect market women's rights.	35 16.8	63 30.3	63 30.3	47 22.6	2.41	1.018

18	The government provides equal opportunities for market women.	30 14.4	23 11.1	84 40.4	71 34.1	2.06	1.015
19	I believe the government understands market women's challenges.	44 21.2	82 39.4	47 22.6	35 16.8	2.65	.996
20	The government is committed to improving market women's lives.	30 14.4	37 14.4	84 10.4	57 27.4	2.19	.998
Weighted Average: 2.47. Threshold: 2.5							
SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree D: Disagree SD : Strongly Disagree							

Table 2 revealed the mean response of market women trust in government. It has a weighted average of 2.47 as against the threshold of 2.5. By implication, market women demonstrate average trust in government.

4. Discussion

4.1 Market Women's Political Beliefs

The finding that market women in marginalised communities of Ondo exhibit high political beliefs suggests that they possess a strong awareness of, and orientation toward, political processes, governance structures, and the role of citizens in shaping public life. Political beliefs, as conceptualised by Dalton (2014), are cognitive and normative frameworks through which individuals interpret political realities, assign meaning to political events, and decide their own role in civic life. In the context of these market women, the presence of high political beliefs indicates that despite socio-economic constraints, their exposure to political discourse, lived experiences with governance outcomes, and interpersonal socialisation have cultivated a clear sense of political identity. The high political beliefs observed align with prior studies in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa that show that political marginalisation does not necessarily equate to political ignorance (Zilincikova, 2020).

On the contrary, those living in politically neglected spaces often develop acute political perceptions because governance failures directly and visibly affect their daily lives. Market women's livelihoods are intimately tied to government policies on taxation, market infrastructure, transport, and security. This daily proximity to policy effects fosters persistent engagement with political ideas, even in the absence of formal participation. Political beliefs among these women are also shaped by social networks within the market environment, where informal political discussions occur organically in trading stalls, cooperative meetings, and association gatherings. These networks act as informal civic education, consistent with Verba, Scholzman, and Brady's (1995) observation that political knowledge is often socially transmitted through routine interactions. The cultural institution of the *Iya-oloja* further reinforces this, as leaders often serve as conduits of political information from politicians to traders, even if mediated by patronage.

However, the findings suggest that these political beliefs are largely cognitive rather than behavioural. While women demonstrate strong opinions about governance and awareness of political structures, this does not always translate into direct political engagement such as lobbying for market improvements or participating consistently in civic platforms. This reflects Almond and Verba's (1963) description of a parochial-participant political culture, where citizens hold political opinions but engage selectively. Importantly, the finding resonates with political efficacy literature. Internal efficacy which is a belief in one's own ability to understand and engage with politics which appears relatively strong, while external efficacy, is a belief that government will respond to citizen demands, is weaker, as

corroborated by low trust levels. In this sense, high political beliefs among these women represent a latent resource for future mobilisation, one that could be harnessed through inclusive strategies that link political awareness to actual decision-making opportunities.

The implications for political mobilisation are particularly important. The high level of political consciousness among market women suggests that strategies for women's empowerment in marginalised communities should not begin with awareness creation, but with pathways that transform awareness into collective action. Market associations could serve as platforms for sustained mobilisation, where traders are encouraged to channel their strong political beliefs into advocacy for improved infrastructure, transparent taxation, and better representation. If supported by responsive governance, the existing political consciousness of these women could become a powerful driver of grassroots mobilisation and democratic participation.

4.2 Market Women's Trust in Government

The finding of low trust in government among market women reflects deep-seated scepticism toward political institutions and actors. Political trust, as conceptualised by Levi and Stoker (2000) in (Oloruntoba, 2021), is the belief that government will act in the citizen's interest and adhere to principles of fairness and competence. The observed deficit in trust here is significant, as it undermines the capacity of democratic institutions to secure legitimacy and foster cooperation among citizens. This distrust is not unique to Ondo's marginalised market women; it mirrors national trends. Afrobarometer (2022) data show that trust in Nigeria's federal government, local government councils, and political parties is consistently low, with women—especially in rural or economically disadvantaged contexts—expressing even greater scepticism than men. However, the reasons for this distrust are highly contextual. For these market women, distrust is rooted in lived experience.

Many reported that government engagement is largely limited to revenue collection, enforcement of levies, and pre-election political mobilisation. Promises of improved market infrastructure, reduced levies, or access to microcredit are often made but rarely fulfilled. This aligns with findings by Okeke (2019), who noted that political promises in market contexts are frequently transactional and short-term, eroding confidence over time. Low trust is also shaped by the perceived extractive nature of government-market relations. Traders view government officials as regulators and enforcers, not as partners in market development. Levy collection, for example, is often seen as a one-way transaction, with no visible reinvestment into market facilities. This perception resonates with the “taxation without services” critique common in African political economy literature (Obeta & Ihechituru, 2025). The distrust is compounded by structural barriers to representation. While *Iya-oloja* leaders may have contact with local politicians, these relationships are often mediated by political patronage and not always transparent to the wider market community.

As a result, market women perceive decision-making as distant, elite-controlled, and unaccountable. From a theoretical perspective, the low trust finding can be interpreted through the lens of institutional performance theory (Levi & Stoker, 2000), which posits that citizens' trust is strongly influenced by their evaluation of institutional performance. In this case, persistent underperformance in delivering promised market improvements, combined with the absence of participatory governance mechanisms, reinforces distrust. The consequences of low trust are far-reaching. Trust is the lubricant of democratic systems—it facilitates compliance with regulations, willingness to cooperate with

authorities, and openness to policy reforms. In its absence, citizens may withdraw from political processes, resist government initiatives, or engage only in short-term, transactional interactions. For market women, low trust could translate into reduced willingness to participate in formal consultation processes, reluctance to support government-led development schemes, and increased reliance on informal networks for problem-solving.

The coexistence of high political beliefs with low trust reveals a form of critical citizenship (Norris, 2011), where citizens are politically aware and evaluative, but sceptical of current governance performance. This duality has important implications. On one hand, it provides a foundation for mobilisation, as politically conscious citizens are more likely to demand accountability and reform. On the other hand, persistent low trust can deepen cynicism and disengagement if reforms are not forthcoming. Mobilisation strategies for market women, therefore, must prioritise restoring trust through visible responsiveness. Transparent reinvestment of levies into market facilities, regular consultative forums between councils and market associations, and accountability mechanisms could help rebuild confidence.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limits of this study. The reliance on self-reported measures of political beliefs and trust introduces the possibility of respondent bias, as women may have overstated their political awareness or understated their trust due to social desirability pressures. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the data only provides a snapshot, which may shift with election cycles or changing government performance. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal and mixed methods approaches to capture evolving perceptions and mitigate self-reporting biases.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings present a nuanced portrait of political consciousness among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo. On one hand, these women demonstrate high political beliefs—reflecting a strong awareness of governance processes, informed opinions on political actors, and an enduring sense of the importance of political participation. On the other, they exhibit low trust in government, signaling a lack of confidence in political institutions' willingness or capacity to act in their interest. The co-occurrence of these two findings suggests that political disconnection in these communities is not rooted in apathy or ignorance. Rather, it emerges from a lived dissonance between political understanding and governance reality. Market women clearly see the relevance of politics to their daily lives, yet their repeated encounters with unfulfilled promises, extractive government practices, and absence of meaningful consultation undermine their willingness to trust official structures.

This dynamic aligns with broader Nigerian and African patterns where citizens, particularly in marginalised or rural settings, engage critically with politics but do so from a position of guarded scepticism. The result is a form of citizenship that is active in thought but cautious in practice—a stance that preserves political awareness but limits collaborative governance. Importantly, the high political beliefs evident among these women constitute a latent civic resource. They indicate that the foundational orientation toward political engagement exists and could be mobilised toward more active participation if institutional trust were strengthened. Efforts to rebuild trust must therefore focus not on generating political interest, but on demonstrating consistent, tangible responsiveness from government actors. Low trust, if unaddressed, risks entrenching a cycle of disengagement. When

citizens perceive government as unresponsive or self-serving, they are less likely to participate in formal processes, which in turn reduces the pressure on institutions to be accountable.

Breaking this cycle requires deliberate policy design: creating continuous channels for dialogue, ensuring transparency in resource use, and integrating market women directly into decision-making about the spaces and systems that shape their livelihoods. In theoretical terms, these findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between political beliefs and political trust. While both are central to democratic health, they are shaped by different processes, and beliefs are often rooted in socialisation and identity, whereas trust is contingent on performance and reciprocity. Thus, recognising this distinction is critical for policymakers seeking to engage communities that are politically aware but institutionally sceptical. Ultimately, this study's results underscore the resilience of political consciousness among even the most economically and politically marginalised. They also serve as a caution: without credible, sustained engagement from government, high political beliefs may not translate into constructive participation but may instead harden into persistent distrust, a condition that weakens the democratic fabric.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made

1. Establish permanent liaison committees between local government councils and market associations (Iyalojas, cooperative leaders) to enable two-way communication on policy priorities, infrastructure needs, and market regulations. This regular, non-electoral interaction can demonstrate responsiveness and gradually rebuild trust.
2. Involve market women directly in planning and monitoring projects that affect their trading environment—such as stall renovations, sanitation facilities, and transportation access. Co-design ensures transparency in resource allocation, aligns interventions with real needs, and makes government performance more visible.
3. Introduce simple, accessible feedback and grievance-redress systems within markets (e.g., suggestion boxes, monthly issue-tracking boards) managed jointly by market leaders and government representatives. These mechanisms provide visible evidence of responsiveness and counter perceptions of neglect.
4. Pair civic education programmes with tangible economic benefits such as microcredit schemes, tax relief for compliant traders, or cooperative grants. Linking political engagement with concrete, delivered benefits can strengthen the perception that political participation leads to meaningful outcomes, bridging the trust gap.

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The Politics of Environmental Clean-ups in the Niger Delta: A Place Where Vultures Feast

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ABSTRACT

This study critically interrogates the politics of environmental clean-ups in the Niger Delta, using the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) and the UNEP Ogoniland report as focal points. Drawing on the frameworks of political ecology, environmental justice, and the resource curse theory, using a qualitative methodology, the research exposes how oil remediation efforts have been compromised by elite capture, rent-seeking, and governance failures. Rather than functioning as genuine ecological interventions, clean-up operations have become arenas of political patronage, marked by opaque procurement processes, institutional sabotage, and the marginalization of affected communities. Through an interdisciplinary analysis of government reports, leaked documents, and civil society data, the study reveals the systemic disempowerment of local stakeholders and the collapse of participatory environmental governance. It argues that remediation in the Niger Delta has become symbolic serving more to preserve political interests than to restore polluted ecosystems or protect human health. The findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms: independent oversight, transparency in contract administration, and genuine grassroots inclusion. The paper concludes that without addressing the underlying political economy of oil pollution, clean-up efforts will remain performative. The Niger Delta, framed here as a carcass upon which the state and its allies feed, stands as both a metaphor and a reality of ecological injustice in resource-rich but politically broken contexts.

KEYWORDS

Environmental Clean-up, Politics, Elite Capture, Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), Environmental Justice, Niger Delta

1. Introduction

The Niger Delta stands as one of the world's most ecologically diverse and economically strategic coastal regions. Home to approximately 30 million people, the region's vast wetlands and mangrove forests support livelihoods centered on fishing, agriculture, and forestry (Anwan et al., 2016). The discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in 1956, and the commencement of commercial production by 1958 (Onuoha, 2008; Anifowose, 2008), signaled a dramatic shift in Nigeria's development trajectory. Today, the Niger Delta contributes over 90% of national oil production and accounts for nearly 80-90% of foreign exchange earnings solidifying Nigeria's status as a rentier petro-state (Ejiba, Onyia, & Adams,



2016; Nwanolue, Ezeamama, & Okeke, 2022; UNEP, 2011). Yet, paradoxically, the region that sustains the nation's wealth remains one of its most impoverished, polluted, and politically marginalized areas. Beneath the surface of petroleum wealth lies a multilayered crisis of ecological devastation, economic exclusion, and elite-driven manipulation of remediation efforts. Oil exploration has not only scarred the landscape but has also become entangled in political patronage, where clean-up operations serve as avenues for enrichment rather than environmental justice. The governance of environmental remediation is thus a contested political terrain shaped by rent-seeking, regulatory capture, and institutional inertia.

Oil dependency has incurred a steep ecological price. According to Amnesty International, an estimated 9 to 13 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Niger Delta over the past five decades comparable to suffering an Exxon Valdez-scale disaster annually (Mathiason, 2009). Official figures grossly underrepresent this reality: while the Department of Petroleum Resources recorded 1.89 million barrels spilled between 1976 and 1996, the United Nations Development Programme (2006) documented over 6,800 spill incidents between 1976 and 2001, accounting for nearly 3 million barrels lost, with more than 70% unrecovered (Ejiba et al., 2016).

Recent geospatial data indicates that from 2006 to 2019, the region experienced 7,940 spill incidents 67% of which occurred onshore. Of these, 81% were attributed to sabotage, while corrosion and equipment failure accounted for 6% and 7%, respectively (Akinwumiju, Adelodun, & Ogundeji, 2020). Contributing factors include decaying infrastructure, illegal bunkering, poor maintenance practices, and human error (Obida, Blackburn, Whyatt, & Semple, 2020; Lindén & Pålsson, 2013). The ecological toll is staggering: Nigeria's mangrove forests which once covered over 7,400 km² have been severely degraded, with 5–10% lost to oil contamination and land-use change (Lindén & Pålsson, 2013). These disruptions reverberate across ecosystems, contaminating soil and groundwater, and eroding biodiversity.

The consequences extend beyond the environment. The Niger Delta faces acute public health and food security challenges. Oil pollution has led to a ~60% drop in household food security, a 36% decline in vitamin C in vegetables, a 40% reduction in cassava protein, and a 24% increase in childhood malnutrition (Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). In communities close to oil spill sites, neonatal mortality is nearly double the national rate, rising from 38 to 76 deaths per 1,000 live births (Bruederle & Hodler, 2019). Long-term exposure to hydrocarbons and heavy metals has also been linked with severe health conditions, including respiratory illnesses, cancers, organ damage, and birth defects (Obida et al., 2020; Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was alarmed by this findings, then released a landmark report on Ogoniland in 2011. It recommended an initial US\$1 billion investment for environmental restoration, that is stressing a 25–30 year clean-up process alongside urgent measures like bioremediation, safe drinking water, and community-driven environmental governance (UNEP, 2011). In response, the Nigerian government created the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) under the Ministry of Environment in 2012. While it was welcomed as a turning point, HYPREP soon came to reflect the wider failures of state institutions. Investigative reporting and UNEP audits between 2021 and 2024 revealed systemic corruption and negligence. Over half of the contractors lacked experience, remediation labs were under-equipped, and environmental audits were deliberately obstructed (Amnesty International, 2020; Chinedu, 2024). Former

Environment Minister Sharon Ikeazor's efforts to remove politically connected saboteurs were swiftly reversed. Cleanup contracts became vehicles for political patronage rather than public service. Thus, the Niger Delta became, in effect, a place where vultures feast where state-sanctioned remediation morphed into a lucrative racket for elites, while devastated communities remain mired in toxic stagnation.

The environmental crisis is equally a socioeconomic catastrophe. The collapse of farming and fisheries has triggered displacement, unemployment, and deepening rural poverty. In Bayelsa State, residents lament how once-fertile farmlands have become lifeless wastelands, decades after spill events (Ratcliffe, 2019). These patterns fuel rural–urban migration, overburden city infrastructure, and deepen the paradox of oil wealth amid community impoverishment.

The politicization of environmental cleanup perpetuates a cycle of distrust between affected communities, oil companies, and the Nigerian state. Numerous reports have documented how HYPREP contracts are consistently awarded to politically favored firms with little to no technical competence often in contravention of UNEP protocols (Chinedu, 2024). Audits are ignored, laboratory analysis is underfunded, and institutional bottlenecks abound. Environmental restoration has become another arena for elite capture and transactional politics, reinforcing the dynamics of the resource curse where resource-rich regions remain underdeveloped due to governance failure (University of St. Gallen, 2023).

2. Statement of the Problem

Environmental remediation in resource-rich settings succeeds where transparency, scientific rigour, strong institutions, and meaningful community participation align (e.g., UNEP and post-spill responses globally). Regardless of this landmark diagnostics such as UNEP's 2011 Ogoniland report and the creation of HYPREP, the Niger Delta in stark contrast has seen little substantive restoration: clean-ups remain patchy, slow, and frequently mismanaged. Crucially, the problem is less technical than political. Agencies that are charged with remediation (notably HYPREP and NOSDRA) are undermined by weak institutional autonomy, opaque procurement, political and corporate interference, and the sidelining of community voices; contracts are often awarded to firms lacking relevant capacity, while oversight and laboratory verification are compromised (Obida et al., 2020; UNEP, 2011). The result is a dual failure: persisting ecological and public-health harms on the one hand, and the politicization of remediation which corrodes legitimacy and diverts resources on the other. Existing scholarship has tended to emphasize contamination levels, technologies, and budgets, paying insufficient attention to the political ecosystem that shapes remediation outcomes. This study therefore interrogates remediation as a political act: why, despite resources and international support, has restoration failed in the Niger Delta, and how do elite interests and institutional weaknesses subvert environmental justice?

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Historical Trajectory of Oil Exploration in Nigeria

The crude oil discovery and exploitation in Nigeria represent a turning point in the nation's economic and environmental history, most especially for the Niger Delta. Crude Oil exploration began in 1908 when the German-owned Nigerian Bitumen Corporation drilled at Araromi in present-day Ondo State, but operations were halted by World War I in 1914 (Udosen, Etok, & George, 2009; Ite et al., 2013). Activity resumed in 1937 under the Shell D'Arcy, which was granted exclusive exploration

rights, though progress was again interrupted by World War II before restarting fully in 1946 (Akanmidu, 2015; Afe, 2008).

After years of surveys and test drilling, Shell-BP (successor to Shell D'Arcy) struck oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in 1956, and launched Nigeria's petroleum industry (Kazeem, 2020; Nriagu, 2019). As at 1958, crude oil exports began at around 5,100 barrels per day, soon attracting other multinational companies such as Mobil, Gulf (Chevron), Agip, and Elf in the 1960s (Udosen et al., 2009; Ite et al., 2013).

This discovery of crude oil transformed Nigeria's political economy from largely agrarian to oil-dependent. The 1970s oil boom entrenched petroleum as the country's primary revenue source, contributing more than 80% of foreign exchange and over 90% of exports (Watts, 2004; Omeje, 2006). Membership in OPEC (1971) and creation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in 1977 strengthened state control, though they also complicated governance and fiscal relations (Ukeje, 2001; Aghalino & Eyinla, 2009).

Alongside the economic benefits, crude oil production devastated the Niger Delta. A region of rivers, estuaries, swamps, and mangroves was reshaped by pipelines and drilling sites, with frequent spills, gas flaring, and land degradation undermining farming and fishing livelihoods. By the 1980s, frustration grew as oil wealth has failed to improve local living conditions, leaving producing communities impoverished and marginalized (Anifowose et al., 2012; Ite et al., 2016).

This inequity sparked resistance movements, most notably the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), founded in the early 1990s under Ken Saro-Wiwa. MOSOP accused the state and Shell of "environmental genocide" in Ogoniland. Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995 by the military regime provoked global condemnation and drew international focus to the Niger Delta crisis (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004).

Democratic rule from 1999 raised hopes of reform, leading to institutions like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. However, corruption, weak oversight, and political interference curtailed their effectiveness (Osaghae, 1995; Omeje, 2006). Environmental remediation remained inadequate, with communities continuing to suffer without proper compensation.

In 2011, a major milestone came with the UNEP report on Ogoniland, which detailed severe ecological damage and proposed a 25–30 year clean-up framework. The Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) was created to lead this effort. Yet, over a decade later, progress has been very slow. Reports highlighted poor implementation, politicized contracts, and limited community involvement, suggesting that clean-up projects often serve elite interests rather than genuine restoration (UNEP, 2011; Obida et al., 2020).

3.2 Environmental Justice

Environmental justice functions both as a theoretical lens and as a practical demand, emphasizing that no group should disproportionately carry the weight of environmental risks while being denied access to ecological and social benefits (USEPA, 2020). Its scope goes beyond protecting natural resources to include equity in health, housing, access to clean water, and participation in governance processes (Ejumudo, 2014). The global recognition of this idea intensified in the 1980s, following evidence that marginalized communities were more exposed to pollution and ecological harm,

which shifted debates about sustainability toward fairness and inclusion (Wayne et al., 2010). In the African context, however, the pursuit of environmental justice is intertwined with legacies of colonial extraction, persistent inequality, and struggles for accountability, where justice must also mean remediation, empowerment, and democratic voice (Bizuneh et al., 2019).

The urgency of this framework is most visible in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Despite fueling the national economy for decades, the region remains impoverished and ecologically devastated. Continuous oil spills, rampant gas flaring, and unchecked deforestation since the mid-20th century have eroded livelihoods and ecosystems (Aghalino & Eyinla, 2009; Anifowose et al., 2012). Politically marginalized ethnic communities face exclusion from decisions about extraction and remediation, enduring what Schlosberg describes as "recognition injustice"—the silencing of identity, agency, and participation. Regulatory bodies such as NOSDRA and interventions like HYPREP have been undermined by weak institutional capacity and elite capture, enabling multinational corporations to externalize damage while diverting rents away from local development (Obida et al., 2020). For the Niger Delta, therefore, environmental justice cannot be separated from social justice. It calls for restitution through cleanup, reparation, and fair distribution of benefits, alongside access to basic infrastructure, health services, potable water, and genuine participation in shaping the region's economic and ecological future (Ejumudo, 2014).

3.3 Political Ecology

Political ecology provides a critical framework for examining environmental problems as outcomes of unequal power relations, struggles over resources, and structural inequalities, rather than as neutral ecological phenomena. Since its emergence in the late twentieth century, particularly in the seminal work of Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), the approach has emphasized how political and economic systems shape patterns of environmental change and determine whose interests are served or silenced (Bryant, 1998). In the Niger Delta, this perspective is indispensable, as decades of oil extraction have generated enormous revenues for the state and multinational corporations while simultaneously deepening the poverty, ecological vulnerability, and political exclusion of local communities. The persistence of oil spills, gas flaring, and inadequate remediation is not coincidental but reflects deliberate choices that privilege profit and state revenue over environmental protection and community well-being (Okoli, 2013; Obida et al., 2020). By situating ecological decline within broader contexts of governance failure, corruption, and elite capture, political ecology redirects attention from the technical aspects of pollution to deeper questions of accountability, justice, and inequality. The experience of the Niger Delta illustrates this vividly, where marginalized fishing and farming communities bear the heaviest burdens, and grassroots mobilizations such as MOSOP connect demands for ecological survival with broader claims to recognition, equity, and justice. Even state-led interventions like HYPREP demonstrate the same dynamics, as remediation processes are often politicized and shaped by elite interests rather than responding to the urgent needs of affected populations.

3.4 Elite Capture and Clientelism

Elite capture occurs when powerful groups redirect public resources such as contracts, funding, and appointments for their own benefit rather than the wider population (Bassey & Edemidiong, 2021). It is a form of corruption in which influential actors manipulate allocations to secure disproportionate

gains. Patronage politics refers to rewarding loyal supporters party affiliates, ethnic groups, or personal allies with positions, contracts, or exemptions (Asabor, 2024). In Nigeria, this system reflects neopatrimonial governance, where leadership is sustained through the exchange of resources for loyalty (Elemo-Kaka, 2025). Rent-seeking, meanwhile, involves pursuing wealth through political manipulation rather than value creation, often manifesting as inflated contracts, non-competitive awards, or regulatory bottlenecks (Emerald Insight, 2020).

Nigeria's oil industry illustrates these dynamics vividly. The OPL 245 case saw an offshore oil block awarded to Malabu Oil & Gas, owned by then petroleum minister Dan Etete, through a non-competitive process. A \$1.1 billion payment meant for the treasury was diverted to private accounts, showing rent-seeking at scale (Doward, Faull, & Jeory, 2017). Similarly, the 2005 oil block allocation was riddled with irregularities: a House committee found that 38 companies, many without bids, received licenses, bypassing established procedures (Ezeamalu, 2018).

Patronage also shapes institutional behaviour. Ministries and agencies are staffed through loyal appointments, and now undermines regulatory autonomy and accountability (Ojo, 2025). Key agencies such as the EFCC and INEC has often seen leadership selections driven by political interests that weakens their objectivity (Ojo, 2025). A related example is HYPREP's procurement for oil spill remediation, where contracts have frequently gone to politically connected firms lacking technical capacity, inflating costs and hampering effectiveness (Obida et al., 2020). Such manipulation channels public funds into elite networks under the guise of reform.

4. Theoretical Underpinning

This study employs the Resource Curse theory, also referred to as the Paradox of Plenty, first developed by Richard Auty (1993). The central claim of this framework is that resource wealth does not automatically translate into prosperity; on the contrary, states that depend heavily on oil and minerals frequently experience slower economic growth, fragile institutions, and rising inequality. Resource rents often entrench a governance dilemma: they discourage economic diversification and weaken accountability while simultaneously nurturing corruption, patronage, and rent-seeking, particularly where institutional capacity is limited (Ross, 1999; Karl, 1997). Terry Lynn Karl's influential work *The Paradox of Plenty* (1997) demonstrated how reliance on oil rents erodes fiscal discipline by replacing broad-based taxation with revenue windfalls, thereby undermining the social contract between state and citizens. Similarly, Michael Ross (2001, 2012) highlighted how hydrocarbon dependence is strongly associated with authoritarianism, distributional inequality, and violent conflict across much of the Global South.

The theory is especially pertinent to Nigeria, where oil wealth has gone hand in hand with environmental decline, underdevelopment, and political exclusion in the Niger Delta. Despite decades of substantial revenue, the region remains ecologically degraded: oil spills, routine gas flaring, and biodiversity loss persist, while remediation has been minimal and inconsistent. Initiatives such as HYPREP, established to clean up Ogoniland, have frequently been criticized for elite capture, opaque contracting, and ineffective oversight (UNEP, 2011; Amnesty International, 2020). Nigeria's rentier federal system further entrenches these outcomes, as oil revenues bypass the productive economy and are channeled through networks controlled by political elites (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003; Iledare & Suberu, 2010). In this sense, the Resource Curse helps explain why environmental

remediation is less a matter of technical failure than of entrenched political economy. Clean-up projects are deeply embedded in rentier logics where wealth, power, and pollution sustain one another. Unless these structural conditions are addressed, remediation efforts risk remaining largely symbolic, with outcomes vulnerable to manipulation and sabotage.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design that is anchored on critical interpretivism, given its concern with revealing the underlying political, economic, and social dynamics that shape environmental clean-ups in the Niger Delta. Data were drawn from a triangulation of sources, including official government documents, policy reports such as the UNEP Ogoniland Report and HYPREP progress assessments, civil society publications, leaked internal communications, and investigative media reports. This was complemented by secondary literature on political ecology, environmental justice, and the resource curse, which provided the conceptual lenses for analysis. Content and discourse analysis were employed to interrogate the narratives, contradictions, and silences embedded in policy documents and remediation discourses, while thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns of elite capture, rent-seeking, and community marginalization. Rather than relying on statistical generalization, the methodology prioritizes analytical depth, situating empirical findings within the broader political economy of oil governance in Nigeria. This interpretive framework makes it possible to foreground the voices and experiences of local communities, as recorded in civil society data and testimonies, while also exposing the opaque institutional practices that weaken remediation efforts. In this way, the methodology highlights not just the technical shortcomings of environmental clean-ups but also the deeper structural injustices and power asymmetries that sustain them.

6. The Political Economy of Environmental Clean-ups in the Niger Delta

Control over environmental remediation in the Niger Delta is deeply politicized. Despite the technical role of agencies like HYPREP and NOSDRA, ultimate authority frequently lies with political elites and federal institutions, creating a disconnect between operational mandates and local accountability. The Senate Committee on Environment, for instance, highlights that oversight mechanisms are weakened by chronic underfunding and political interference, rendering them ineffective in ensuring transparent practice.

HYPREP, established in 2012 under the Federal Ministry of Environment to act on the UNEP's 2011 Ogoniland report, was intended to spearhead large-scale, community-based remediation efforts. However, leaked UN documents revealed that HYPREP "selected unqualified contractors," operated under-equipped labs, and actively blocked auditors raising serious governance concerns. The scandal even forced the UN to sever its advisory role by mid-2023. NOSDRA, created by the 2006 Act, is Nigeria's statutory oil-spill regulator. Yet, it has been hamstrung by financial dependency on oil companies and lacks the logistical capacity to deploy independent investigations. Only 2% of reported spills were officially certified as cleaned in five years some 150 of 3,177 cases due to its reliance on the very firms it regulates.

NOSDRA's failure is rooted in structural under-resourcing. It lacks essential tools like helicopters and boats, forcing dependence on oil companies to visit spill sites (Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission, 2019). Though pleads for budgetary reform including a proposed trust

tied to oil profit were made in 2018, the Act remains unchanged, preserving weak regulatory capacity. Meanwhile, while HYPREP's Ogoniland fund reached US \$1 billion, limited amounts reached local communities. One early clean-up site near Port Harcourt turned into a "moonscape" rather than restored farmland, illustrating a dangerous divergence between allocated resources and actual remediation performance (Davey, 2024).

UNEP set strict remediation standards, including a 25–30-year timeline, rigorous baseline surveys, and community-based monitoring (Sam et al., 2024). In practice, HYPREP adopted petroleum hydrocarbon thresholds far higher than UNEP's recommendations, undermining ecological safety and community confidence (Sam et al., 2024). Independent auditors found soil tests conducted in unaccredited labs and oversight teams physically obstructed, violating both national regulations and UN guidelines (Davey, 2024).

Contract awards tell a story of political patronage. In 2021, a UN review found 21 of 41 HYPREP contractors had no relevant expertise a result of politically driven selection processes. The ousted Environment Minister, Sharon Ikeazor, accused a senior HYPREP official of conflict of interest, claiming that "the majority of cleanup companies are owned by politicians" a statement quickly reversed under political pressure (Davey, 2024).

7. The Role of Institutions and Governance Failure

The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) was established by the NOSDRA Act (2006), under the Federal Ministry of Environment, to lead in oil spill detection and response in line with the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness (OPRC, 1990). Despite this mandate, NOSDRA has become structurally incapacitated lacking essential logistics such as helicopters, boats, and funds forcing them to rely on oil companies for site inspections (Yafugborhi, 2018). In five years, out of 3,177 oil spill incidents, only 150 cleanups were certified complete just 2%. This chronic underperformance points to a regulatory collapse rooted in underfunding and institutional overdependence on industry.

NOSDRA sits under the Ministry of Environment but remains hindered by overlapping mandates, especially with DPR and the new regulatory agencies under the Petroleum Industry Act (2021), which blurred enforcement roles. Although attempts to amend and expand NOSDRA's legal powers began in 2017, including enhanced penalty systems, presidential assent was withheld, leaving the agency powerless to prosecute polluters. Structural bottlenecks within Nigeria's environmental governance framework have fostered a climate where regulatory independence is undermined by bureaucratic inertia, thereby enabling patterns of corporate impunity. Evidence from investigative journalism and leaked United Nations correspondence indicates that HYPREP itself has been deeply compromised, often obstructing oversight rather than facilitating it. Reports suggest that auditors were denied access, financial controls were weakened, and internal checks were perceived as hostile rather than supportive of transparency. Attempts at reform, most especially by former Environment Minister Sharon Ikeazor, who sought to strengthen accountability and leadership within HYPREP, were swiftly curtailed when she was removed from office, an episode that highlights how entrenched elite interests and institutional sabotage can derail genuine oversight efforts.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), through its 2011 Ogoniland report, had initially provided a robust framework for remediation. By 2021, UNEP cracked: it withdrew from active

oversight, citing corruption, technical failures, and a refusal to cooperate in remediation efforts. This illustrates the limits of international oversight: while UNEP can diagnose and recommend, it lacks enforceable power to ensure sustained compliance or accountability within a politically captured domestic context.

8. Elite Interests, Corruption, and the Vultures' Feast

Environmental clean-up initiatives in the Niger Delta a region referred to as a “place where vultures feast” have served as political feeding grounds. Multiple investigations, including leaked UN files and media reports, reveal that HYPREP has systematically awarded contracts to unqualified firms linked to political elites. In 2021, a confidential UN review found that of the 41 contractors hired, 21 had no relevant experience, yet were selected to manage highly polluted sites (Davey, 2024). Many of these firms are not even traceable in the Corporate Affairs Commission’s registry, pointing to deliberate evasion of due diligence .

The leadership of HYPREP has itself been a locus of political power dynamics. When former Environment Minister Sharon Ikeazor attempted to remove the then-leading coordinator, Philip Shekwolo, citing his close ties with politicians, she was swiftly ousted and Shekwolo was reinstated within two months (Davey, 2024). This episode reflects how clean-up governance is fought over by the elite, with bureaucratic positions leveraged for political gain rather than ecological renewal (Alabi, 2025).

Rather than serving as ecological interventions, clean-up initiatives have become rent-seeking opportunities. A leaked UN document described HYPREP-approved firms as entities that received a literal “blank check” to monitor their own subcontracted work, with auditors being barred from verifying outcomes (Davey, 2024). Independent labs found to be under-equipped or non-functional still signed off on remediation standards showing how deeply patronage compromised technical integrity. The metaphor of vultures aptly captures this political ecology. Like scavengers drawn to carrion, political actors, consultants, and opportunistic contractors swoop in on environmental catastrophe, not to restore, but to profit. The awarding of multi-million-dollar contracts without transparency or capacity checks represents not accidental oversight, but calculated exploitation. This is a form of systemic decay where ecological sacrifice zones fuel elite accumulation, sustaining a lucrative cycle of crisis and co-optation.

9. Environmental and Human Consequences

Local communities in the Niger Delta overwhelmingly view both government bodies and multinational oil firms with deep distrust. Reports such as “No Progress” (Friends of the Earth, Amnesty International, ERA) reveal that communities believe clean-up efforts especially by Shell are largely symbolic gestures that countless promises have lined but delivered scant results (Clark, 2014). Affected residents often observe polluted lands and contaminated water, with cleanup signage that masks real remediation only fueling their skepticism. Many allege the government falsely certifies sites as safe, despite ongoing pollution and health hazards .

This distrust has catalyzed community protests, notably during divestment negotiations with Shell. In March 2024, hundreds of women and youths demonstrated in Port Harcourt and Yenagoa demanding an environmental audit, compensation, and continued cleanup before any asset handover (Mazzi, 2024). In Goi, Rivers State, villagers highlight exclusion from environmental assessments,

forced relocations, and severe health crises linked to oil pollution (Edozie, 2019). Youth unrest has even targeted HYPREP assets; a sign of deep alienation when a HYPREP-branded bus was burned following lack of community engagement (Igwe, 2022).

Mechanisms intended for community participation such as Environmental Impact Assessments and local consultations have largely collapsed in practice. Women, who bear the brunt of ecological degradation, are often sidelined in decision-making processes (Sam & Zibima, 2024). NGOs like ERA/FoEN criticize selective engagement and excessive co-optation by HYPREP leadership, further weakening trust and undermining independent oversight (Abade, 2017).

Despite these systemic challenges, local civil society continues to resist co-optation. MOSOP remains a powerful force, drawing on its legacy of environmental activism and legal resistance (e.g., Ken Saro-Wiwa's movement) (Edozie, 2019). In recent years, environmental NGOs and youth climate groups have mobilized citizen-led pollution reporting via digital tools, created grassroots cleanup projects, and collaborated on school-based climate education (Alabi, 2025). In 2024, a coalition of community groups rallied in Port Harcourt demanding a halt to Shell's divestment until transparent audits and compensation were guaranteed (Mazzi,

The experiences of Niger Delta communities reveal a tension between systemic disempowerment and enduring resilience. Widespread alienation arises from exclusion, broken promises, and harmful impacts. Yet, grassroots actors women's associations, youth coalitions, NGOs, and environmental defenders continue to organize, advocate, and document environmental harm. Their efforts assert that effective cleanup cannot succeed without community inclusion, transparency, and genuine participation.

10. A Critical Appraisal of the UNEP Report and HYPREP

In August 2011, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released a landmark environmental assessment of Ogoniland, proposing a 25–30 year remediation plan with an initial US\$1 billion fund for bioremediation, potable water, and community participation (UNEP, 2011). Yet implementation has fallen far short. By 2020, almost a decade later work had commenced on only 11% of the 67 contaminated sites, while emergency actions such as safe drinking water provision remained largely unfulfilled. In one case, a community well contained benzene levels nearly 900 times above WHO standards, but alternative supplies were still absent (EnviroNews Nigeria, 2015).

Financial management has been equally troubling. Although US\$540 million was pledged and US\$360 million reportedly deposited into the Ogoni Trust Fund, disbursements to real projects amounted to barely US\$80 million (Akintayo, 2022). HYPREP's own reports show that between 2018 and 2019, only US\$31 million was spent against nearly US\$200 million budgeted, pointing to mismanagement and inertia (Uwaegbulam, 2020).

Both international actors and civil society have voiced sharp criticism. UN officials labeled HYPREP a "total failure," citing poor contractor selection, weak laboratories, and auditor obstruction. Groups such as Amnesty International and Environmental Rights Action condemned the absence of transparency, potable water, and health interventions, while local communities described the project as little more than a bureaucratic façade.

The Ogoniland case offers wider lessons. First, technical plans falter without institutional strength: HYPREP lacked a legal mandate and clear budget framework, leaving it open to elite capture.

Second, UNEP could design but not enforce reforms, withdrawing in 2023 after years of frustration. Lastly, community trust dependent on clean water, credible information, and fair contracting was ignored, deepening skepticism rather than fostering stewardship. Ogoniland demonstrates how international expertise and funding, without domestic accountability or inclusivity, collapse into rent-seeking and disillusionment. The Niger Delta experience underscores that remediation must confront governance and power relations, not just environmental contamination.

11. Discussion

The findings of this study show that remediation in the Niger Delta is shaped less by technical shortcomings than by political economy, governance failures, and structural injustice. From the dysfunction of NOSDRA and HYPREP to the exclusion of affected communities, ecological degradation has been reproduced by the very institutions charged with addressing it. More than a decade after the UNEP Ogoniland report, only a fraction of sites have been remediated, while urgent recommendations such as clean water and health interventions remain unmet. Despite substantial funding, contracts were routinely awarded to politically connected firms with limited expertise, turning clean-up efforts into rent-seeking exercises. This affirms the central claim of this study: remediation has been captured by elites and repurposed into a theatre of extractive governance.

Institutions meant to safeguard communities reveal deeper structural crises. HYPREP's contract processes were compromised by political influence, while NOSDRA's dependence on oil firms undermined its regulatory independence. These failures reflect a neopatrimonial system where access to oil rents outweighs commitments to accountability or protection.

The Niger Delta illustrates how environmental harm follows patterns of exclusion. Those most affected poor, marginalized communities possess the least political leverage. This aligns with Schlosberg's idea of recognitional injustice, where communities are denied not just remediation but recognition, voice, and dignity. Testimonies reveal frustration that "clean-up" often amounts to symbolic gestures, while women, youth, and grassroots leaders remain excluded from decision-making. What should have been an exercise in restoration has instead become a site of predation. Contracts, reports, and oversight mechanisms are manipulated to serve political interests, reflecting a broader pattern of elite capture. The metaphor of vultures feeding on a carcass captures how institutions descend on the crisis not to heal but to harvest. As a result, billions in revenue have coincided with deepened poverty and ecological ruin. Unless remediation efforts confront the entrenched systems of patronage, technocratic clean-ups will remain ineffective. Real progress requires: democratizing governance through community oversight and gender inclusion; legislating institutional autonomy for HYPREP and NOSDRA; conditioning international support on measurable reform; and reframing clean-up as a justice issue involving compensation and political empowerment. Finally, accountability is essential: without legal consequences, elite actors will continue to profit from ecological disaster.

12 Conclusion

This study explored the politics of environmental remediation in the Niger Delta, situating the Ogoniland clean-up within broader debates on political economy, environmental justice, and elite capture. The analysis revealed that rather than addressing ecological devastation, clean-up programmes have frequently been diverted into networks of patronage, rent-seeking, and political reward. Institutions such as HYPREP and NOSDRA, weakened by opaque contracting, poor oversight, and elite

interference, have lost public trust and credibility. These failures reflect not isolated mistakes but a systemic political economy in which the interests of powerful actors consistently override the needs of affected communities. Consequently, pollution endures, livelihoods remain threatened, and faith in governance continues to decline.

The implications are both environmental and political. Persistent contamination aggravates health risks and damages ecosystems, while exclusion of local voices deepens social inequalities and disillusionment. What should represent a transformative moment of justice has too often been reduced to symbolic gestures of governance with little substantive impact. Reversing this trajectory requires structural change: transparency embedded in every stage of remediation, genuinely independent oversight, and meaningful community participation. Only by grounding clean-up efforts in accountability and inclusion can ecological repair translate into lasting recovery and renewed legitimacy in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta's problem is not the absence of technical solutions but the persistence of political predation. Its polluted landscapes symbolize systemic betrayal, where remediation serves spectacle rather than justice. Until governance prioritizes people over patronage, genuine environmental restoration will remain deferred.

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Assessing the Influence of Design Adaptability on Student Housing Experiences in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Student housing in Nigerian higher institutions faces growing challenges of overcrowding, limited adaptability, and low satisfaction, driven by rising enrolment, evolving lifestyles, and demand for multifunctional spaces. This study investigates the role of spatial flexibility in enhancing user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels within Kwara State, focusing on how adaptable design impacts well-being, comfort, and functionality. The aim is to evaluate the relationship between flexible spatial arrangements and satisfaction, with objectives including identifying user-initiated physical adjustments, determining hostel features supporting flexibility, and assessing perceptions of adaptability in academic and living experiences. A quantitative survey was conducted using structured questionnaires administered to 313 residents of University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Kwara State Polytechnic. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Findings show 69% reside on-campus, mostly in shared rooms with two or more bunks. Only 10.54% made structural adjustments and 1.92% altered walls, but more modified room layouts (26.83%) and bedroom areas (37.38%). Most respondents affirmed flexibility's value: 96.8% linked it to satisfaction, 95.85% to efficient space use, 87.53% to inclusivity, and 80.51% to improved well-being. The study concludes that spatial flexibility strongly enhances satisfaction and space optimization. It recommends architects and facility managers prioritize adaptable, student-centered hostel designs.

KEYWORDS

Spatial Flexibility, User Satisfaction, Undergraduate Hostels, Nigerian higher institution

1. Introduction

Globally, the design of student accommodation has evolved to reflect changing expectations around adaptability, comfort, and functionality. As educational institutions expand and student populations diversify, there has been a growing emphasis on incorporating spatial flexibility into residential buildings to enhance user satisfaction (Altas & Gursay, 1998). Spatial flexibility refers to the capacity of a built environment to accommodate change in function, layout, and space usage over time without necessitating major structural modifications. In countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, university housing has increasingly adopted flexible design strategies to improve students' residential experiences by addressing privacy, personalization, social integration, and evolving space needs (HMC Architects, 2019). These trends underscore a broader recognition of the link



between physical space and students' academic and emotional well-being.

In the African context, particularly in urbanizing regions, the pressures of rapid population growth, urban density, and limited infrastructural capacity have significantly shaped the discourse around hostel design and user satisfaction. Many African universities face overcrowding, outdated hostel infrastructure, and limited adaptability, leading to reduced student satisfaction and suboptimal living conditions (Abubakar & Aina, 2019). As higher education becomes more accessible, the need to redesign student housing for flexibility and livability becomes urgent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there is an increasing awareness of how spatial conditions can either support or hinder student performance and well-being, driving interest in responsive architectural solutions.

Regionally, in Nigeria, university hostels often struggle with structural rigidity, overcrowding, and inflexible layouts. These challenges limit the ability of students to adapt their living spaces to personal or academic needs. Studies have shown that spatial constraints in Nigerian university hostels negatively affect students' mental health, sense of autonomy, and satisfaction (Ede et al., 2020). The integration of spatial flexibility—such as adjustable room layouts, modifiable walls, and transformable functions—has therefore emerged as a potential intervention to improve user satisfaction and the overall functionality of hostel accommodations.

The concept of spatial flexibility is central to understanding user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels, as it reflects the adaptability of living spaces to students' evolving needs. Key indicators of flexibility include structural adjustments, internal wall modifications, layout changes, and alterations to usable areas such as bedrooms, kitchens, and common rooms (Altas & Gursoy, 1998). These elements serve as proxies for assessing how much control residents have over their spaces and the degree to which hostels accommodate lifestyle demands. In practice, even simple adjustments like rearranging room layouts or furniture can strongly influence students' perceptions of comfort, autonomy, and belonging (Baper & Saied, 2020).

Among these indicators, changes in bedroom layouts and usability adjustments emerged as the most significant, given that bedrooms are the most frequently used and personalized spaces (Abubakar & Aina, 2019). Other modifications, such as adapting kitchens, stores, or makeshift study corners, highlight students' efforts to compensate for design deficiencies (Ede, Bamigboye, & Ogunbode, 2020). Meanwhile, the limited changes to bathrooms, balconies, and common rooms suggest structural constraints or restricted accessibility, emphasizing areas where architectural improvements are needed (Alhilo & Hussein, 2022). Although less common, larger interventions such as structural or internal wall adjustments reflect deeper dissatisfaction with hostel design and underscore the rigidity of institutional spaces (Altas & Gursoy, 1998).

The link between spatial flexibility and user satisfaction is both theoretical and empirical. Flexible environments allow students to adapt spaces for studying, resting, or socializing, which enhances psychological well-being, comfort, and social integration (Ede et al., 2020). Conversely, rigid and overcrowded spaces limit productivity, increase stress, and reduce quality of life (Abubakar & Aina, 2019). Data from institutions in Kwara State confirms this relationship, showing that students who reported making layout or usability adjustments expressed higher satisfaction, validating the argument that spatial flexibility is a critical determinant of hostel livability (Baper & Saied, 2020; Alhilo & Hussein, 2022). Therefore, hostel design in Nigerian higher institutions must prioritize flexibility to ensure that

spaces meet students' academic, social, and personal needs effectively.

Undergraduate hostels in Nigerian higher institutions, particularly within Kwara State, face growing challenges in meeting the spatial and comfort needs of students, resulting in low levels of user satisfaction. One major problem is the rigidity of hostel spaces, which prevents adaptation to students' evolving academic, social, and personal needs. Many institutional hostels are constructed with fixed layouts, permanent walls, and immovable structural systems that do not allow for flexibility. As a result, students are unable to personalize or reconfigure their spaces, leading to dissatisfaction and discomfort. For instance, the data indicates that only 10.54% of respondents made structural adjustments, and only 1.92% adjusted internal walls, highlighting a general inflexibility in hostel infrastructure. Increasing the possibility of structural or internal wall adjustments could create more adaptable spaces that respond better to students' changing needs, thereby enhancing satisfaction (Altas & Gursoy, 1998).

Another significant problem is overcrowding and poor space utilization, which is common in many Nigerian hostels due to increasing student populations and inadequate planning. High bunk densities and limited usable space per student lead to stress, lack of privacy, and reduced comfort. According to the survey, 30.67% of rooms contained four or more bunks, and 31.65% of rooms had four or more occupants, reflecting overcrowded living conditions. Furthermore, changes to usable areas such as the bedroom (37.38%) indicate that students are attempting to reclaim some comfort by modifying their personal zones. However, changes to other key functional areas like kitchens (9.58%) and stores (4.79%) remain minimal, possibly due to space or design constraints. Encouraging spatial flexibility in these areas can enable better management of shared resources and provide a more functional and comfortable living experience for students (Ede et al., 2020).

A third issue impacting satisfaction is the inability to adapt room layouts and functions to meet different user needs over time. Student activities vary between studying, resting, and interacting with peers, and a static room design cannot adequately support these varying functions. The study revealed that only 26.83% of respondents were able to change their room layout and functions, suggesting that the majority of students live in spaces that cannot be adjusted for multifunctional use. The lack of flexibility in adapting space functions may result in poorly organized, cluttered, or underutilized environments, negatively affecting mental focus and general well-being. Promoting room layout changes and creating provisions for reconfigurable furniture or modular spaces can allow students to personalize their living areas according to their daily schedules and lifestyle preferences, leading to increased user satisfaction (Abubakar & Aina, 2019).

Student satisfaction in university hostels in Kwara State is hindered by a combination of structural rigidity, overcrowding, and a lack of multifunctional adaptability. The analysis of spatial flexibility indicators—such as structural and internal wall adjustments, changes to room layout, and modifications to usable areas—clearly demonstrates their potential to either alleviate or worsen these problems. Addressing these spatial limitations through flexible, student-centered design approaches will not only improve satisfaction but also support students' academic performance, well-being, and retention in on-campus housing.

2. Literature Review

Altas and Gursoy (1998), in a study conducted in Atakoy, Istanbul, aimed to evaluate the impact of spatial adaptability and flexibility on residential satisfaction by focusing on the physical and

organizational attributes of dwelling spaces. Using a comparative post-occupancy evaluation of four 2-bedroom apartment types within a 16–20-year-old housing settlement, the researchers assessed how alterations in size, space organization, and physical characteristics influenced users' satisfaction levels. The study revealed that residential satisfaction decreases over time due to evolving spatial needs, but users regain satisfaction by modifying their living spaces to better suit these needs. The findings showed that adaptability and flexibility—particularly the ability to alter space layout and size—are key determinants of housing quality. The authors concluded that spatial adaptability significantly enhances long-term user satisfaction and recommended that future housing designs incorporate flexible planning strategies to accommodate users' changing lifestyles and preferences over time.

Baper and Saied (2020), in their study conducted in Empire-Erbil City, aimed to investigate how smart interior design solutions influence the achievement of flexible spaces, particularly within small spatial environments such as studio apartments. Using a prototyping method alongside a detailed questionnaire, the researchers explored how smart materials and technologies—such as sensors and actuators embedded within interior components—can be employed to enhance spatial flexibility. The study analyzed the architectural structure and interior design components across technological, environmental, formal, and holistic dimensions. Their findings revealed a strong correlation between the use of smart materials and increased physical flexibility, enabling spaces to adapt to user needs, preferences, and actions. The study concluded that smart analog models (SAM) integrated with digital modules (DM) significantly enhance the adaptability of interior spaces by removing rigidity and allowing multifunctional use. Based on these outcomes, the authors recommended adopting smart construction techniques and interior architecture strategies that embrace ICT-embedded elements to improve the livability and functionality of small residential spaces.

Alhilo and Hussein (2022) conducted a study in Turkish university dormitories aimed at examining the role of innovative flexible furniture design and its impact on interior spaces, particularly student rooms. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study involved detailed observation and evaluation of various student room designs across Turkish university hostels to explore how multifunctional, adaptable furniture affects spatial organization. The researchers focused on identifying how innovation in furniture design enhances both the aesthetic and functional quality of interior spaces. The findings showed that flexible furniture structures—such as foldable and multipurpose units—achieved full performance and aesthetic integration in the first tested model (100%) and partial success in the second model (50%). The study concluded that dynamic and innovative furniture designs are essential in addressing the spatial challenges of student housing, offering both functional versatility and improved spatial flow. Based on these outcomes, the authors recommended adopting flexible furniture designs in university dormitories to accommodate user needs, improve spatial efficiency, and enhance the overall aesthetic value of student living environments.

Campbell-Palmer (2025) conducted a study at the University of Leeds with the aim of identifying and improving best practices to support students with accessibility requirements in university-owned accommodation. Using a multi-method approach that combined literature review, webpage analysis against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and staff interviews, the study found notable strengths such as individualized care, a positive and responsive culture, large resource availability, and effective cross-team collaboration. However, gaps were identified, including insufficient formalization

of roles and processes, limited availability of accessibility-related information, a training deficit, and the exclusion of certain student groups. The findings further showed that poor website design and inadequate information-sharing hindered both staff effectiveness and student access to support. The study concluded that while the University of Leeds had laid a strong foundation for inclusivity, achieving best practice in accessibility must be regarded as a dynamic, ongoing process tailored to each institution's demographics and evolving challenges. To address these issues, the research recommended codifying roles and processes, establishing a Residential Services Hub, mandating staff training on accessibility and inclusive language, and employing website accessibility specialists to redesign accommodation web pages for greater clarity and usability (Campbell-Palmer, 2025).

Godfred Nii and Emeanulu (2025) investigated the effects of housing accessibility on the general well-being of international students at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), Paisley. The study aimed to examine how access to suitable housing influences psychological well-being, academic performance, cultural adaptation, and social support among international students. Employing a quantitative research design, the authors distributed online surveys to 291 international students from diverse backgrounds. The findings revealed that lack of accessible housing significantly impacted students' physical and mental health, manifesting as stress, lack of concentration, and emotional instability, which in turn negatively affected their academic and social experiences. The study concluded that housing accessibility plays a critical role in maintaining student life balance, supporting cultural adaptation, and enhancing academic success. Consequently, the authors recommended that universities integrate housing accessibility into their admission processes and educational health strategies to improve the holistic well-being of international students (Godfred Nii & Emeanulu, 2025).

Amoah, Bamfo-Agyei, and Simpeh (2024) conducted a study in Ghana to examine the key factors influencing the choice of student accommodation among public university students. The aim was to identify the determinants of accommodation selection that shape students' satisfaction and living experiences. Using a quantitative methodology, the researchers distributed structured closed-ended questionnaires to 626 tertiary students through personal delivery at their residences, applying descriptive analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis. The findings revealed that out of the forty-one identified factors grouped into four components—building, facilities available, proximity, and management—three components (facilities available, proximity, and building quality) significantly influenced students' choice of accommodation. The study concluded that students' preferences are strongly shaped by the physical quality of buildings, the availability of essential amenities, and the location of residences relative to academic and social needs. The authors recommended that accommodation providers and higher education stakeholders prioritise the provision of quality facilities, reliable internet connectivity, communal and recreational spaces, and well-managed residential services to foster student well-being and satisfaction (Amoah et al., 2024).

The concept of spatial flexibility, defined as the adaptability of built environments to evolving user needs, is particularly relevant within the Nigerian socio-cultural context, where communal living, extended family systems, and dynamic student populations demand constant adjustments in space utilization (Altas & Gursoy, 1998). Nigerian higher institutions, which accommodate diverse students from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, often provide rigid hostel layouts that conflict with the fluidity of students' lifestyles and expectations (Abubakar & Aina, 2019). This disjuncture

highlights how theoretical notions of flexibility directly intersect with local cultural practices of sharing, modifying, and personalizing space to enhance comfort and belonging.

Institutionally, Nigerian universities face the dual challenge of overcrowding and limited funding for hostel infrastructure, further amplifying the importance of spatial flexibility. Unlike Western contexts where purpose-built student housing may incorporate adaptable design elements, hostels in Nigeria are often static, reflecting minimal consideration of students' evolving social and academic needs (Ede et al., 2020). Within this context, spatial flexibility becomes not only a theoretical construct but also a practical necessity for managing high student densities, enabling multifunctional use of rooms, and mitigating stressors associated with inflexible living arrangements (Baper & Saied, 2020). This linkage underscores the role of adaptability as both an architectural and institutional response to pressing infrastructural challenges.

Socio-culturally, the Nigerian student community values autonomy, personalization, and social interaction, all of which are enabled or constrained by spatial flexibility. The ability to reconfigure spaces for studying, resting, or socializing aligns with students' desire to balance academic and personal life within limited hostel environments (Alhilo & Hussein, 2022). Moreover, cultural practices of improvisation and resource-sharing mean that even small adjustments, such as rearranging furniture or converting shared spaces, carry significant implications for satisfaction and well-being. Embedding the theoretical framework of flexibility within these socio-cultural realities strengthens the argument that Nigerian hostels must evolve toward more adaptive and user-responsive designs that align with institutional capacities and cultural patterns of space use.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design aimed at assessing the impact of spatial flexibility on user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels across selected Nigerian higher institutions in Kwara State. The survey method in figure 1 was chosen for its strength in collecting large-scale, standardized data that allow for the identification of patterns, relationships, and trends among hostel residents. Structured questionnaires were designed and administered to 313 respondents, comprising students from University of Ilorin (80.19%), Kwara State University (13.41%), and Kwara State Polytechnic (6.4%). The questionnaire captured both demographic data and specific variables related to spatial flexibility, including room configuration, occupancy, physical modifications, and students' perceptions of flexibility's role in satisfaction, space utilization, accessibility, and well-being.

The choice of a quantitative design enabled objective measurement of students' experiences and opinions, allowing for statistical analysis of the extent to which flexible space design impacts satisfaction levels. The use of structured questionnaires ensured consistency in responses, while the descriptive analysis using frequencies and percentages provided clear summaries of key findings. This design is appropriate because it supports generalizability of the results across similar student populations and settings. Furthermore, it facilitated the identification of specific spatial factors (e.g., bunk configuration, layout changes, structural adjustments) that correlate with user satisfaction, offering evidence-based insights for architects and university facility managers. The implication of adopting this design is its ability to capture measurable user experiences that inform practical recommendations for improving hostel design through adaptable and student-centered approaches.

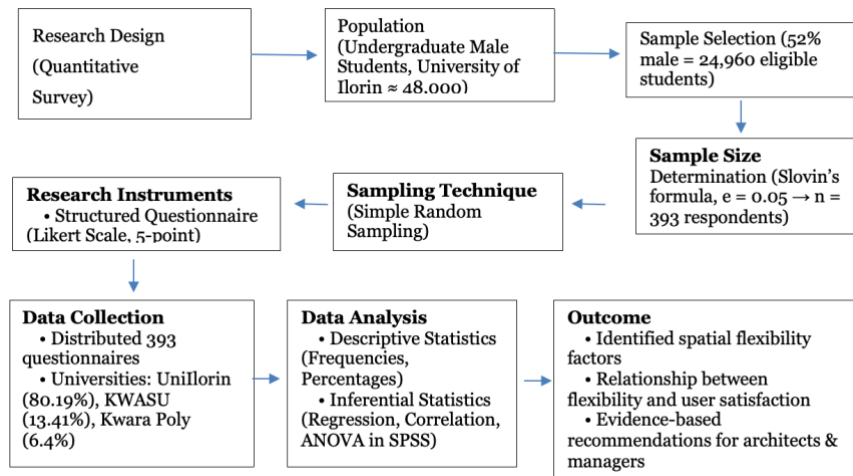


Figure 1: Methodology Framework

3.1 Population and sample selection procedures.

3.3.1 Research Population

Population is the number of people, objects or occurrences that have similar observable features (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). In other word, it is the totality of the objects, individuals, and/or events; that meet the set criteria for inclusion in a research for the aim to be met (Oladun, 2012). Inferences are drawn from the characteristics of the population. For this study, the population are undergraduate male students in University of Ilorin. The University has about 48,000 undergraduate students with a 48:52 female to male ratio (Times Higher Education, 2023).

3.3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

As Gorard (2003) points out, the goal of sampling is to learn about and draw conclusions about a considerably greater number of cases (population). In this study, simple random sampling is used so that every element has an equal chance of getting selected to be part of the sample. Given that the population of male undergraduate students is 52% of 48000 students, the total number of elements to be selected is 24,960.

The sample size for the study is calculated using Slovin's Formula

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where

n = the required sample size;

N = the finite population size; and

e = the level of significance in this case 0.05 was used

$$24960 / 1 + 24960(0.05)^2 = 393.69$$

Therefore, a total of 393 respondents were adopted as the sample size for the study and same number of questionnaires was distributed among male undergraduate students in the University.

3.3.3 Research Instruments

This study used questionnaires and interviews for the collection of primary data. Questionnaire administration is an organized method used in obtaining data based on samples (Tan, 2011); and its being used generally to solicit views on surveys based on flexibility. This questionnaire comprises a well-written structured list of questions to which corresponding responses were supplied by the

respondents (self-report). The questionnaire was structured to reflect the main theme of the study interest, thus, relevant data for solving problem of the study. It comprises tables and checkboxes for easy choice making from available options to respondents. The questionnaire inquired on a Likert scale with 5-points where 5 was the highest of the ranking. According to Manu (2015), Likert scale reduces uncertainty and it is easy to use.

4. Results

4.1 QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Characteristics of Respondents

In order to accomplish the aim and the stated research objectives, characteristics of the respondent were put into consideration, to determine the status of the respondents.

Table 1.0: Institution Distribution of the Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Institution		
University of Ilorin	251	80.19
Kwara State University	42	13.41
Kwara State Polytechnic	20	6.4
Total	313	100

Figure 2.0: Characteristics of the Respondents: Institution Administered, Source: Author's Findings (2025)

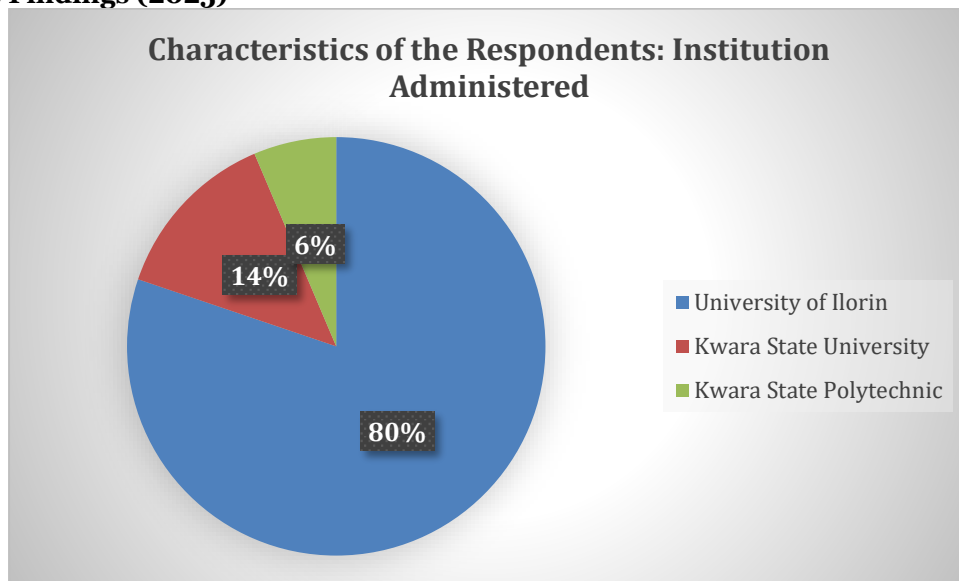


Table 2.0: Age Distribution of the Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than 21	104	33.22
21-30	198	63.26
31-40	9	2.88
41-50	2	0.64
50 & above	0	0
Total	313	100

Figure 3.0: Characteristics of the Respondents: Age, Source: Author's Findings (2025)

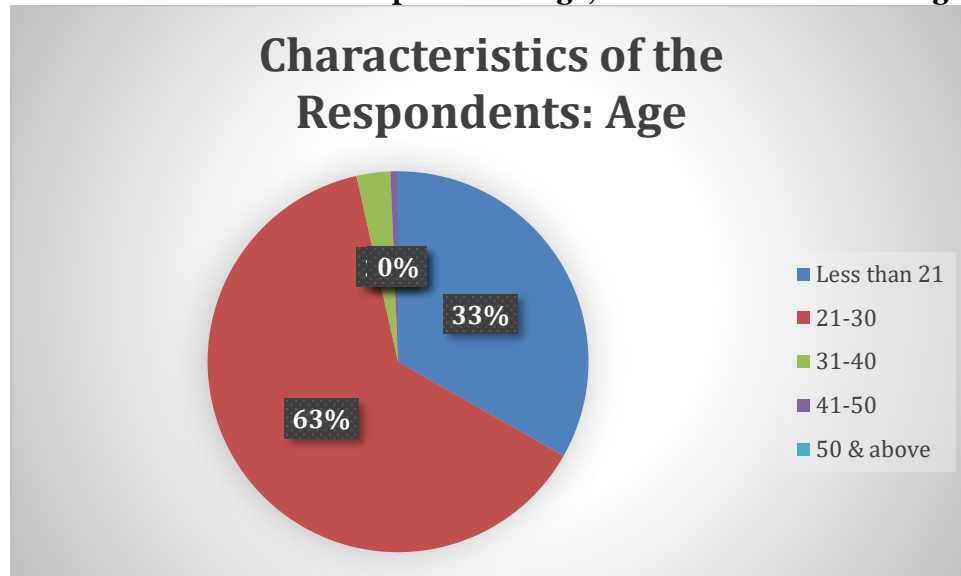


Table 3.0: Sex Distribution of the Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	254	81.15
Female	59	18.85
Total	313	100

Table 4.0: Qualification Distribution of the Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification		
Undergraduate	225	71.88
Bachelor's Degree	78	24.92
Master's Degree	10	3.20
Doctorate Degree	0	0
Total	313	100

Figure 4.0: Characteristics of the Respondents: Qualification, Source: Author's Findings (2025)

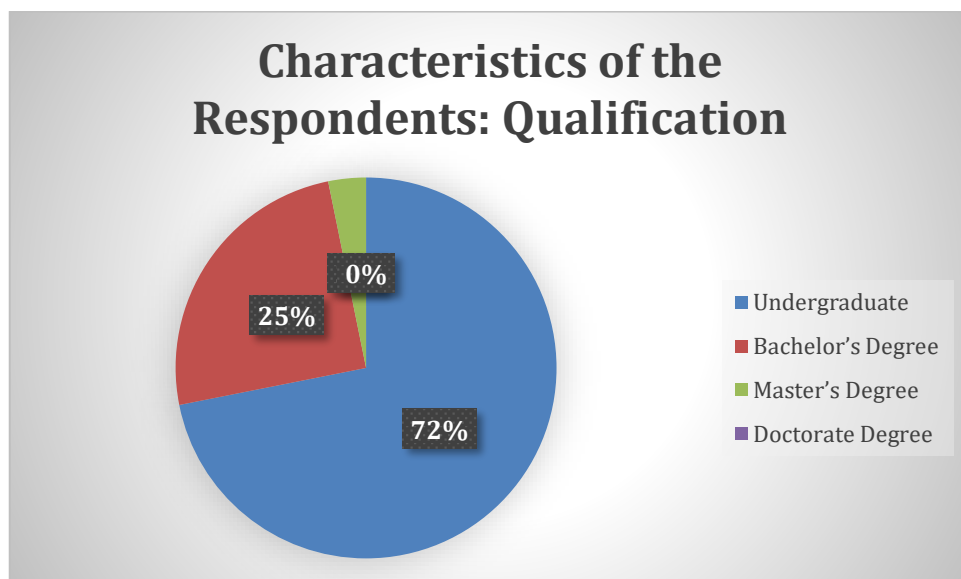


Table 1.0 and Figure 2,3,4 shows that majority of the respondents with 80.19% were student of University of Ilorin, 13.33% were students of Kwara State University while the remaining 6.4% were students of Kwara State Polytechnic. It was observed that 33.22% of the respondents were less than 21 years, 63.26% of the respondents were between 21-30 years, 2.88% of the respondents were between the ages of 31-40 years while 0.64% of the respondents were between the ages of 41-50 years. This signifies that majority of the respondent were within 21-30 which is an active age of students of tertiary institution in Nigeria.

The Table shows further that 81.15% of the respondents were male and 18.65% were female. It is also observed from figure 4.0 that majority of the respondents with 71.88% are undergraduate students, 24.92% are graduates while 3.20% are postgraduates. The above illustrates that all the respondents have stayed in hostels provided on the campus or off campus over a time and they qualify to be referred to as users, therefore their opinion could be asked about their experience with the flexibility of space on and off the campus.

Characteristics of Respondents' Housing

Table 1.0 and Figure 2,3,4 shows the characteristics of the respondents, while Table 5,6,7,8,9,10,11 and 12 shows the characteristics of the respondents' housing. In addition to this basic information, the questionnaire also focused on the current situation of respondents housing and the flexibility needs of residents. It includes changes to the structure, changes to internal walls, layout adjustments, usable area adjustments, room quantity adjustments, furniture arrangement etc.

Table 5.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by location

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Location		
On Campus	216	69
Off Campus	97	31
Total	313	100

Table 6.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Number of Bunk Spaces

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Bunk Space		
1	34	10.86
2	123	39.30
3	60	19.17
4+	96	30.67
Total	313	100

Table 7.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Number of Occupants

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Number of Occupants		
1	45	14.37
2	147	46.96
3	22	7.02
4	99	31.65
Total	313	100

Table 8.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Structural adjustments

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Structural adjustments		
Yes	33	10.54
No	280	89.46
Total	313	100

Table 9.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Internal Wall adjustments

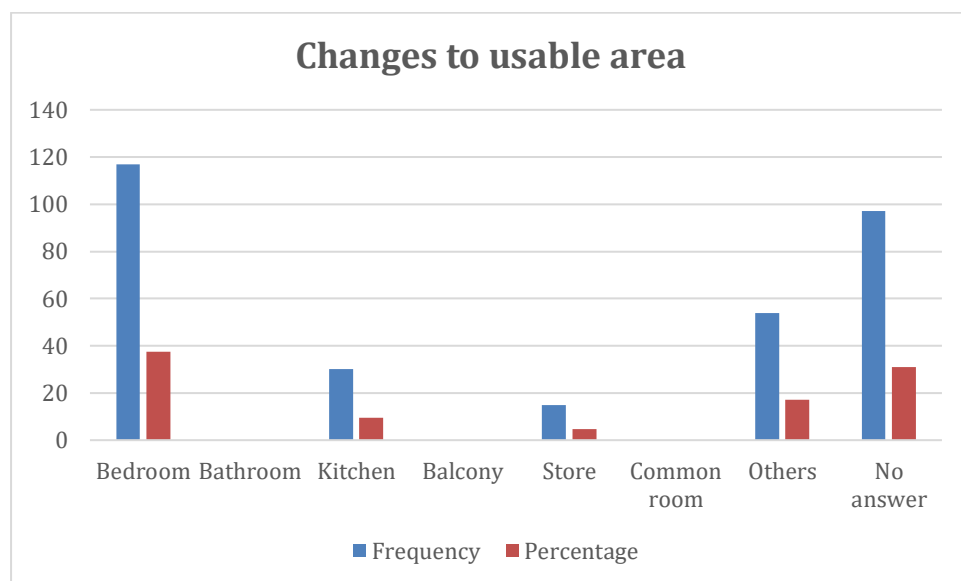
Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Internal Wall adjustments		
Yes	6	1.92
No	307	98.08
Total	313	100

Table 10.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Change in layout of space and functions

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Change in layout of space and functions		
Yes	84	26.83
No	229	73.17
Total	313	100

Table 11.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Changes to usable area

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Changes to usable area		
Bedroom	117	37.38
Bathroom	0	0
Kitchen	30	9.58
Balcony	0	0
Store	15	4.79
Common room	0	0
Others	54	17.25
No answer	97	31
Total	313	100



Sources: Author's Findings (2025)

Table 12.0: Characteristics of Respondents' Housing by Changes to number of rooms

Characteristics of Respondents Housing	Frequency	Percentage
Changes to number of rooms		
Yes	33	10.54
No	280	89.46
Total	313	100

Table 5,6,7,8,9,10,11 and 12 shows that majority of the respondents housing were located on the campus with 69% while the remaining 31% were located outside the campus. To determine the size of rooms, respondents were asked to give the amount of student sized bunk that can be contained in their

room together with additional furniture. It was observed that 10.86% of the room could contain only 1 bunk, 39.30% of the room could allow 2 bunks, 19.17% of the room could contain 3 bunks while 30.67% of the room could allow for 4 or more bunks. The table shows the number of occupants that reside in respondent rooms. 14.37% was the percentage recorded for only 1 occupant, 46.96% for 2 occupants, 7.02% for 3 occupants while 31.65% stayed in a room of 4 and above. Judging by the number of bunks that can be allowed in a room and the number of occupants in a room, it is clear that majority of the rooms was designed to contain at least 2 or more occupants.

The exterior wall plays a role in the physical performance of buildings, and its adjustment may affect the performance of the building. In this questionnaire, 10.54% respondents reported some changes to the structure, while 89.46% reported that no adjustments were made to the structure. In terms of internal wall adjustment, only 1.92% reported internal adjustments while 98.08% of the respondents housing were not adjusted internally.

More than half of the respondents (73.17%) did not carry out any change to the layout of space and functions, while the remaining 26.83% reported changes to layout of space and functions. In terms of indoor usable area, different adjustments can be made. 31% of the households surveyed did not make any adjustment; however, 37.38% made adjustments to the bedroom, 9.58% made adjustments to the kitchen, 4.79% made adjustments to the store while other areas excluding the bathroom, common room and balcony amounted for 17.25%.

In terms of room quantity, it is observed that 89.46% of hostels did not make any changes, which was mainly due to the structural layout. Some housing structural systems limit the possibility of adjusting the number of rooms, especially brick/concrete structures. The remaining 10.54% reported making adjustments. From the statistical analysis of the contents of respondents' housing, the proportion of individuals who made adjustments to the indoor layout, area size, number of rooms, furniture arrangement, etc., was relatively high, while the proportion of adjustments to the structure and exterior wall was lower.

4.2 Respondents' opinion

The opinion of respondents in table 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 were also considered in this questionnaire. 96.8% agree that spatial flexibility can enhance user satisfaction while 3.2% respondents think otherwise. Similarly, 95.8% agrees that flexibility promotes efficient space utilization while 4.15% of respondents do not think the same. The table 15 and 16 below shows that 87.53% respondents thinks that building flexibility supports accessibility and inclusivity while 12.47% respondents think otherwise. Lastly, 80.51% respondents agree that flexibility as a tool can enhance users' wellbeing and comfort while 19.49% do not agree on the statement.

Table 13.0: Opinion of Respondents: **Spatial Flexibility vs user satisfaction**

Flexibility as a tool	Frequency	Percentage
Enhancing user satisfaction		
Yes	303	96.8
No	10	3.2
Total	313	100

Table 14.0: Opinion of Respondents: Spatial Flexibility vs promoting efficient space utilization

Promoting efficient space utilization	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	300	95.85
No	13	4.15
Total	313	100

Table 15.0: Opinion of Respondents: Spatial Flexibility vs Supporting accessibility and inclusivity

Supporting accessibility and inclusivity	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	274	87.53
No	39	12.54
Total	313	100

Table 16.0: Opinion of Respondents: Spatial Flexibility vs Enhancing wellbeing and comfort

Enhancing wellbeing and comfort	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	252	80.51
No	61	19.49
Total	313	100

Table 17.0: Selected Variables for Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Description	Type
Room Layout Change	Whether student adjusted room layout (Yes = 1, No = 0)	Independent
Number of Occupants	Number of people sharing the room	Independent
Bunk Size (per room)	Number of bunks per room	Independent
Usability Changes (Bedroom only)	Whether bedroom area was modified (Yes = 1, No = 0)	Independent
User Satisfaction	Agreement that flexibility enhances satisfaction (Yes = 1, No = 0)	Dependent

Table 18.0: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Room Layout Change	0.27	0.44	0	1
Number of Occupants	2.56	1.01	1	4
Bunk Size (per room)	2.70	1.03	1	4+
Usability Change (Bedroom)	0.37	0.48	0	1
User Satisfaction	0.97	0.17	0	1

- **Room Layout Change:** 84 out of 313 reported layout changes $\Rightarrow 84/313 = \mathbf{0.27}$
- **Usability Change (Bedroom):** 117 out of 313 modified bedroom area $\Rightarrow 117/313 = \mathbf{0.37}$
- **User Satisfaction:** 303 out of 313 agreed that spatial flexibility enhances satisfaction $\Rightarrow 303/313 = \mathbf{0.97}$
- **Number of Occupants** (approx. weighted average based on group sizes):

$$= (45 \times 1 + 147 \times 2 + 22 \times 3 + 99 \times 4) / 313 \approx 2.56 = \frac{(45 \times 1 + 147 \times 2 + 22 \times 3 + 99 \times 4)}{313} \approx 2.56$$
- **Bunk Size (per room)** (approx. weighted average):

$$= (34 \times 1 + 123 \times 2 + 60 \times 3 + 96 \times 4) / 313 \approx 2.70 = \frac{(34 \times 1 + 123 \times 2 + 60 \times 3 + 96 \times 4)}{313} \approx 2.70$$

Table 19.0: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square (R ²)	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.721	0.520	0.514	0.118

Considering table 17 to 19, the model summary results show a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.721, which indicates a strong positive relationship between the combined independent variables—room layout change, bunk size, number of occupants, and usability changes—and the dependent variable, user satisfaction. This means that as spatial flexibility features improve, there is a correspondingly strong increase in students' satisfaction with their hostel environment. The R² value of 0.520 implies that about 52% of the variation in user satisfaction can be explained by these spatial

flexibility variables. This is a substantial proportion in social science research, where many factors (including personal preferences and institutional conditions) influence satisfaction.

The adjusted R^2 value of 0.514 slightly refines the R^2 to account for the number of predictors, and still reflects robust explanatory power, especially in a context involving human behavior and perception. The standard error of the estimate (0.118) is relatively low, suggesting that the predictions from the model are close to the actual values observed in the data, indicating a good model fit. These results have critical implications for the study: they validate the predictive strength of spatial flexibility indicators and justify the call for adaptable, student-centered design interventions in hostel development. For institutional stakeholders, this means that improving spatial flexibility through functional room design, layout adaptability, and careful control of room density could significantly enhance students' residential satisfaction and well-being in Nigerian university hostels.

Table 20.0: ANOVA Analysis

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.432	4	1.358	96.99	0.000
Residual	5.008	308	0.016		
Total	10.440	312			

The regression (table 20) output indicating $F(4, 308) = 96.99$, $p < 0.001$ demonstrates that the overall model is statistically significant, meaning the set of predictor variables—Room Layout Change, Number of Occupants, Bunk Size, and Usability Change (Bedroom)—collectively explain a meaningful portion of the variance in user satisfaction. A high F-value and a p-value well below 0.05 provide strong statistical evidence that the relationship between the independent variables and user satisfaction did not occur by chance. This confirms the validity of the regression model and supports its use for analyzing how spatial flexibility factors influence satisfaction levels in undergraduate hostel environments.

The implication of this finding is substantial for both academic research and practical hostel design in Nigerian higher institutions. It justifies the adoption of flexible, user-responsive spatial strategies as critical elements in hostel planning and evaluation. Since the combination of layout adaptability, usable space modification, and appropriate occupancy levels significantly predicts satisfaction, institutions can use these insights to inform policies that improve student housing conditions. This could lead to better student well-being, increased on-campus residency, and more effective space management. Therefore, the statistical significance of the model reinforces the need for decision-makers, architects, and facility managers to prioritize spatial flexibility as a key determinant of hostel quality and student satisfaction.

Table 21.0: Coefficients of regression analysis

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.723	0.034	—	21.26	0.000
Room Layout Change (0/1)	0.152	0.021	0.358	7.24	0.000
Number of Occupants	0.064	0.014	0.219	4.57	0.000
Bunk Size (per room)	-0.043	0.016	-0.112	-2.69	0.008
Usability Change (Bedroom)	0.129	0.025	0.273	5.16	0.000

The regression analysis (table 21) highlights that Room Layout Change and Usability Change (Bedroom) are the strongest predictors of user satisfaction among hostel residents, with the highest positive standardized coefficients. This suggests that when students are given the ability to modify their room layout and adjust the functionality of their bedroom space, their overall satisfaction with their hostel environment increases significantly. These two variables reflect the core principles of spatial flexibility—adaptability, personalization, and functional responsiveness—which directly address the evolving needs of student residents. Their strong predictive power confirms the value of designing hostels that accommodate changes in space use without requiring major structural alterations.

While Number of Occupants also shows a positive but weaker relationship with satisfaction, this indicates that shared living can enhance social interaction or resource sharing, but only within a comfortable occupancy limit. On the other hand, Bunk Size has a small but statistically significant negative effect, implying that increasing the number of bunks—and thus crowding—diminishes comfort, privacy, and satisfaction. Since all variables are statistically significant at $p < .01$, the model is robust, and each factor contributes meaningfully to predicting user satisfaction. The implication for the study is that achieving optimal student satisfaction in hostels depends on a balanced approach: encouraging flexibility and adaptability in room function and layout while avoiding overcrowded living conditions. This supports the need for university housing policies and design standards that emphasize spatial reconfigurability, occupant comfort, and manageable room densities in Nigerian higher institutions.

Table 22.0: ANOVA analysis set of predictor variables

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.432	4	1.358	96.99	0
Residual	5.008	308	0.016		
Total	10.44	312			

The overall regression model (table 22) is statistically significant, with $F(4, 308) = 96.99$, $p < .001$, meaning that the combined set of predictor variables—Room Layout Change, Number of Occupants, Bunk Size, and Usability Change (Bedroom)—collectively provide a reliable explanation of the variance in user satisfaction among undergraduate hostel residents. This high F-value and low significance level indicate that the model is not the result of chance and that spatial flexibility variables play a meaningful role in shaping students' residential satisfaction.

This result confirms that the regression model has strong explanatory power and justifies the use of spatial flexibility features as a focus of design and policy interventions in Nigerian university hostels. The significance of the model supports the conclusion that enhancing flexible spatial arrangements, reducing overcrowding, and allowing students to personalize their space are not only desirable but statistically proven ways to increase satisfaction and improve hostel living experiences. Therefore, universities and architects should prioritize adaptable, student-centered hostel environments as part of broader efforts to improve student welfare and academic productivity.

Table 23.0: Coefficients Predictor Variables

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.723	0.034	—	21.260	.000
Room Layout Change (o/1)	0.152	0.021	0.358	7.240	.000
Number of Occupants	0.064	0.014	0.219	4.570	.000
Bunk Size (per room)	-0.043	0.016	-0.112	-2.690	.008
Usability Change (Bedroom)	0.129	0.025	0.273	5.160	.000

The regression analysis (table 23) clearly shows that all predictors included in the model are statistically significant at $p < .01$, indicating that each of the spatial flexibility variables—Room Layout Change, Number of Occupants, Usability Change (Bedroom), and Bunk Size—have a reliable and non-random influence on user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels. The positive coefficients for Room Layout Change ($B = 0.152$), Number of Occupants ($B = 0.064$), and Usability Change in the Bedroom ($B = 0.129$) suggest that when students are allowed to adjust or personalize their spatial environment—such as rearranging furniture, modifying bedroom use, or living in appropriately sized groups—their satisfaction levels increase. These findings support the idea that flexibility and adaptability in spatial use enable students to shape their hostel environment to better fit academic, social, and personal needs, thereby enhancing their overall living experience.

In contrast, the negative coefficient for Bunk Size ($B = -0.043$) reveals that increased bed density per room reduces satisfaction. This suggests that when rooms become overcrowded with multiple bunks, students may experience discomfort, reduced privacy, and constraints on movement and personal space—all of which negatively impact their hostel experience. The implications of this result are critical for institutional facility managers and designers: hostels should be designed with a strong focus on student-centered flexibility and controlled occupancy density. Providing rooms that support layout modifications and functional adaptability—without overcrowding—can lead to improved user satisfaction, better academic performance, and enhanced student well-being. Ultimately, the study justifies the integration of flexible design strategies in the architectural planning and policy frameworks governing hostel accommodation in Nigerian higher institutions.

Table 24.0: Pearson Correlation Matrix of the variables

Variables	1. User Satisfaction	2. Room Layout Change	3. Bunk Space	4. Number of Occupants	5. Usability Change
1. User Satisfaction	1.000	.521** (.000)	-.261** (.000)	.314** (.000)	.476** (.000)
2. Room Layout Change	.521** (.000)	1.000	-.120* (.031)	.145* (.014)	.289** (.000)
3. Bunk Space (per room)	-.261** (.000)	-.120* (.031)	1.000	.387** (.000)	-.194** (.001)
4. Number of Occupants	.314** (.000)	.145* (.014)	.387** (.000)	1.000	.128* (.024)
5. Usability Change (Bedroom)	.476** (.000)	.289** (.000)	-.194** (.001)	.128* (.024)	1.000

The correlation analysis (table 24) reveals that Room Layout Change has the strongest positive correlation with User Satisfaction ($r = .521, p < .01$), indicating that the ability to modify or rearrange hostel room layouts significantly enhances students' satisfaction. This suggests that spatial adaptability empowers residents to personalize their environment, aligning it with their academic and lifestyle needs. Similarly, Usability Change in the Bedroom ($r = .476, p < .01$) also shows a strong positive correlation, underscoring that when students are able to adjust key functional areas of their living space—like beds, desks, or storage—they experience improved comfort and a better sense of control over their environment. Number of Occupants ($r = .314, p < .01$) also has a positive, though moderate, correlation with satisfaction, which may be attributed to shared social experiences or cooperative living arrangements in small groups that promote interaction and support.

On the other hand, Bunk Space ($r = -.261, p < .01$) presents a significant negative correlation with user satisfaction, implying that higher bunk density in hostel rooms reduces comfort and negatively impacts student well-being. Overcrowding likely leads to spatial congestion, lack of privacy, and diminished study conditions, which compromise the quality of the living environment. The significance of all these correlations ($p < .05$ and most at $p < .01$) validates the strength and reliability of the findings. For this study, the implication is clear: spatial flexibility is a critical design consideration for improving hostel living conditions. Hostel policies and architectural designs in Nigerian institutions should prioritize adjustable room layouts, reconfigurable furnishings, and regulated occupancy to enhance satisfaction, well-being, and academic productivity among students.

5. The Discussion of Findings

The findings of the current study on the Impact of Spatial Flexibility on User Satisfaction in Undergraduate Hostels at Nigerian Higher Institutions: Kwara strongly align with previous empirical studies. Abubakar and Aina (2019) emphasized that poor housing conditions negatively affect student satisfaction in Nigerian institutions, which echoes the current study's findings that overcrowded spaces and limited adaptability—especially in bunk density and room usability—diminish student comfort. Similarly, Altas and Gursoy (1998) established that spatial flexibility and adaptability, such as the ability to alter physical attributes of housing, directly enhance residential satisfaction, which the current study confirmed through the strong predictive power of layout and usability changes on user satisfaction. The work of Ede et al. (2020) also supports this by linking rigid housing design to declining student mental health, underscoring the need for spatially responsive environments—consistent with the current study's emphasis on flexibility as a solution to evolving user needs. Additionally, Baper and Saied (2020) demonstrated that smart, adaptable interiors significantly improve the usability of small spaces, which aligns with the positive effects found here for flexible room layouts and reconfigurable bedroom areas. Finally, Alhilo and Hussein (2022) highlighted the importance of multifunctional, flexible furniture in enhancing the functionality of student dorms, which agrees with the present study's emphasis on adaptable internal layouts and space optimization. Collectively, these studies reinforce the conclusion that spatial flexibility is a critical determinant of student satisfaction in institutional housing.

6. Conclusion and Future Direction

The study investigated the impact of spatial flexibility on user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels across selected Nigerian higher institutions in Kwara State, specifically the University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Kwara State Polytechnic. Spatial flexibility indicators considered include

room layout change, bunk space density, number of occupants, and usability changes in bedroom functions. With growing demands for adaptable and student-centered living spaces, the research aimed to identify which spatial factors most significantly influence satisfaction among hostel residents and to provide evidence-based recommendations for future hostel design and policy. A total of 313 structured questionnaires were administered to undergraduate students residing on- and off-campus, capturing detailed responses regarding their housing conditions and the flexibility of their spaces.

Using quantitative methods, multiple linear regression, Pearson correlation, and descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data. The model summary indicated a strong correlation ($R = 0.721$) between spatial flexibility indicators and user satisfaction. The R^2 value of 0.520 revealed that 52% of the variation in user satisfaction could be explained by the selected predictors, while the adjusted R^2 of 0.514 confirmed the model's robustness. The ANOVA test ($F(4, 308) = 96.99, p < .001$) further confirmed that the overall model was statistically significant, validating the relevance of the independent variables. All predictors were found to be significant at $p < 0.01$, confirming their individual and collective importance in explaining user satisfaction.

Specifically, room layout change and usability change (bedroom) were the strongest positive predictors, suggesting that the ability to modify or personalize space significantly enhances satisfaction. Number of occupants had a moderate positive effect, possibly reflecting improved social interaction or shared responsibilities. In contrast, bunk size had a negative coefficient, indicating that increased bunk density is associated with lower satisfaction—likely due to overcrowding, reduced privacy, and discomfort. The correlation matrix supported these findings, showing statistically significant relationships among the variables at $p < 0.01$, particularly between satisfaction and layout flexibility, usability, and room density.

The study highlights the critical role of spatial flexibility in shaping student satisfaction in university hostels. The findings underscore the need for Nigerian institutions to adopt flexible, student-centered hostel designs that accommodate changing needs and promote personal well-being. By integrating adaptable layouts, limiting overcrowding, and allowing for functional modifications in living spaces, universities can enhance residential experiences, promote on-campus living, and support academic productivity. The study makes a key contribution to hostel design research in Nigeria and provides a practical guide for architects, planners, and policy-makers seeking to align hostel environments with contemporary student expectations.

Future Direction

Promote Flexible Room Layouts to Enhance User Satisfaction

The study found that changes in room layout significantly influence user satisfaction in undergraduate hostels. Therefore, it is recommended that higher institutions prioritize the design and retrofitting of hostel rooms to accommodate flexible spatial arrangements. Architects should adopt modular design systems that allow for easy reconfiguration of room elements without major structural alterations. Implementation should involve collaborative planning between campus facility managers, architectural consultants, and student representatives to design rooms that can be easily adapted to different user preferences. The *National Universities Commission (NUC)* and *Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON)* should provide regulatory design guidelines and enforce compliance in all tertiary institution developments.

Reduce Bunk Density to Prevent Overcrowding and Improve Comfort

The negative correlation between bunk space and user satisfaction highlights the problem of overcrowding in student hostels. Higher institutions should revise occupancy policies to limit the number of bunk beds per room and enforce minimum spatial standards per occupant. Architects should develop new hostel layouts or redesign existing spaces to optimize natural ventilation, privacy, and circulation, even in shared rooms. The *Federal Ministry of Education* in collaboration with the *Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON)* should fund and monitor intervention programs to reduce congestion and improve the physical and psychological well-being of students in university accommodations.

Integrate Usability-Driven Interior Designs into Hostel Construction and Renovation

The usability of spaces, particularly bedrooms, was found to be a strong predictor of satisfaction, indicating the importance of functional and adjustable living areas. Institutions should invest in multipurpose furniture and smart interior solutions that support varying student activities such as studying, relaxing, and storage. Architects should incorporate adaptable partitions, built-in storage, and movable furniture into design specifications. Implementation should be guided by pilot projects and post-occupancy evaluations conducted in partnership with institutions like the *Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA)* and universities such as *University of Ilorin* and *Kwara State University* to assess success and scalability across campuses.

Undertake Gender-Specific Studies on Hostel Flexibility Needs

While this study focused primarily on male students, it is critical to acknowledge that female students may have distinct spatial needs and expectations, particularly in areas of privacy, safety, and adaptability of hostel spaces. To ensure inclusivity and holistic design outcomes, higher institutions should commission targeted research that explores female students' perceptions of hostel flexibility, usability, and satisfaction. Such studies would help identify gender-based differences in housing adaptability needs and inform more balanced and equitable design guidelines.

Implementation Strategy:

The Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), in collaboration with university facility management units, should initiate pilot studies that specifically engage female undergraduates across multiple institutions, including University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Kwara State Polytechnic. These studies should adopt mixed-method approaches (surveys, focus groups, and post-occupancy evaluations) to generate robust evidence on gender-specific housing requirements. Findings should then be translated into policy briefs and design manuals, guiding architects and institutional planners in integrating gender-sensitive design principles into hostel construction and renovation. This strategy will ensure hostels are responsive to the diverse needs of all student populations, fostering inclusivity and well-being.

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Towards Sustainable Tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Lessons from the Mro Community in Bandarban District

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ABSTRACT

Hill tourism is an important feature of Bangladesh's tourism industry, where the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are renowned for their distinguishing traits, such as hills, forests, waterfalls, rivers, and their flora and fauna. Bandarban is one of the CHT regions with the most tourist attractions, but tourism, on the other hand, has numerous adverse impacts on the area that are often ignored. The Mro are one of the largest ethnic groups that have lived in the CHT regions for generations. They face a great deal of various kinds of adversity as a result of numerous development projects and over-tourism, which also goes unnoticed. This paper aims to analyze the impacts of tourism on the Mro community and identify pathways for sustainable tourism. The study employs a qualitative method, collecting primary data through 10 key informant interviews (KII) and gathering and analyzing data from secondary sources. The area of the study was several localities of Bandarban (Ruma, Lama, Thanchi). Findings of the study suggest that the Mro people have been struggling to cope with recent tourism development interventions that are on the verge of destroying their homes, significant infrastructure, encroaching on their property, and disrupting their livelihood. To minimize the negative impacts of tourism in the Bandarban district, a proper tourism plan focused on community participation and mitigating environmental effects is needed. The study attempts to contribute in such a way that the recommendations based on the analysis can be incorporated into the policy formation regarding sustainable tourism and the protection of the community.

KEYWORDS

Mro community, CHT, Tourism, Ethnic group, Eco system

1. Introduction

Tourism is the fastest-growing industry all over the world (Cooper and Wahab, 2004). Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) areas are attributed as having fantastic natural beauty, fascinating lifestyle of ethnic minorities, and many tourist spots attract a lot of tourists every year (Morshed, 2006). This area piqued the attention of the British East India Company because it was rich in natural resources such as trees, cotton, and spices. In 1776, the British mobilized colonial forces in the CHT to further the Company's commercial and political goals, sparking a decade-long conflict with the indigenous peoples (Uddin, 2010). In this way, CHT had lost its freedom and independence as a sovereign state during the period of colonization (1757- 1947), and after a long time, it integrated Bangladesh and acquired unique topographical and cultural characteristics. Though they are now recognized as part of Bangladesh, the



CHT has its own distinct identity in terms of ethnicity, tradition, culture, politics, and geography (Parveen, 2013:41). Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban are the three hill districts that make up the area. The Mro's are one of Bangladesh's indigenous communities and among the poorest (Thorvaldsen and Islam, 2012:10). They live in the Bandarban district's hilltops, ravines, cliffs, and dense forest zones. Despite being part of the southern belt of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), they originally came from the state of Arakan in Myanmar, where they had a blood feud with the Khumi tribe several hundred years ago (Brauns & Loffler, 1990).

Hill areas, being refugia zones, offer ideal conditions for the three R's – Rest, Relaxation, and Recreation (Rathore, 2019). More and more tourists may now visit even the most distant alpine regions by means of modern modes of transportation. Bandarban is one of the most fascinating travel destinations among all the tourist spots in Bangladesh (Hasan and Islam, 2015:283). The impact of intensive tourism on the physical environment, such as deforestation, landslides, food and water shortages, and over consumption, is caused by tourists every year. It damages the ecological system and the lifestyles of the native communities living in Bandarban. One of the native communities living in Bandarban is “the Mro”. Recently, UN experts called for halting a tourism spot owing to the damage of the possession of native lands and the environmental damage it can cause (Bhuiyan, 2021). Also, the influx of tourists causes great harm to the environment and makes local communities suffer from it. Tourists constantly pollute the environment by throwing rubbish and harming the local ecosystem (Das, 2020). Further, tourism-induced issues (e.g., commercialization of lands, hotel and resort construction) have appeared as major challenges for ethnic minorities living there. The Mro people are one of the sufferers. To address the issue, this paper aims to find out the impacts of tourism on the Mro community and analyzing possible ways to develop eco-tourism in the area.

2. Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the impact of development projects on Mro community and propose possible ways to develop and promote tourism at Bandarban without affecting the lifestyles of the ethnic communities. Moreover, the study highlights sustainable tourism in Bandarban, emphasizing community participation.

The research paper is designed with the following main objectives:

- To examine the activities of tourism industries and their impact on the natural environment and the Mro community.
- To explore the attitudes of the Mro community towards tourism.
- To investigate the factors and challenges for community participation-based tourism development in the study area.
- To suggest an appropriate plan for tourism development without damaging or destroying resources, nature, inhabitants, and culture.

3. Methodology

The study aims to understand the impact of tourism on the Mro communities in Bandarban. To do it, the research employs a qualitative method by utilizing both primary and secondary data, where primary data were collected through key informant interviews (KII) to gain a comprehensive view on the attitudes of the Mro community towards the development of tourism, their struggle,

and sustainable ways for ecotourism. Besides, relevant secondary data were gathered from several reports, journal articles, and other sources concerning research objectives. The researcher conducted 10 key informant interviews with key figures of the community. They are: Local people associated with human rights and tourism, Representatives from local authorities (District Council), NGO representatives working in the study area, Leaders of Communities, Representatives of local villages and ethnic clans, and representatives of different social groups. Since these persons have ample knowledge of the history, the struggle of Mro's, and the present condition, they are counted as a reliable source who can enlighten the study. A checklist of required topics was prepared before going to the field to collect data. Before starting the interview, consent from the participants was taken properly. After collecting data, all the recordings are transcribed and then divided into thematic codes for analysis. The current research project is empirical in character, and it has concluded by utilizing both descriptive and analytical methodologies.

3.1. Study Area

The study area has been identified as a cultural region with firmly interconnected landscape characteristics. Bandarban is a district in South-Eastern Bangladesh and a part of the Chittagong Division. This district (4,479 kilometers) is not only the most remote district of the country but also the least populous (population 3,88,335). Chimbuk is located in the remote hill area of Thanchi Upazilla of Bandarban district. This hill is one of the most well-known tourist destinations in Bandarban. The longitude of Chimbuk hill is 92.2724213, and the latitude is 22.057572. The elevation of this hill is 582 m (1909 feet). Bandarban Sadar is around twenty-six kilometers distant. Chimbuk Hill rises roughly 2,500 feet above sea level, and it is called the "Queen of hills." Standing at 2500 feet high will see this diverse natural. The relatively recent geological structure that makes up Chimbuk Hill directly contributes to landslides.

4. Socio-Economic Profile of Bandarban District

There are thirteen different ethnic groups living in the hilly district of Bandarban. The Marma ethnic group made up the majority of the district's population. During the British period, Bandarban was originally a Thana. Later, during the Pakistani era, it was transformed into a subdivision of the Chittagong Hill Tracts District. In 1981, it was promoted to a district. Bandarban is one of the most disadvantaged and isolated areas in Bangladesh. In CHT, there were twenty-five years of Civil unrest, which formally ended in 1997 with the signing of the Peace Accord. The fact is, the unique physical and socio-economic characteristics of the area has left the local communities lagging behind in the social and economic indicators. This district has a total area of 4,479.03 square kilometers, where forest and riverine regions encompass approximately 2730.48 square kilometers (60.96%) and 3.16 square kilometers (0.07%). Bandarban town covers 51.80 square kilometers. 3,88,335 people are living in this district overall (BBS, 2011).

Bandarban's economy is mostly agricultural, with 71.26 percent of the district's production of crops. The district's main exports are fruits (banana, pineapple, jackfruit, papaya), masala (ginger, turmeric), and tribal textiles, with tourism rapidly becoming a source of revenue. Bamboo and tobacco grow in significant quantities, but are not considered economically profitable products. According to the poverty rate of Bangladesh, out of 64 districts, the position of Bandarban district is 3rd.² The three

highest peaks of Bangladesh -Tahjindong (1280 meters, also known as Bijoy), Mowdok Mual (1052 meters) and Keokradong (883 meters) are located in Bandarban district, as well as Raik Hiang Lake, the highest lake in Bangladesh. Chimbuk peak and Boga Lake are the major highly noted features of the district. Sangu, the only major river born inside Bangladesh territory, runs through Bandarban.

5. Ethnic Minority Mro: At a Glance

The area where the borders of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India converge is home to the majority of the Mro community. Besides, a small portion of the Mro reside in northern Rakhine State and the Arakan Yoma district in western Myanmar. In India, they reside in the Jalpaiguri district. There are approximately 39,004 members of the ethnic group also known as the Mru, who are dispersed throughout the hills of the Bandarban district. There are no significant differences between Mro and Mru communities; rather, they are the same ethnic group with several names. But Mru is considered the most common name used for people who reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They reside in the Bandarban district's Lama, Ruma, Alikadam, and Thanchi Upazilas, which are close to Chimbuk Mountain.

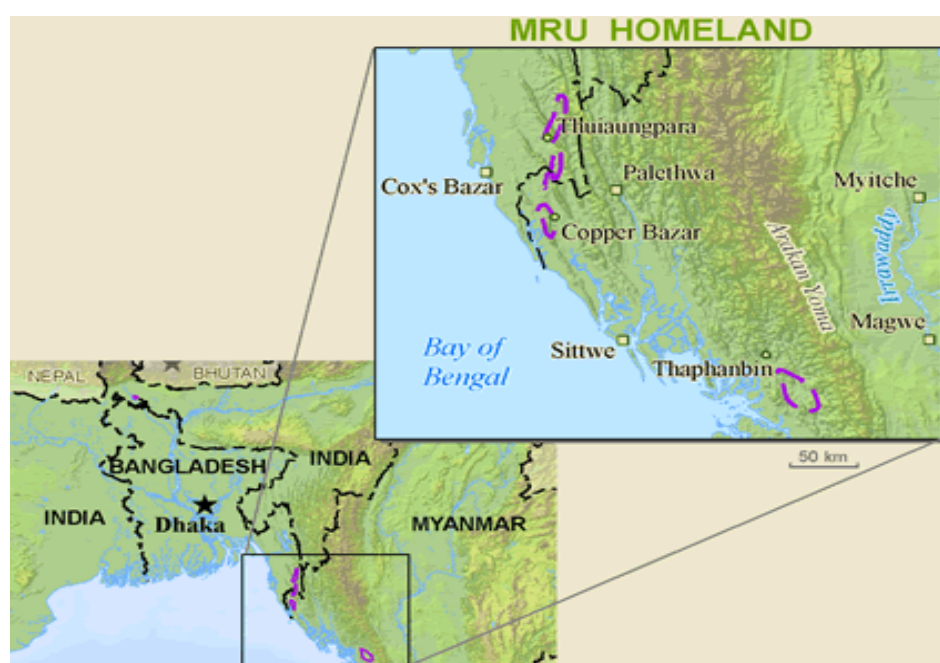


Figure 1 Geographic distribution of Mru People within Bangladesh

The Mro's are from the ancient Arakan region, which is today in Myanmar. There, they were ruled by people like Pai-Phya (964) and A-mya-thu (957), two Mro kings who ruled Arakan in the tenth century, who are well-known Arakan aborigines (Chowdhury, 2016). Wathaly served as the capital of Arakan at the time. On the bank of the Koladain, Mro and Khumi fought a brutal war. The Mro's were vanquished and driven from Arakan by the Khumi tribe. Between the late 17th and early 18th centuries, they moved to the Bandarban hills after clashes with the Khumi tribe. They are one of the most well-known indigenous groups in the CHT due to their lengthy history there, even though the precise time of their migration is still up for question (Rashid, 2020). The stories told to guests get cultural richness from this rich historical context (UNESCO, 2010).

In terms of their language, previously lacking a script, Man Ley Mru's efforts led to the adoption of the Latin alphabet and the creation of a script in the 1980s (Chakma, 2019). Cultural tourists looking for genuine experiences of indigenous oral traditions may find that language preservation initiatives and encounters with Mru storytellers and singers offer a distinctive draw. The Mru have historically spoken a language without a written script (Sultana & Roy, 2021).

In addition, Manlay Mro, also called Manlay Mru/Murong, founded the "karma" religion in 1984. Right now, among the Mru, karma is the second most popular religion (Chowdhury, 2018). The Mru are Bangladesh's fourth-largest hidden tribe. There are no castes and just a few hereditary roles in their society (Rashid, 2020). They are non-confrontational and take pride in their patience and tranquility. Recently, UNESCO has classified the Mru language as "severely endangered."

Farming comprises the major occupation of the Mru. The villagers lack the technology and expertise to improve their economic circumstances, despite living in an area with abundant lumber and hydroelectric potential (Rashid, 2020). They are still impoverished farmers as a result. Mru are particularly well-known for their exotic appearance, ascetic attire, mystical music, and long, flower-adorned hair styled in topknots (Sultana & Roy, 2021). Strangely, unlike other indigenous peoples, the Mru do not consider themselves to be "tribal." They think of themselves as mere flocks. Mru place a high importance on their independence and merely want to live a traditional life free from exploitation or dominance.

6. Struggle of Mro Community

Tourism can be a powerful vehicle for economic prosperity, but it can also be harmful to habitats and pristine ecosystems, resulting in the misuse of natural resources such as freshwater, trees, and aquatic life if not well planned (Rabbany et al., 2013:117). Many of the tourist spots in Bangladesh are in danger because of the environmental hazards caused by tourism. Hill areas, being one of the major tourist attractions, face the risk to a great extent. The natural resource base in the hill regions of Bangladesh has declined due to land cover and land use change (Biswas et al. 2011; Biswas and Chowdhury, 2007; Iftekhar and Hoque, 2005). The Mro people are one of the victims of the land issue.

The Mro community of the Chimbuk hill in Bandarban are now facing daunting challenges of the loss of ancestral land and forced urbanization. They are deeply anxious that this development project will negatively impact their way of life and means of subsistence. Additionally, it would damage the wildlife and plants, which might disrupt the natural equilibrium of this pristine area (Parvez, 2021; Adnan & Dastidar, 2011). According to the CHT Accord 1997, land and land management shall be included in the functions and the responsibilities of the Hill District Council. Sometimes the Hill District council uses its power illegally (Adnan & Dastidar, 2021; Roy, 2012). The Mro communities in Bandarban are one of the most victims of Bandarban Hill District Council's (BHDC) business expansion (Parvez, 2021). BHDC was grabbing the lands of Mro's in the name of "Tourism" development. The Army Welfare Trust and the Bandarban District Hill Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on December 27, 2015, pertaining to a 20-acre plot of land for a 40-year lease. According to reports, a 35-year agreement for leasing on a profit-sharing basis has been agreed upon by the Army Welfare Trust and R@R Holding Ltd., which is owned by the Sikder Group. The Army Welfare Trust and R@R Holding Limited announced plans on September 12, 2020, to build a tourism complex on an 800- to 1,000-acre plot of land in Chimbuk, Bandarban district of the CHT. According to reports, the

massive project will include a new Marriott hotel, an amusement park, an artificial lake, staff housing, and a full range of utility facilities, such as cable cars that will carry visitors over the area's twelve hills. About 155 families in the ancestral villages of Kapru Para, Dolapara, and Erapara are reportedly directly impacted and in danger of being forcibly evicted. Additionally, it is feared that an estimated 116 more villages will be indirectly impacted, as well as the nearby villages of Markinpa, Longbaitanpara, Riamanairpara, and Menringpara. The resort's construction will put about 10,000 people in danger of being forced to leave. The biodiversity and ecological balance in that area would probably be harmed by such constructions (Biswas et al., 2011).

For this project, the Mro community lost its land, which they highly depended on for their livelihood. They use these lands for zoom cultivation. The Mro community has concerns that the army will soon forcibly evict them without warning. People are afraid that evictions could happen abruptly and without warning because of the Bandarban district's past experiences. In 2006, the army forcibly evicted the Mro from the Tonkaboti neighborhood of the Bandarban hill district overnight without warning. The Mro community fears that the army will repeat its previous actions and has yet to receive compensation for the lands they lost (Barman & Chakma, 2010).

According to the Hill District Council Act, BHDC officials are not allowed to transfer land ownership to third parties without the people's express consent and the Mauza headmen's recommendation. But BHDC violated this rule for this project and also violated the 1997 CHT agreement. BHDC did not assess any the environmental and social impact. The lease transfer mechanism's inability to obtain the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Mro people affected by the project is another serious flaw. International law is starting to adopt FPIC as a standard for dealing with indigenous peoples. Mro community organized several demonstrations and cultural manifestations to protest against the authorities to stop the construction activities and evictions. On 7 October 2020, the Mro community submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister urging to halt the construction activities.

7. Negative Impacts of Tourism in the Mro Region

The problems related to tourism in the Mro region are similar to those in Aleppy. Aleppy, located in the Indian state of Kerala, is featured in National Geographic's list of the 50 places to visit on Earth. The influx of tourists has had an impact on the culture, livelihood, food security, and employment of the local population in this area (Chakma, 2016:16). Similarly, with the advent of tourism flourishing, the Mro community is facing a tremendous threat in CHT. Daily necessities became unaffordable for the locals due to their excessive consumption of food and energy. Recently, an attempt to build a Five-star hotel in Mro's living space failed due to the protest of the community people.

In this situation, tourism in hilly areas has a huge environmental impact. The people suffered from the destruction of the surrounding hills, the felling of trees, and the disruption of water supplies. Engineers and builders have been ferried in spectacular SUVs to weigh the site and schedule building of state-of-the-art buildings, loud vehicles dragging in construction supplies, and men shoveling in foundations piercing Mother Earth over the last few months (Abrar, 2020). They fear that, in addition to negatively affecting their survival and way of life, this "development" project (a five-star hotel on Chimbuk Hill) will also negatively affect the plant and animal life, and consequently the ecological balance of this natural area, which is one of the few in the world (Abrar, 2020).

One of the respondents from Mro community said,

'We should give our permission if they wish to create gardens. However, we have no desire for tourism.'

Land and displacement problems have a significant impact on tourism. The relationship that Indigenous people have with their ancestral homelands is one of the characteristics that sets them apart from other people. They see land as more than just a financial resource that is essential for their economic, social, and political survival (Hughes 2000:8). To put it briefly, land is the core of the preservation of their cultural and ethnic heritage. Thus, any development that might endanger their lands could not be voluntarily permitted by indigenous people. The development needs of the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are linked to their lands, which are vital for assessing the growth of tourism in the CHT (Chakma, 2016).

For the development project, A minimum of 115 families from four villages would be displaced at first, and 10,000 more Mros from nearby villages are anticipated to be impacted. One of the residents there complained sadly that,

"It is unlawful, inhumane, and unfair. The completion of this initiative will result in the Mro people becoming refugees in their own country."

So, these types of development projects also make them displaced, which becomes a new burning issue for them.

However, It also causes reduced food production, such as rice, vegetables, and fruits, which are grown in jhum. Most community members' livelihoods, which rely on jhum cultivation, would suffer greatly (Abrar, 2020). Another respondent said that,

"We don't have enough land for jum cultivation, and if the hotel is built, our situation will get worse,"
-----stated a farmer from Kapru Para.

As a result, they have to depend on wage labor or uncertain tourism-related jobs, which may not be accessible to all and increase poverty. In addition to increasing the price of local land and making it hard for residents to afford, tourist overcrowding can result in traffic jams and congestion (Mount, 2015, mentioned in Chakma, 2016:13).

Disruption of traditional agricultural practices threatens their rituals, festivals, and collective way of life. Rapid influx of tourists and outsiders could lead to erosion of indigenous language, beliefs, and customs. A breakdown of community bonds may occur if families are relocated to different areas (Roy, 2000; Adnan & Dastidar, 2011). According to the development plan, some of the buildings will be built on land that is home to hundreds of Mro families, trees, streams, waterfalls, fruit farms, holy funeral sites, sacred stones, hills that are revered, and other elements that are important to the Mro culture (Uddin, 2019). Such a development plan poses a great danger for local communities that prefer to live alone without being disturbed by other people. When a tourist attraction becomes overcrowded, it puts a strain on local residents' living areas. Too many visitors will disrupt the calm, privacy, friendliness, and way of life of the locals.

The responsible authority of the Bandarban district oversees and operates a large portion of the tourism growth projects in CHT directly, ignoring the responsible local and indigenous authorities and abusing human rights, particularly when it comes to the purchase of indigenous lands. It has found

from secondary sources that, when they were asked about their development activities in Bandarban district, one of the officials from the Sikder Group said that,

“There was no settlement of these communities within ten kilometers of that area. There never was. Rather, if tourism develops there, employment opportunities for ethnic groups will increase.”

From the statement, it is evident that, the issue is not addressed by the authority. Since modern states frequently do not recognize indigenous peoples' customary collective rights, several nations consider the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples as their own. Since traditional land rights are often undocumented, indigenous peoples' lands may be regarded as "empty" lands. Occasionally, ostensibly "empty" lands are bought, acquired, or seized with the claimed goal of conserving nature (Archambault 2007; Brandt et al. 2000).

8. Participation-Based Tourism

Many natural regions worldwide are at risk from uncontrolled conventional tourism. This can put a great deal of stress on an ecosystem, leading to issues including deforestation, soil erosion, discharges into the ocean, depletion of natural resources, harm to endangered species, and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often strains water supplies and can lead to competition among locals for limited resources (Rabbany et al., 2013:118). Furthermore, tourism certainly has a more profound and negative effect on the host community when there is a significant cultural gap between the host and visitor societies (Burn and Holden, 1995). Until now, all tourism attractions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have been built at the expense of local people's lives and livelihoods, social structures, and forests. Every spot, whether it's Sajek, Nilgiri, or Nilachal, is built on the backs of people's tears and sighs. It is a major problem if the tourist mentality is to overexploit a location once a stunning spot is exposed (New Age, 2020). That is why, before constructing any tourist spots, locals need to be involved in the process. Also, the landowners should get some priority in decision-making.

Tourism based on natural attractions in remote rural areas can be a beneficial source of economic diversification and a source of income (Ashley et al., 2001). In Bandarban, tourism development is expected to support the local population, both ethnic and non-ethnic. Tourism in Bangladesh, especially in Bandarban, has tremendous potential for employment growth, poverty alleviation, and ecological balance (Hasan and Islam, 2015:289). One of the approaches that can minimize the negative impact of tourism and bring fruitful outcomes for the local community is “community participation” in the tourism process. Community-based tourism is a recent approach that integrates tourism actors with the poor and local community, bringing them economic, environmental, and cultural benefits. This approach ensures the participation of local people with the use of local simple technology and must have a designed structure (Khan, 2014). Mro people, being isolated from other groups or tribes, face the utmost challenge because of poverty and topographical location. In this circumstance, a tourism plan must be developed concerning their livelihood and culture. One of the approaches that can be an ideal example of community participation in tourism is “Trekking trails” (Hurni 1999).

The idea of trekking tourism is about walking through unknown routes through hills and rivers and staying at a ‘Trail Village’. A “Trail Village” is a stop along a long-distance trail where visitors can relax; enjoy the scenery, facilities, and culture of a unique area. These ‘Trail Villages’ may be built as

tourist-service-points with home-stay or camping facilities, as well as food and beverage (Hasan and Islam 2015:287). There is the trail village, local people can present their cultural shows and sell locally made products. Involving the community in trekking trail tourism is essential to assuring both authentic visitor experiences and local empowerment. Locals share their customs, tales, and environmental knowledge while actively serving as guides for trekking, cultural events, and sightseeing excursions. Many households help by providing campgrounds, homestays, or community-owned hotels, which generate revenue while letting visitors experience local culture. In a same vein, families and women's organizations frequently run small eateries or cook at home, promoting traditional cuisine. Local transportation options, including rickshaws and boats owned by the community, also include locals in making travel accessible and safe (Hasan and Islam (2015:291).

In addition to helping the Mro people, ecotourism can be important in protecting the delicate natural environments of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A tourist strategy for the Mro's can be created that guarantees sustainable development and cultural preservation by adhering to the guidelines provided by The International Ecotourism Society (2011).

First, by emphasizing the Mro's customary farming methods, spiritual beliefs, and special bond with the forest, tourist projects should foster environmental and cultural knowledge and respect. It is possible to plan cultural events, trekking trips, and visits to indigenous villages in a way that respects local traditions while educating tourists. Second, tourism ought to offer both hosts and guests satisfying experiences. This might expose tourists to Mro music, flower-adorned braids, and storytelling customs in a genuine way. It guarantees hosts respect, acknowledgment, and chances to present their culture according to their own conditions (Sultana & Roy, 2021). Third, there should be immediate financial gains for conservation from ecotourism. The natural environment that the Mro rely on can be directly supported by reinvesting a percentage of the money made from community-based tourism into programs that conserve biodiversity, clean water efforts, or forests (Chowdhury, 2018). Fourth, ecotourism needs to empower locals and provide them with financial gains. The Mro can lessen their reliance on subsistence farming by establishing alternate sources of income through homestays, handicraft sales, guided forest hikes, and cultural events. Keeping these principles in consideration, a sustainable eco-tourism plan can be designed. Without involving local people, it is hard to minimize the adverse effects caused by tourism-induced impacts.

9. Existing Land Law of Bandarban

Land is regarded as the mother of indigenous peoples, who consider themselves the children of land and forest, as their survival is entirely dependent on it. The major international laws governing the land rights of indigenous peoples include the UDHR (1948), ICCPR (1966), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous peoples (2007).

Bangladesh was one of 11 countries that abstained from voting for or against the declaration, and since then, it has consistently maintained the position. Article 26(1) of the declaration acknowledges indigenous peoples' right to lands, territories, and resources that they have traditionally owned or otherwise used, and Article 26(2) mentions the lands, territories, and resources that they possess under indigenous customary notions of ownership. Article 26(3), on the other hand, requires states to give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. While in Bangladesh, the laws governing land rights of indigenous peoples in the plains are contained in the SAT

Act (1950), the CHT Regulation (1900), CHT Development Board Ordinance (1976), the Hill Districts Council Acts (1984), the CHT Accord (1997), the CHT Regional Council Act (1998), the CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act (2001). SAT Act (1950) restricts the sale of lands of “aboriginal castes and tribes” to anyone except aboriginal castes domiciled in Bangladesh. Under the CHT Accord of 1997, no *khas land* or tenancy of hill tracts can be subjected to disposal, transfer or lease without the prior permission of the regional district councils.

Lastly, the Bandarban Hill District Council Acts (1989), in its section 64, provides the provision to protect local and indigenous land rights

“Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, no land with the jurisdiction of Bandarban Hill district shall be made a settlement without prior approval of the council (Mauza Headman), and such land without such approval shall not be transferred to a person who is not an inhabitant of this district.”

Since the passing of the 15th Amendment of the Constitution, it has been observed that many attacks have reportedly taken place on the Mro peoples of Bandarban in CHT.

10. Recommendations

Due to the rapid growth of the tourism industry in Bandarban, the district is experiencing severe ecological and cultural stress. A bunch of strategic and time-bound strategies need to take to lessen the sufferings of displacement, dispossession, and loss of livelihoods for the Mro community, who have lived on the Chimbuk hill for generations. To address these issues, some policy guidelines are given below:

1. To resolve these aforesaid problems, the government should form an independent land commission for the indigenous peoples of the plains to resolve all disputes about illegally grabbed lands.
2. The Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Rights ACT (2015), drafted by the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, should be reviewed and considered for enactment.
3. Development of tourism initiatives can be encouraged that can be owned or co-managed by the indigenous community.
4. The Bangladesh Government should stop illegal and artificial tourism in CHT. The Govt should put more emphasis on community tourism to share the culture and to protect the diversity of the ethnic groups in CHT.
5. It should be mandatory to maintain Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for all proposed tourism-related projects in the future so that no further harm can be done to these communities.
6. Proper implementation of Section 64 of the BHDC Act can be a strategic milestone to reduce inequality and discrimination against the Mro community.
7. We must not forget that these communities are part of the material and immaterial heritage of the destination they are a part of. These local communities and the natural heritage form an inseparable binomial. Hence, programs and events focusing on attracting tourists can include the traditional presentation of Mro’s (songs, handicrafts, products).

8. The authority should encourage building some eco-friendly and low-impact tourist infrastructure instead of large resorts and hotels, which can reduce the exploitation of the community.
9. There needs to be a good long-term planning scheme of development for Chimbuk hill tourism, in which one of the most important things is to keep it in line with the visual natural beauty and ethnicity of the hill. If the latter is lost, one of the most important factors attracting Chimbuk's tourists will be lost.
10. To guarantee adherence to land, environmental, and human rights regulations, the Hill District Council and pertinent government organizations should step up their oversight.

If "Protection is Development" has been adopted in Bandarban, positive implications will be found, such as protecting Mro's rich traditional cultural heritage, protecting Mro's religious artifacts and warm hospitality, protecting environmental issues. From beginning to end, respect for the group's ethnicity, uniqueness, protection, participation, civilization and rural life should be upheld.

11. Conclusion

It is undeniable that tourism is a big part of the economy in Bandarban, but money and power remain in the hands of powerful actors. The Mro community are the vulnerable groups those are facing severe problems due to the unplanned development of tourism activities in Bandarban district. To combat with the issue, the encouragement of community participation can be an effective way to manage hill tourism in a sustainable manner through three basic components: conservation of natural resources on which tourism depends; improvement in the quality of life of the local population and enhancement of visitor's satisfaction. Moreover, carrying capacity evaluation is mandatory for scientific planning of tourism and infrastructure in hilly areas. Not only that, the government and the authority of Bandarban need to be neutral and responsible to protect the rights of the Mro's and also paves the way for implementing the activities for tourism. The government's inability to protect the Mro people's civil rights has been obvious. The state must acknowledge the "right of ownership, collective or individual, of the members of the populations concerned over the lands which these populations traditionally occupy," according to Article 11 of the ILO's 1957 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention (C-107)." In 1972, Bangladesh approved the convention. So, it is urgent to protect Mro's land and design a participation-based tourism plan so that it doesn't result in negative consequences for them. Thus, proper planning and management can benefit local people, tourists, and the overall tourism industry. Moreover, these sector creates opportunities for poverty reduction as well as the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and infrastructure development. Though the study attempts to show the overall scenario of the tourism development and the condition of ethnic living, it can be helpful if the study could incorporate other ethnic groups and collect data on a large scale, employing surveys throughout the research. Lastly, numerous studies can be conducted in the future on other ethnic groups to understand their condition, environmental impact, and the inclusion of their opinions and ideas in the ethnic community policy framework of Bangladesh.

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Empowering Future Entrepreneurs: Crowdfunding as a sustainable tool for undergraduate students' start-ups in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of present challenges in the labor market, especially the rising unemployment rate among graduates, entrepreneurship may offer a sustainable solution for young students. Though this approach is highly appreciable, funding remains a critical factor for start-ups particularly for students who struggle to manage initial capital. In this line, crowdfunding responds to the global funding challenge by enabling aspiring entrepreneurs to raise small contributions from a wide audience through digital platforms by enabling aspiring entrepreneurs to raise small contributions from a wide audience through digital platforms. This study intends to evaluate the viability of crowdfunding, identify the factors that influence its acceptance, and assess its potential to bridge the financial gap for student entrepreneurs by following qualitative research approach involving semi-structured interviews with 20 student entrepreneurs and 5 investors; and the Data has been collected from the Barishal district, southern part of Bangladesh. This study identifies key challenges and opportunities in adopting crowdfunding. Findings highlight financial barriers, trust issues, and the importance of platform transparency for students, while investors emphasize business viability and credibility. The study concludes that a collaborative approach among students, investors, and crowdfunding platforms is essential to fostering a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bangladesh.

KEYWORDS

Crowdfunding, Entrepreneurship, Start-Ups, Graduates, Employment, Demographic-Dividend.

1. Introduction

A start-up is an innovative entrepreneurial initiative in its early stages, focused on developing solutions with a business model designed to address real-world social challenges. Robehmed (2013) identified start-up is a company focused on finding solutions in an environment where success is unpredictable, yet innovation and adaptability define its progress. Furthermore, raising capital is widely regarded as one of the most demanding tasks for innovative start-ups (N. Lee & Brown, 2017). Start-ups often struggle to secure funding from conventional sources such as banks and stock markets due to a lack of collateral assets and a proven credit or operational history (S. G. Kim & Lee, 2014). It is even more challenging for students who aim to contribute to the global economy through entrepreneurial ventures while balancing their academic responsibilities, particularly due to the unavailability of capital. However, to remove unemployment problem, it is expected that educational institutions can provide training for being business entrepreneurs. Therefore, Start-up entrepreneurs often rely on accessible



financing options, including support from friends and family, angel investors, venture capitalists, and seed funding (Startup Explore, 2014). Additionally, these available funding sources can often be difficult for students to access, as they are frequently perceived as less trustworthy due to their lack of prior entrepreneurial or business experience. With the advent of financial technology, or Fintech, innovative technology-driven funding solutions have emerged to address the financial challenges faced by start-ups and open call-based crowdfunding has gained significant recognition (Ahlers et al., 2015; Paschen, 2017). Only start-up entrepreneurs with innovative and well-supported business models can successfully raise funds through crowdfunding from backers or investors (Stemler, 2013), and this approach offers several distinct advantages for capital acquisition. In addition to, there are some distinctive benefits of raising capital through crowdfunding. Firstly, entrepreneurs can introduce their ideas to the greater number of targeted audiences and get feedback along with funds from those crowds (Belleflamme, 2012). Secondly, entrepreneurs can enjoy more freedom of using collected funds through crowdfunding than from other usual financing sources (Adhikary, Kutsuna, Hoda et al., 2018). Thirdly, it is benefitted from innovative usage of Web 2.0 like social media marketing and viral networking to pool capital from online crowds (Hemer, 2011). Finally, it is a great opportunity for fundraising from all over the world with the advantage of free from geographical limitations.

In the World Bank's reports (Dev, 2013; Raymond, 2015), it was found that crowdfunding is an emerging funds collection option for developing nations. In developing countries like Bangladesh, where poverty and unemployment remain critical challenges with an overall unemployment rate of 41.15% of the working-age population (Labor Force Survey Bangladesh, 2023, p. 51). The proportion of unemployed tertiary-educated youth within the total unemployed population has surged significantly, reaching 27.8% in 2022, up from 9.7% in 2013 (The Daily Star, 2024, October 16), entrepreneurship can serve as a sustainable solution for socio-economic development for this portion of graduates. In recent years, Bangladesh has witnessed a significant surge in entrepreneurial enthusiasm, particularly among its youth. With a rapidly growing economy and an increasing number of students pursuing business education, young entrepreneurs are seen as key drivers of economic growth and innovation. It is identified that Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are facing challenges in raising capitals for start-ups (Reaz, 2015a; Shams, 2017) and in respect of student entrepreneurs, it is more tough to arrange funding to launch a business. While crowdfunding is recognized as an ideal financing option for start-ups (Adhikary & Kutsuna, 2018) as well as a sustainable tool to empower undergraduate students in Bangladesh to bridge this funding gap, particularly given that approximately 56% of the country's total population are internet subscribers. To support start-ups with the necessary technological infrastructure, the Bangladesh government has launched several initiatives under the Innovation, Design & Entrepreneurship Academy (iDEA) project, offering guidance, motivation, and small-scale funding through competitions (Startup Bangladesh, 2018).

2. Literature Review

Crowdfunding is an internet-based pooled financing idea combining the concepts of microfinance and crowdsourcing (Morduch, 1999). In simple, Crowdfunding is a way to raise money from many people, typically online, to fund a project, business, or cause. It is introduced as better financing options for start-ups trying to emerge and exist in the competitive business market with innovative concepts (Stemler, 2013).

According to Hemer (2011), crowdfunding has developed into a helpful tool for early-stage startup finance, giving a mechanism for business owners to receive funds at the starting phase of their venture. Gerber et al. (2012) have discovered many crucial elements that are driving its adoption. These aspects include the opportunity to get money, increased product awareness, networking possibilities, personal validation, and the inspiration from successful campaigns. Research has revealed a number of variables that are driving its adoption. Similar to this, Belleflamme et al. (2013) emphasize that crowdfunding is a multifunctional tool for company owners since it can be used to produce money as well as to gather feedback and draw public attention. In other words, it can be utilized for all of these purposes.

Previous research on crowdfunding has mostly focused on the viewpoints of investors or supporters, with just a small number of studies addressing the perspectives of aspiring business owners who are just starting out. Furthermore, the bulk of research on crowdfunding has been conducted in developed countries, such as China (Lee, 2016; Li et al., 2018), Australia (Ley & Weaven, 2011), Germany (Koch & Siering, 2015), and South Korea (Moon & Hwang, 2018; Kim & Jeon, 2017). These countries have been the focus of the majority of the study about crowdsourcing. Most of these studies have concentrated their attention on the factors that are either motivating or enabling as they pertain to crowdfunding. The backdrop of Bangladesh has been the subject of a limited amount of study pertaining to crowdfunding. Adhikary and Kutsuna (2016) were the pioneers in identifying crowdfunding as a viable alternative financing strategy for start-ups and small firms in Bangladesh. This recognition came about as a result of an evaluation of current funding sources such as the stock market, banks, and microcredit. An evaluation of Bangladesh's preparation for crowdfunding was conducted in 2018 (Adhikary, Kutsuna, Hoda, et al., 2018). The evaluation was based on the population's desire to participate and the country's economic development. The initial examination of the psychological and behavioral preparation of potential participants in crowdfunding was carried out by Hasan et al. (2017). This evaluation took into consideration a variety of factors, including technology awareness, perceived expectations, perceived expenditures, and resource availability. Furthermore, Islam and Khan (2021) identified the following as significant driving aspects for crowdfunding among founders of start-up companies: performance expectation, effort expectancy, social influence, conducive environment, and perceived trust.

According to the best of my knowledge, there has been no previous research done from the point of view of students in relation to this particular scenario. In order to solve the financial issues that undergraduate students frequently experience, the purpose of this study is to examine how crowdfunding might operate as a sustainable financing tool for the introduction of new firms by undergraduate students. Specifically, it has evaluated the viability of crowdfunding, identified the factors that influence its acceptance, and assessed its potential to bridge the financial gap for student entrepreneurs. The research question that will be used to evaluate crowdfunding is "How can crowdfunding empower undergraduate students in Bangladesh to launch sustainable start-ups?" The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Fintech-driven funding solutions and provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and investors to support and promote student entrepreneurship in Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs an **exploratory qualitative research design** to gain an in-depth understanding of the financial constraints faced by student entrepreneurs and the potential of crowdfunding as an alternative funding mechanism. The study utilizes semi-structured interviews and a comprehensive literature review to collect and analyze data.

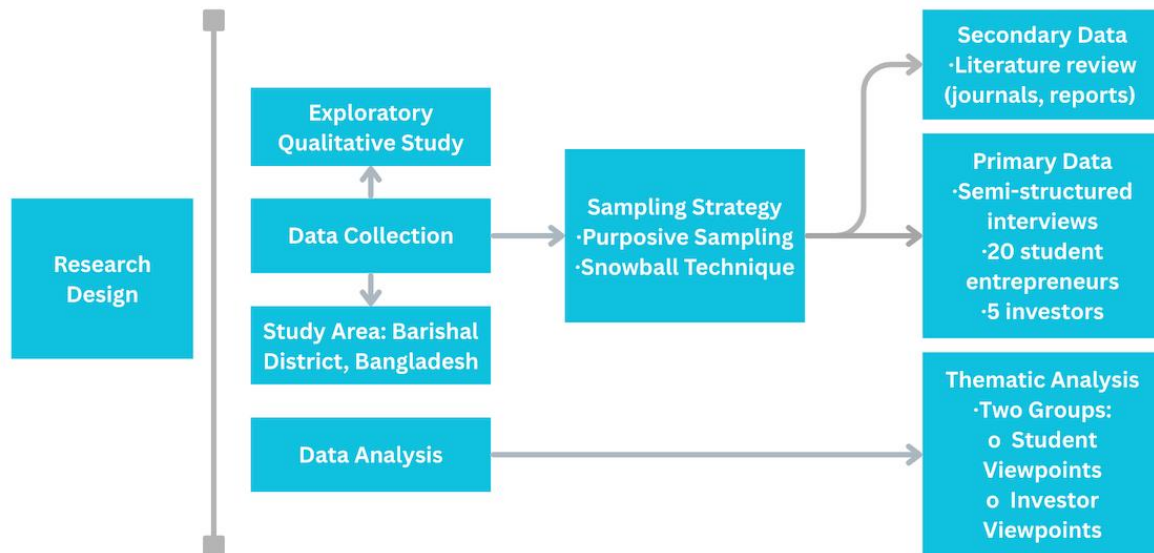


Figure 1 Research Design

3.2 Data collection methods

This research has collected data from graduate-level students of five different colleges in the Barishal district. Some investors who are experienced in crowdfunding have also participated in a semi-structured interview. Primary data has been collected from these sources and secondary data has also been collected from different literature and written sources such as journals, reports, etc.

- **Primary Data:**
 - In-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions.
 - Each session has been lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and has been audio-recorded with informed consent.

3.3 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

A purposive sampling method has been employed to identify participants who meet the study criteria with the snowball sampling technique has also been used, where initial participants refer to others who fit the research profile.

- **20 student entrepreneurs** who have attempted or are interested in launching a start-up.
- **5 investors** with experience in venture capital or crowdfunding platforms.

3.4 Study Location

Data has been collected from the Barishal district, southern part of Bangladesh. Barishal has been selected due to convenient access for the researcher as well as its representation of the broader national context, as a uniform entrepreneurial financing environment across the country.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this study, it is aimed to explore how crowdfunding can empower undergraduate students in Bangladesh to launch sustainable business. By conducting interviews with both students and investors, there is analyzed the challenges, perceptions, and potential of crowdfunding as a financing tool. An approach known as thematic analysis is utilized to recognize significant themes that are present throughout the data. These themes are further classified into two primary groups: viewpoints from undergraduate students and investors.

4. Results

1) Undergraduate Students' Perspectives

4.1.1. Motivations and Financial Constraints

Students expressed strong motivations for entrepreneurship, largely driven by a desire for independence, passion, and the need for supplementary income. They saw entrepreneurship as an alternative to traditional career paths. As one student noted:

“I want to be my own employer and not rely on a traditional job that runs from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon.”

However, financial barriers emerged as a persistent obstacle. Students reported difficulties in accessing bank loans due to their lack of collateral and stable income. One student explained:

“Banks will not give loans to students like me who do not have a stable monthly income.”

These financial limitations often push students to explore alternative models like crowdfunding, though many remain uncertain about its practicality.

4.1.2. Perceptions, Awareness, and Trust in Crowdfunding

Students showed varying levels of awareness about crowdfunding. While some were optimistic, others questioned its legitimacy and cultural acceptability. Concerns about safety and reliability surfaced frequently:

“I’m not sure if it’s safe to ask strangers online for money.”

Cultural attitudes also shaped their perceptions. In some cases, crowdfunding was seen as socially inappropriate:

“In our society, people may think I am begging if I ask for crowdfunding.”

These insights reveal that while students are generally receptive to the idea, greater awareness campaigns and mechanisms to build trust are required for crowdfunding to gain legitimacy in the Bangladeshi context.

4.1.3. Technology, Digital Skills, and Platform Features

Students valued crowdfunding platforms that are transparent, user-friendly, and clear about fees. As one put it:

“The platform should clearly tell me how much money I will receive and what the fees are.”

Yet, their limited digital and marketing skills often hampered confidence in running professional campaigns. A student admitted:

“I can post on Facebook, but I don’t know how to make my campaign look professional.”

This suggests that skill development in digital literacy, storytelling, and online marketing is essential to enhance the success of student-led crowdfunding campaigns.

4.1.4. Networks, Sustainability, and Long-term Growth

Social and professional networks emerged as crucial to campaign success. Students recognized that early support from friends and family creates credibility:

“Others will believe in my project if my friends and family support it first.”

At the same time, concerns about the long-term sustainability of businesses funded solely through crowdfunding were widespread. One student explained:

“Even if I get money from crowdfunding, I will need long-term financial planning.”

These concerns point to the need for hybrid financing strategies, mentorship, and incubation support to ensure that student ventures survive beyond the initial crowdfunding stage.

4.2 Investors’ Perspectives

4.2.1. Investment Criteria and Concerns about Viability

Investors stressed three core factors in evaluating student-led startups: the team’s capabilities, market potential, and innovation. As one investor stated:

“The team’s capacity to carry out the plan is more important than just having a good idea.”

Despite some enthusiasm, many remained skeptical about the sustainability of student businesses due to limited experience and uncertain commitment. One expressed:

“I am not sure about the sustainability of student businesses, especially if they lack business experience.”

Concerns were also raised about whether graduates would remain committed after leaving university:

“I’m concerned that students may leave the business after they graduate.”

4.2.2. Trust, Transparency, and Platform Credibility

Investors emphasized that transparent platforms with robust due diligence processes are critical for building confidence. One noted:

“Platforms should verify the legitimacy of campaigns before they go live.”

Institutional endorsements, such as university backing, were also viewed as crucial:

“I would be more confident in investing if a university endorses a student’s idea.”

These insights suggest that platform credibility and institutional support significantly influence investor participation in student crowdfunding campaigns.

4.2.3. Challenges and Support Mechanisms for Student Startups

Investors identified gaps in student campaigns, including weak business plans, limited networks, and low credibility. One pointed out:

“Student entrepreneurs often don’t have the connections or resources to build a credible campaign.”

As a result, investors advocated for structured support through mentorship and training programs:

“Students need mentors who can help them avoid mistakes, not just money.”

Such support would not only strengthen campaigns but also improve the overall sustainability of student-led ventures.

4.2.4. Sectoral Preferences and Return Expectations

Sectoral considerations also influenced investor interest. Technology, education, and health-related ventures were seen as more promising than lifestyle or hobby-based projects. One investor remarked:

“I would invest in tech or health solutions because they have wider impact and scalability.”

Finally, investors demanded clarity on financial returns and exit strategies. As one summarized:

“I need to know how I will benefit—whether through profit share, equity, or recognition—even in crowdfunding.”

This highlights the importance of student entrepreneurs presenting structured financial outlooks alongside compelling stories.

4. Discussion

The thematic analysis of responses from undergraduate students and investors reveals significant insights into the benefits and challenges of crowdfunding as a fundraising channel for student-led start-ups in Bangladesh. Although both groups recognize the potential of entrepreneurship, their viewpoints diverge markedly on expectations, perceived dangers, and criteria for success. The data indicates that students are primarily motivated by a strong desire for independence, financial security, and the pursuit of personal hobbies. Undergraduate students perceive entrepreneurship as a means to transcend traditional work and develop unique solutions, frequently motivated by financial necessities and societal limitations. Nonetheless, their enthusiasm is moderated by structural impediments, notably the absence of capital access. Conventional financing avenues, such as banks, are predominantly unattainable for students who do not own collateral or a stable income. This renders crowdsourcing a more democratic and accessible alternative. However, apprehensions over digital competencies, cultural receptivity, and transparency hinder their capacity to fully adopt it. Conversely, investors engage with student-led enterprises with prudence and an emphasis on sustainability. Although they acknowledge the ingenuity and zeal of student entrepreneurs, they underscore the need of execution proficiency, well-defined business ideas, and sustained dedication as critical investment requirements. Investors expressed significant apprehension on the feasibility of crowdfunding for students, highlighting issues of professionalism, restricted networks, and uncertainty about students' commitment to sustaining their businesses post-graduation. This signifies a disparity between the entrepreneurial ambitions of students and the risk-averse position of investors. A fundamental point of alignment between students and investors is the significance of trust and transparency. Students are cautious of frauds and seek transparency from platforms, whereas investors need thorough due diligence, validity verification, and authenticated campaign history. Both factions concur that credibility is key to effective crowdfunding. Both recognize the significance of social and professional networks. Students perceive these networks as a means to enhance visibility, whereas investors regard them as a measure of legitimacy and campaign momentum. A shared area of interest is the necessity for institutional support and mentorship. Students acknowledge that crowdfunding alone may not sustain their enterprises, while investors affirm this by highlighting the necessity of structured guidance. Universities, incubators, and government-sponsored projects may function as middlemen that bolster the legitimacy of student entrepreneurs, offer mentorship, and cultivate investor confidence. This indicates a collaborative framework in which crowdfunding serves as an integral component of a larger support ecosystem. Cultural and societal attitudes pose an additional

challenge. Students are concerned that crowdfunding would be viewed as soliciting, indicative of a wider cultural mistrust regarding alternative finance options. Investors indirectly endorse this issue by demanding professional conduct and sector-specific attention. Awareness campaigns, success narratives, and prominent endorsements could facilitate the normalization of crowdfunding and reframe it as a credible entrepreneurial instrument rather than a measure of desperation. Ultimately, both factions emphasize sustainability and strategic foresight. Students are concerned that crowdfunding may not provide adequate support beyond initial capital, whereas investors need definitive exit strategies and quantifiable profits. This underscores the necessity for hybrid financing methods that integrate crowdsourcing with mentorship, equity, or institutional finance, guaranteeing that student start-ups are not only initiated but also expanded. In conclusion, the discourse illustrates that although undergraduate students are motivated by enthusiasm and necessity, investors emphasize sustainability, trustworthiness, and organization. Addressing this disparity necessitates cultivating trust, enhancing digital competencies, securing institutional backing, and legitimizing crowdfunding as a viable financing alternative. Addressing these difficulties could enable crowdfunding to become a formidable instrument for empowering student entrepreneurs and promoting innovation in Bangladesh.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the possibility of crowdfunding supporting students in Bangladesh to establish businesses. This is not a well researched topic in Bangladesh or the world. The findings indicate that an increasing number of students want to become entrepreneurs in order to become self-sufficient and innovative, but financial issues continue to put them in their path. Crowdfunding appears to be an excellent alternative, yet it will only be successful in the extent to which they are technologically and business savvy, whom they are connected with, and what they believe the people in the society would regard them. Investors will feel more confident about student projects when they portray a trustworthy team, the business plan is strong, the crowdfunding sites are active, and the business is capable of continuing its operations. This indicates that we require a favorable atmosphere to student businesses that provides money, skills, mentors, and school or company support.

Meanwhile, there are certain limitations of the research. The data was also limited to single region in Bangladesh and the sample was small thus the findings might not be applicable to other locations. Besides, the qualitative approach is effective in the depth of understanding but it fails to provide broad statistical patterns. Nevertheless, the study is a good place to begin with to understand the concept of crowdfunding in student business, particularly in developing nations.

Universities can also include courses about crowdfunding and business finance as a way of letting students find alternative means of raising funds. Investors can take more confident business decisions by having clear and trustworthy crowdfunding sites, and posting success stories. The policymakers and investors ought to support the hybrid finance approaches which combine crowdfunding with coaching and incubation to provide the students with money and long-term support.

In future research, more people in various locations in Bangladesh and other nations should be studied to enable the researchers to make comparisons of various cultures and policies. The longitudinal and quantitative methods might help understand the impact of crowdfunding on the long-term growth and sustainability of student-based start-ups. This would not only render the findings more applicable

to many but also demonstrate that the idea of crowdfunding can be used to make young people more innovative and active in the global economy.

6. Recommendations:

To maximize the potential of crowdfunding for student entrepreneurship in Bangladesh, several actions are necessary.

1. **Training students in digital marketing**, persuasive storytelling, and campaign management equips them with essential tools to design impactful, engaging crowdfunding projects successfully.
2. **Encouraging students to mobilize family**, friends, and social connections boosts campaign visibility, builds trust quickly, and ensures stronger initial fundraising momentum.
3. **Entrenching crowdfunding education** into entrepreneurship courses helps students understand platforms, strategies, risks, and opportunities, preparing them for practical fundraising challenges.
4. **University incubation hubs offering mentorship**, resources, and networking empower students to refine ideas, attract backers, and develop sustainable entrepreneurial ventures.
5. **Provide institutional endorsement** through certificates, badges, or letters assures backers of quality and authenticity, building legitimacy, credibility, and long-term investor trust.
6. **Improve crowdfunding platform transparency** clear fees, timelines, and user-friendly design reduce confusion, improve trust, enhance participation, and ensure smoother crowdfunding experiences.
7. **Adopt strict verification** like ID checks, prototypes, and milestone-based releases confirm authenticity, reduce fraud risks, and increase backer trust in student projects.
8. **Showcasing student success stories** through events, media, and case studies inspires peers, provides practical learning, and fosters a strong entrepreneurial culture.
9. **Develop a supportive regulatory framework** that reforms clear regulations on taxes, ownership, and disputes safeguard stakeholders, encourage participation, reduce risks, and build confidence in student crowdfunding ecosystems.
10. **Blending crowdfunding** with seed funding, grants, and mentorship ensures continuity, scales ventures effectively, and strengthens long-term sustainability of student startups.

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Appendix-1

Guide for Undergraduate Students Interview

Empowering Future Entrepreneurs: Crowdfunding as a sustainable tool for undergraduate students' start-ups in Bangladesh.

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study aims to explore the potential of crowdfunding as a sustainable funding tool for empowering undergraduate students in Bangladesh to launch start-ups. Your insights will help us understand the feasibility and challenges of crowdfunding in this context.

Respondents' information

Name:

Address:

Questionnaire:

1. What motivates you to consider starting a business while you are still in university?
2. What challenges do you face when trying to fund your new business idea?
3. Have you heard of crowdfunding as a funding model? If so, what are your perceptions of it?
4. What factors would make you trust a crowdfunding platform to support your start-up?
5. What do you think are the key benefits and challenges of using crowdfunding to launch your business in Bangladesh?

Guide for Investor Interview

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study aims to explore the potential of crowdfunding as a sustainable funding tool for empowering undergraduate students in Bangladesh to launch start-ups. Your insights will help us understand the feasibility and challenges of crowdfunding in this context.

Respondents' information

Name:

Address:

Questionnaire:

1. What do you look for in a start-up when deciding whether to invest, especially in student-led ventures?

2. Do you believe crowdfunding can be an effective way to fund student-led start-ups in Bangladesh? Why or why not?
3. What factors would make you more willing to invest in a crowdfunding campaign supporting a student start-up?
4. What challenges do you think student entrepreneurs in Bangladesh face when attempting to raise funds through crowdfunding?
5. How can crowdfunding platforms help improve the confidence of investors in student start-ups?

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Interdiscursivity in Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Birthday Tributes on X

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the interdiscursive strategies employed in Bola Ahmed Tinubu's birthday tributes on X, focusing on how they blend diverse discourses to construct political legitimacy and manage public perception in Nigeria's digital political landscape. Utilising Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analysed ten purposively sampled tributes from Tinubu's verified X account, @officialABAT tweeted within the first half of Tinubu's presidency. The tributes were categorised into four thematic groups according to their dominant discourses, with each text examined at the textual, discursive, and social practice levels. Theme 1 consists of four texts, while Themes 2, 3, and 4 comprise two texts each. The analysis identified seven dominant interwoven discourses —nationalist, heroic, political leadership, relational, human rights, literary, and meritocratic — that strategically extol the virtues of the subjects of the analysed tributes while simultaneously reinforcing Tinubu's authority and credibility. The study contributes to scholarship on political communication by identifying tributes as a distinct genre through which leaders reproduce dominant ideologies, naturalise authority, and shape collective memory.

KEYWORDS

Authority, Discourse, Interdiscursivity, Ideology, Tribute

1. Introduction

In contemporary political communication, social media platforms have become pivotal arenas for the dissemination of ideologies and the performance of political identities. Among these platforms, X (formerly Twitter) has emerged as a strategic space where political actors blend various discourses to construct persuasive narratives. The concept of interdiscursivity, which refers to the intermingling of distinct discourses within a single communicative event, offers a valuable lens for analysing how political figures negotiate power, legitimacy, and public appeal (Fairclough, 1992; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria's president, exemplifies this practice in his birthday tributes on X, where economic, nationalistic, religious, and developmental discourses often coalesce.

However, despite the increasing scholarly attention to political discourse on social media, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how Nigerian political elites, particularly the presidency, strategically utilise interdiscursivity to shape public perception and legitimise authority in digital spaces. While several studies have explored the rhetorical devices and ideological structures in political communication (Adetunji, 2006; Opeibi, 2019; Onyegbu, 2024; Abolarin-Egbebiola & Dada, 2025, etc.), few have specifically examined the nuanced layering of discourses within birthday tributes issued on



platforms like X by Tinubu's presidency in Nigeria. This gap is particularly significant because presidential discourse on social media is not merely informative; it is performative and ideologically loaded. It is often designed to align national narratives with political agendas. Therefore, Bola Ahmed Tinubu's use of interdiscursivity on X calls for critical study. This is because it reflects broader trends in political legitimisation and governance rhetoric in postcolonial African democracies. Addressing this research gap contributes to a deeper understanding of how language constructs power in digitally mediated presidential communication.

In light of the foregoing, this study aims to interrogate the interdiscursive strategies embedded in Bola Ahmed Tinubu's press releases on X, with a view to uncovering the ideological constructs they propagate. Specifically, the first objective is to identify and categorise the different discourses interwoven within selected press releases. The second objective is to critically examine how these interdiscursive elements function to legitimise political authority, manage public perception, and reinforce dominant ideological positions. Through these objectives, the study contributes to the broader field of Critical Discourse Analysis by highlighting the role of interdiscursivity in shaping presidential communication in Nigeria's digital political landscape.

Furthermore, the justification for this study lies in the increasing centrality of social media as a platform for official political communication and the relative paucity of discourse-analytical research that interrogates the strategic layering of discourses within such spaces in the Nigerian context. As presidents and other high-ranking officials now bypass traditional media to engage the public directly, platforms like X have evolved into arenas where language is carefully curated to project authority, manage crisis narratives, and construct political legitimacy (KhosraviNik, 2017; Ekström & Johansson, 2019). Nevertheless, scholarly attention to how interdiscursivity functions within presidential communication in Nigeria remains limited. Thus, this study is timely and necessary, as it bridges a critical gap at the intersection of political discourse, digital communication, and ideological analysis. By focusing on Bola Ahmed Tinubu's press releases, the research not only contributes to the theoretical advancement of Critical Discourse Analysis but also enhances our understanding of how Nigerian political elites navigate identity, power, and persuasion through interdiscursive practices. Moreover, it provides empirical insight into how discourse is mobilized to appeal to diverse publics in a linguistically and ideologically heterogeneous society — thereby enriching academic literature and informing media literacy, political communication strategies, and civic engagement in contemporary Nigeria.

This study contributes to scholarship on political discourse by foregrounding presidential tributes as a distinct and underexplored genre within Critical Discourse Studies. While research on Nigerian political communication has largely focused on campaign rhetoric, policy speeches, and protest discourse, this work demonstrates that ceremonial and commemorative texts also function as powerful tools of ideological construction and political legitimisation. It reveals how interdiscursive hybridity operates in birthday tributes, showing how multiple discourses are strategically woven together to reinforce President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's credibility. The findings shed light on Nigerian political culture by showing how tributes are crafted to appeal to diverse constituencies, thereby projecting inclusivity. They reiterate how ceremonial discourse reproduces nationalist, democratic, and cultural hegemonies. In doing so, the study deepens debates on the nexus of discourse, ideology, and power in governance. It also demonstrates that tributes are not merely commemorative but strategic

political acts. Methodologically, it expands the reach of Critical Discourse Analysis by applying it to non-confrontational and celebratory genres, thereby enriching the study of political texts.

2. Literature Review

The concept of interdiscursivity originates from Bakhtin's (1981) theorisation of dialogism and heteroglossia, which posit that texts are inherently dialogic, constantly engaging with multiple voices and discourses. Bakhtin's later work (1986) underscores heteroglossia as the co-existence of social languages within utterances, producing a "hybridisation" of discourses. Kristeva (1980) extended this perspective through her notions of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, emphasising the ways texts simultaneously draw upon and transform existing discourses. Building on these foundations, Fairclough (1992) situated interdiscursivity within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), where it refers to the mixing of genres, registers, and discourses within a text to reflect social practices and power relations. Importantly, Fairclough distinguishes interdiscursivity from intertextuality: while intertextuality involves surface-level textual borrowing, interdiscursivity points to deeper discursive conventions and ideological structures.

More recent scholarship has highlighted interdiscursivity as a central feature of political communication, demonstrating how leaders strategically blend discourses to construct legitimacy and appeal to heterogeneous audiences. Cap (2017), for instance, examined European political speeches and showed how politicians interwove security, economic, and cultural discourses to frame immigration policies. His CDA analysis identified interdiscursive strategies such as metaphor and deixis, which aligned nationalistic rhetoric with transnational policy frameworks. In a related study, Oddo (2018) explored U.S. political debates, showing how interdiscursivity enabled the fusion of deliberative and populist discourses, thereby appealing simultaneously to elite stakeholders and grassroots voters. Together, these studies establish the value of interdiscursivity as a tool for analysing political rhetoric across diverse contexts, consistently highlighting how discourses are combined to manage legitimacy, identity, and ideological conflict. However, while such research has examined interdiscursivity in various political settings, little attention has been paid to the intertextual strategies through which political leaders explicitly draw on and reframe prior texts. In particular, no study has investigated how Bola Ahmed Tinubu employs intertextuality in his birthday tributes to some distinguished Nigerians on X to construct authority and engage Nigeria's diverse digital audience. This study therefore addresses this gap by focusing on the intertextual dimensions of Tinubu's political communication.

3. Theoretical Framework

Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, which integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, provides the analytical lens for this study. At the textual level, the tributes are examined for explicit and implicit intertextual references, such as borrowings from constitutional discourse, appeals to cultural and religious registers, or echoes of global political rhetoric. This helps in identifying and categorising the different discourses interwoven within the texts.

At the level of discursive practice, the focus is on how these tributes are produced, distributed, and consumed within Nigeria's political communication landscape. This involves interrogating how interdiscursive elements are strategically selected and combined to construct messages that appeal to different audiences. In particular, attention is given to how intertextual borrowings from popular

slogans, legal formulations, or international diplomatic language are mobilised to manage public perception and build legitimacy for presidential decisions.

Finally, at the level of social practice, the analysis moves beyond the texts to consider how these intertextual strategies reinforce or contest broader ideological positions. Here, the emphasis is on how Tinubu's birthday tributes draw upon wider societal discourses, such as neoliberal economic policies, democratic governance ideals, or national unity narratives, among others to sustain dominant power structures. This dimension is crucial in showing how intertextuality functions as a tool of ideological reproduction, enabling the presidency to both legitimise political authority and also naturalise specific worldviews as common sense within Nigeria's socio-political context.

4. Methodology

This qualitative study uses CDA to analyse ten purposively sampled birthday tributes from Tinubu's verified X account (@officialABAT), tweeted within his first two years as president (2023–2025). The timeframe captures efforts to consolidate authority. Tributes were selected for interdiscursive elements, ensuring they reflect the presidency's official voice.

5. Data Analysis

The tributes are categorised into four thematic groups according to their dominant discourses, with each text examined at the textual, discursive, and social practice levels. Theme 1 consists of four texts, while Themes 2, 3, and 4 comprise two texts each, as presented below:

Theme 1: Political Leadership and Nationalism

Text 1: Vice – President Kashim Ibrahim

Dear Kashim,

As you mark your 57th year, I take a moment to reflect on the journey we have undertaken together in the service of our great. Your story, from the classrooms of the University of Maiduguri to the highest echelons of leadership, unwavering commitment, and unparalleled wisdom.

Your courage, especially during those trying years in Borno State, has left an indelible mark. It's not just your tenacity in the face of adversity that stands out, but the intellectual prowess and innovative spirit you bring to every challenge.

I'm not just proud to have you as our Vice President; I am honoured to count you as a friend. May the years ahead continue to be filled with the same grace, wisdom, and strength you have shown over the decades.

Happy 57th, Kashim. Here's too many more years of shared success and collaboration.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on September 2, 2023)

The text has eulogistic expressions such as “unwavering commitment” and “intellectual prowess” to construct an elevated representation of Shettima. Metaphorical formulations such as “indelible mark” portray Shettima's legacy as enduring. At the level of discursive practice, the text is directed at multiple audiences, including Nigerians at large, political supporters, and Shettima himself. It interweaves nationalist discourse, as reflected in the use of expressions, such as “our great Nigeria”, heroic discourse, with words such as “courage”, political leadership discourse, with the use of the phrase “highest echelons” among others, and relational discourse, with Tinubu referring to the subject as “friend” to cultivate national pride and legitimise his administration. Within its socio-political context, particularly in the aftermath of the 2023 elections, the text consolidates political legitimacy by foregrounding unity between the southern Tinubu (as President) and the northern Shettima (as Vice –

President), thereby mitigating regional tensions and reinforcing nationalist as well as meritocratic ideologies.

Text 2: Kadir Obafemi Hamzat

As Dr. Kadir Obafemi Hamzat celebrates his 60th birthday, it is an occasion that brings both deep pride and heartfelt reflection. I have heard the distinct privilege of knowing Dr. Hamzat for many years, not just as a colleague in the public service but as a trusted friend whose contributions to the development of Lagos State and Nigeria are nothing short of extraordinary. In 2005, recognising his exceptional talent and unwavering commitment to excellence, I brought Femi back home to serve in my cabinet during my tenure as the Governor of Lagos State. From that moment, it was clear that he possessed a rare combination of technical acumen, visionary leadership, and an unyielding dedication to the progress of our people. His role in shaping the future of Lagos State has been pivotal. With a deep understanding of governance and an innovative approach to problem-solving, Femi has been instrumental in driving the socio-economic transformation of the state.

His contributions have not only strengthened the infrastructure and governance of Lagos State but have also set new standards for public service across the nation.

Beyond his professional achievements, Femi is a man of profound integrity and compassion. His commitment to the welfare of the people, his humility in leadership, and his ability to inspire others are qualities that have made him a cherished figure both in government and among the people he serves,

As we celebrate this significant milestone in Femi's life, I extend my deepest congratulations and warmest wishes. His 60th is not just a celebration of personal journey but a testament to the enduring impact he has made on Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole.

On behalf of a grateful nation, I wish Dr. Hamzat continued strength, good health and fulfilment in the years to come.

May his legacy of service and leadership continue to inspire generations.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on September 18, 2024)

In this text, Tinubu uses complimentary terms such as “exceptional talent” and “visionary leadership” to construct a highly valorised image of Hamzat. He also uses the pronoun “I” to position himself as a political gatekeeper and arbiter of legitimacy, and the inclusive “we” to foster collective identification. At the level of discursive practice, the message addresses Lagosians, Nigerians more broadly, and political supporters, thereby reinforcing Tinubu's political legacy. It blends nationalist discourse as reflected in the use of “grateful nation”, heroic discourse, as in “profound integrity”, political leadership discourse, as shown in the use of “new standards”, relational discourse, with the use of “trusted friend”, and meritocratic discourse to legitimise the subject and bolster the credibility of his administration. Situated within its broader socio-political context, the tribute legitimises Tinubu's governance legacy in Lagos, thereby consolidating his continuous influence there.

Text 3: Former President Muhammadu Buhari

On behalf of the government and people of Nigeria, I extend my warmest congratulations and best wishes to you on your 82nd birthday.

As you celebrate this remarkable milestone in Daura, we reflect on your years of dedicated service and leadership, which have significantly shaped the course of our nation.

Your steadfast commitment to Nigeria's advancement and unity inspires many, and your enduring legacy continues to guide our nation's journey towards prosperity and stability.

Your doggedness and resilience in contesting presidential elections in 2003, 2007, and 2011 before winning in 2015 and 2019 also inspires us never to give up.

I will continue to build on the infrastructure legacy you bequeathed to our nation as the leader of our country's first All Progressives Congress (APC) administration.

On this special day, may you be surrounded by the love of your family and friends and continue to enjoy good health, happiness and fulfilment in all your endeavours, now and in the future. Happy birthday and thank you for your service to Nigeria.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on December 17, 2024)

The tribute contains formal expressions such as “dedicated service” and “enduring legacy” to compliment Buhari. Metaphorical formulations such as “shaped the course” depict Buhari as a pathfinder whose contributions are framed as historically consequential. At the level of discursive practice, the message is directed towards Nigerians at large, members and supporters of the APC, as well as Buhari himself, thereby reinforcing party cohesion and projecting continuity. The discourse interweaves nationalist elements, as reflected in the use of “advancement and unity”, heroic characterisations, with the use of “doggedness”, political community discourses, and resilience narratives to legitimise Buhari’s role within the party and the nation. Within the broader socio-political context, the text functions as a social practice that consolidates APC unity and enhances Tinubu’s legitimacy by aligning his administration with Buhari’s legacy, and simultaneously appealing to northern political bases.

Text 4: Former President Oluseun Aremu Obasanjo

Today, as former President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo turns 88, I pray a special tribute to an extraordinary leader and statesman who has made enormous contributions to Nigeria’s development and whose life for the past six decades is woven deeply into the fabric of Nigeria’s history.

Providence has consistently thrust General Obasanjo to the forefront at critical junctures in Nigeria’s history.

He served the country meritoriously in the Nigerian Army. As a colonel, fate beckoned on him while commanding the Third Marine Division to receive the instrument of surrender from Colonel Philip Effiong, the Biafran Army Commander, signalling the end of Nigeria’s 30 months civil war.

General Obasanjo also made history as the military leader who took over the reins of power, following General Murtala Muhammed’s death in 1976. He completed the administration’s transition programme, and successfully handed power to a civilian regime in 1979.

Twenty years later, in 1999, he emerged as civilian president, freed from prison a year earlier, to herald the rebirth of another democratic dispensation, which recently clocked 25 years, and still counting.

During the two eras, General Obasanjo implemented critical policies and reforms, and made important decisions that profoundly impacted the lives of many Nigerians. As the Head – of – State, he consistently demonstrated a selfless commitment to national unity, peace, and progress.

Out of office, only a few will deny that the former president continues to wield considerable influence among the political elite at home, and well-grounded abroad, where he is an ambassador of global peace and troubleshooter. His tireless effort in conflict resolution, advocacy for good governance, and dedication to Pan – Africanism through institutions like African Union and the United Nations are testaments to his statesmanship.

Sometimes controversial, former President Obasanjo’s regularly interventions in national affairs have helped shaped public policies, and acted as a check on leadership.

I thank General Obasanjo for his onerous contributions to Nigeria. I commend him for his statesmanship and leadership.

At 88, the former President is still gaining strength. I pray that God Almighty will grant him the grace to live for more years so that the nation and Africa can continue to tap from his wealth of experience.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on March 5, 2025)

Reverential words and phrases such as “extraordinary leader” and “statesman” are used to construct an elevated portrayal of Obasanjo, while references to “providence” and “fate” imbue the representation with historical weight and inevitability. The deployment of personal pronouns, particularly “I” and “we,” functions to balance Tinubu’s individual perspective with a collective national voice, thereby reinforcing both personal credibility and shared identity. At the level of discursive practice, the message is oriented towards multiple audiences, including Nigerians, political elites, and international observers, with an emphasis on historical continuity and legitimacy. The discourse intertwines historical narratives, patriotic appeals, military ethos, and statesmanlike characterisations to situate Obasanjo within a broader trajectory of national leadership. Within its socio-political context, the text operates as a social practice that aligns Tinubu with democratic continuity, strategically countering narratives of political rivalry while simultaneously reinforcing nationalist sentiment and elitist leadership ideologies, and obscuring regional fault lines in the Nigerian polity.

Theme 2: Cultural and Literary Legacy

Text 5: Wole Soyinka

I am pleased to join admirers around the world in celebrating the 90th birthday of Nigeria’s iconic son and the world – renowned Professor Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde, famously known as Wole Soyinka.

Tomorrow, July 13th, will be the climax of the series of local and international activities held in his honour. To underscore the literary giant’s global relevance, a symposium and a poetry reading were held in Rabat, Morocco on 9 July. The event was organised by the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Pan African Writers Association (PAWA).

Professor Wole Soyinka, the first African to win the Nobel Literature Prize in 1986, deserves all the accolades as he marks the milestone of 90 years on earth. Having beaten prostate cancer, this milestone is a living testament to his ruggedness as a person and the significance of his person.

It is fitting we celebrate this national treasure while he is still with us.

I am, accordingly, delighted to have the honour to announce the decision of the Federal Government to rename the National Theatre in Iganmu, Surulere, as The Wole Soyinka Centre for Culture and the Creative Arts.

We do not only celebrate Soyinka’s remarkable literary achievements but also his unwavering dedication to the values of human dignity and justice.

When he turned 80, I struggle to find words to encapsulate his achievements because they were simply too vast. Since then, he has added to his corpus with his series of interventions, published in many volumes.

Professor Soyinka is a colossus, a true Renaissance Man, blessed with innumerable talents. He is a playwright, actor, poet, human right activist and political activist, composer, and singer.

He is a giant bestriding not just literary world but our nation, Africa, and the world.

He remains the shining light of our nation, the gadfly that pokes our national soul, decrying tyranny and oppression, urging us to become better as a nation.

He is one Nigerian whose influence transcends the Nigerian space and who inspires people around the world. Since his youth, he has been a vocal critic of oppression and injustice whenever it exists, from apartheid in South Africa to racism in the United States. Soyinka always speaks truth to power.

Beginning from his 20s, he took personal risks for the sake of our nation. His courage was evident when he attempted to broker peace as at the start of the civil war in 1967. Detained for two years for his bravery, he narrated his experience in his prison memoir, “The Man Died”

Despite deportation and solitary confinement, his resolve to speak truth to power and fight for the marginalised was further strengthened. His early writing, such as “The Lion and the Jewel”,

“Death and the King Horseman”, not only testifies to his mastery of language and innovative storytelling but also his unflinching commitment to enthroning a fair and just society.

Our paths crossed during our just struggle for the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. When faced with a trial in absentia and death sentence by the military regime at home, he galvanises opposition in exile through NALICON and NADECO. His global stature made him the face of our struggle to validate June 12 and restore democracy in Nigeria.

Today, I join the world to celebrate his profound influence on generations of writers, scholars, and activists who have inspired by his work. I celebrate him for giving us the spark to fight and confront military dictators in our country.

I celebrate him for his enduring spirit and for teaching us that literature and drama can be used as a powerful tool to challenge the status quo.

I wish Professor Soyinka an incredibly happy 90th birthday.

May he continue in good health to find creative fulfilment in the next decade leading up to his centennial.

May he continue to inspire us all to build a nation where people are free from oppression and our teaming youths can live up to their dreams without being a wasted generation.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on July 12, 2024)

The tribute lauds Wole Soyinka as a “literary giant” and “national treasure”, among others. The pronouns “I” and “we” used strategically align Tinubu with Soyinka’s cultural and intellectual legacy. Metaphorical designations including “gadfly” and “colossus” further position Soyinka as a transformative figure whose impact transcends literature and extends into broader sociopolitical spheres. At the level of discursive practice, the message is directed towards multiple audiences—Nigerians, global literary communities, and domestic political supporters—thereby reinforcing Tinubu’s image as a patron of culture and custodian of national heritage. The discourse blends nationalist appeals, heroic narratives, human rights commitments, political authority, and literary prestige to strengthen both individual and institutional legitimacy. Within its wider socio-political context, the act of renaming the National Theatre operates as a social practice that consolidates Tinubu’s authority by linking his administration with cultural ideals.

Text 6: Mr. Frank Abiodun Aig-imoukhuede

Today, I celebrate the remarkable life of Mr. Frank Abiodun Aig – Imoukhuede, OON, a national treasure and cultural icon, as he marks his 90th birthday.

Celebrating 90 years today, Mr. Aig – Imoukhuede’s remarkable journey highlights the impactful combination of dedication, creativity, and service to his country. As the first Nigerian university graduate to join the Daily Express, he broke new ground in journalism. His subsequent roles, including Nigeria’s first Cultural Officer and Director of the National Council for Arts and Culture, have significantly enriched our cultural and literary landscape, inspiring future generations to contribute to our heritage.

Through iconic achievements, such as organising FESTAC 1977, and penning literary classics like *Pidgin Stew* and *Sufferhead*, he has preserved the essence of the Nigerian and African experience for generations to come. Mr. Imoukhuede’s work bridges cultural gaps, elevate our heritage, and inspire us to embrace our collective identity with pride.

As we honour his immense contributions, I urge younger generations to draw inspiration from his legacy of excellence, innovation, and patriotism.

Happy 90th Birthday, Mr. Frank Abiodun Aig – Imoukhuede! May your days ahead be filled with health, joy, and fulfilment! Your impacts continue to resonate for decades to come.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on January 8, 2025)

Tinubu uses celebratory expressions such as “national treasure” and “cultural icon” to construct an elevated representation of Aig-Imoukhuede. He uses “I” and “we” to cultivate collective identification

and foster national pride in the tribute. Metaphorical formulations such as “...broke new ground” frame Aig-Imoukhuede’s contributions as innovative and transformative, situating him within a discourse of cultural progress. At the level of discursive practice, the message is directed towards cultural communities, Nigerians more broadly, and particularly the youth, thereby positioning heritage as both a source of pride and a foundation for future continuity. The discourse incorporates cultural narratives, professional achievement, patriotic appeals, political authority, and generational discourses to strengthen legitimacy and broaden its resonance across diverse audiences. Within its socio-political context, the text functions as a social practice that aligns Tinubu with Nigeria’s cultural golden age, thereby enhancing his political legitimacy while reinforcing patriotism and cultural continuity. In doing so, it appeals particularly to nostalgic audiences who valorise heritage as a marker of collective identity and national cohesion.

Theme 3: Traditional and Religious Authority

Text 7: Oba Gbadebo

Your Royal Majesty,

Please accept my warm felicitations on the auspicious occasion of your 80th birthday, which takes place on September 14, 2023.

I share in the joy of so many Nigerians in celebrating another milestone with you and your family, the Council of Chiefs, sons and daughters of Egba-land, as well as friends and associates from the public and private sectors.

Your Royal Majesty’s track record of service to our nation has been inspiring, exemplary, and commendable, most notably beginning with your distinguished and meritorious career in the military, which saw you winning many medals.

Since ascending the throne of Your Majesty’s forefathers in 2005, your wisdom and charismatic leadership have brought peace and progress to your domain, and the impact has been felt at both state and national levels.

At 80, Your Royal Majesty, we will continue to cherish and rely on your experience, foresight, and guidance to take Nigeria to greater heights, all while acknowledging your sacrifices and selfless service.

I pray the Almighty God will grant Your Majesty many more years of joy, health and strength to continue serving the country we love.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on September 13, 2023)

Bola Ahmed Tinubu use formal and deferential language such as “wisdom” and “charismatic leadership” to exalt Oba Gbadebo. The use of the honorific “Your Royal Majesty” alongside the inclusive pronoun “we” strategically balances reverence for traditional authority with appeals to collective unity. The ceremonial structuring of the tribute mirrors conventional genres of royal address, thereby embedding the it within established cultural and rhetorical traditions. At the level of discursive practice, the message is oriented towards multiple audiences, including Egba-land, and Nigerians more broadly, in order to reinforce cultural ties and situate himself within a continuum of traditional and national leadership. The tribute entwines royalist, patriotic, military, and political registers to strengthen its appeal and to underscore the symbiosis between cultural heritage and contemporary governance. Within its broader socio-political context, the text functions as a social practice that enhances Tinubu’s legitimacy through the honouring of traditional rulers, while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical and patriotic ideologies that promote unity and stabilise political authority.

Text 8: Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye

Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye exemplifies deep faith, wisdom, and humility, demonstrating a remarkable dedication to the gospel and selfless service. His impactful work continues to inspire millions in Nigeria and beyond. His leadership reflects a purposeful life, rooted in conviction and a steadfast commitment to uplifting others, serving as a powerful model for humanitarian service and spiritual guidance.

As he marks 83rd birthday, I pray for his continued strength, good health, and divine grace to keep guiding and inspiring generations to come.

Happy Birthday, Daddy G.O.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on March 2, 2025)

Tinubu uses faith-based phrases, such as “deep faith” and “divine grace” to celebrate Adeboye on his 83rd birthday. The appellation “Daddy G.O.” introduces an element of familiarity that personalises his authority and fosters intimacy with audiences. The pronoun “I,” juxtaposed with references to his capacity to “inspire millions,” is used to balance personal affirmation with the projection of a wider communal and national influence. At the level of discursive practice, the message addresses multiple audiences—members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Christians across denominational lines, and Nigerians more broadly—thereby leveraging religious capital to enhance legitimacy. The discourse blends religious, humanitarian, and patriotic registers to situate Adeboye as both a spiritual leader and a moral exemplar within the national space. Within its broader socio-political context, the tribute aligns Tinubu with Christian values and moral leadership, thereby strategically countering narratives of bias in Nigeria’s religiously diverse landscape, while simultaneously reinforcing religious and patriotic ideologies that contribute to the legitimisation of political authority.

Theme 4: Personal and Familial Bonds

Text 9: Oluremi Tinubu

My dearest Oluremi,

On this beautiful day, as we celebrate your 64th birthday, my heart is full of gratitude and love for the incredible woman you are. Since we began this journey together, you have been my rock, confidante [sic], greatest supporter, and the love of my life. Every step of the way, you have shown unwavering strength, grace, and love to me, our family, and our beloved nation, Nigeria. You are the heart of our home, the light guiding me through the most challenging days, and the embodiment of kindness and wisdom. Your compassion, generosity, and dedication inspire millions of Nigerians and me, especially our young women who look up to you as their First Lady.

On your special day, I want to take a moment to tell you how truly blessed I feel to walk beside you. Your love sustains me, wisdom guides me, and strength lifts me. I could not ask for a better partner to share triumphs and trials of life.

As you turn 64, I wish you nothing but boundless joy, peace and happiness. May this year unfold with blessings, laughter and cherished moments you so richly deserve. I look forward to all the moments we will create together in the years to come.

With all my love and appreciation, now and always.

Your Bola.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on September 21, 2024)

Tinubu uses emotive terms such as “rock” and “confidante” to construct an intimate yet valorised representation of his wife, Oluremi. The metaphor “...light guiding me” elevates her role to one of moral and inspirational significance. The interplay of the pronouns “I” and “we” in the tribute serves to balance the personal and the collective, projecting both marital intimacy and national pride.

At the level of discursive practice, the message is directed at multiple audiences, including Nigerians at large, women, and political supporters, thereby humanising Tinubu and broadening the affective appeal of his political persona. The tribute incorporates romantic, familial, and patriotic registers, situating Oluremi not only as a partner in private life but also as a symbolic figure within the national imaginary. Within its socio-political context, the text operates as a social practice that counters perceptions of aloofness by reinforcing Tinubu's moral credibility, while simultaneously promoting patriarchal and nationalist ideologies that emphasise family values as foundational to governance and collective identity.

Text 10: Olamilekan Bello

Dear Mr. Olalekan Bello,

On the joyous occasion of your 70th birthday, I write to celebrate an extraordinary gentleman whose life has been a beacon of excellence, integrity, and service.

Your journey over decades is a source of pride not only to your family and close circle but also to our nation. You have demonstrated, time again, that character, dedication, and commitment to uplifting others are the hallmarks of true leadership.

On a personal note, as an in-law and a friend, I have witnessed first-hand, the grace and wisdom with which you navigate life. Your devotion to family, your humility in success, and your steadfastness in adversity are qualities that inspire admiration and respect.

As you mark this milestone, I join your family, friends and well-wishers in praying for continued good health, happiness and peace. May the years ahead even bring greater fulfilment, as you continue to positively impact lives.

Once again, happy 70th Birthday! May you bask in the joy and love of this special day with warm regards.

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on November 28, 2024)

The text contains panegyric terms such as “beacon of excellence” and “integrity” to celebrate Bello. The metaphor “beacon” symbolises moral guidance and exemplary leadership. The strategic use of the pronouns “I” and “our” in the tribute simultaneously creates a sense of intimacy and collective unity, thereby positioning Tinubu both as a personal associate of the subject and as a national leader. At the level of discursive practice, the message is directed towards Bello's immediate circle, Nigerians at large, and political supporters, thereby reinforcing loyalty and consolidating networks of support. The tribute entwines relational, character-based, leadership-oriented, and celebrity registers to enhance Bello's public image. Within its socio-political context, the tribute underscores Tinubu's relational style of leadership, appealing to forms of patronage-based politics, while also promoting ideals of moral leadership and nationalism, albeit in a more implicit and less emphatic manner.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the ten tributes reveals the intertwining of seven primary discourses that collectively construct Tinubu's political and cultural legitimacy. A nationalist discourse frames subjects such as Shettima, Soyinka, Buhari, and Obasanjo as contributors to Nigeria's unity and progress, thereby fostering collective pride and reinforcing a sense of shared national identity (Texts 1, 5, 3, 4). This is complemented by a heroic discourse that elevates individuals as exceptional figures, attributing to them qualities such as courage (for Shettima), resilience (for Buhari), and statesmanship (for Obasanjo), which embed them within narratives of national heroism (Texts 1, 6, 3, 4). Political leadership discourse further underscores governance roles associated with Hamzat, Buhari, and Obasanjo, aligning Tinubu with images of effective leadership and institutional continuity (Texts 2, 3, 4).

In parallel, a relational discourse highlights Tinubu's personal bonds with Shettima, Hamzat, Oluremi, and Bello, serving to humanise his political persona and present his leadership as relationally grounded in Texts 1, 2, 9, and 10. A human rights discourse links Soyinka and Obasanjo with ideals of justice and democracy, thereby enhancing Tinubu's credibility within democratic frames in Texts 2 and 9. Similarly, a literary discourse celebrates the cultural contributions of Soyinka and Aig-Imoukhuede, positioning Tinubu as a patron of national culture and heritage in Texts 5 and 6. A meritocratic discourse, evident in references to Shettima, Hamzat, and Aig-Imoukhuede, foregrounds talent, dedication, and achievement, projecting aspirational values that align with narratives of progress and excellence in Texts 1, 2, and 6.

These dominant strands are reinforced by additional discourses: the royal (Oba Gbadebo) which invokes traditional authority in Text 7, the romantic/familial (Oluremi) which foregrounds intimacy and moral grounding in Text 9, the religious (Adeboye) which invokes Christian values as a source of legitimacy in Text 8, and the resilience discourse (Buhari) which highlights endurance in governance in Text 3. Collectively, these interdiscursive elements construct a multi-dimensional narrative of Tinubu's leadership, embedding him within frameworks of nationalism, morality, cultural patronage, and traditional legitimacy.

The tributes strategically align Tinubu with iconic figures such as Soyinka, Obasanjo, Buhari, and Adeboye, thereby leveraging their symbolic capital to legitimise his authority and embed his image within established reservoirs of national prestige. Institutional acts, such as the renaming of the National Theatre, alongside invocations of shared historical struggles, including the June 12 democratic movement in Text 5 and Lagos governance in Text 2, further consolidate his credibility by situating him within narratives of continuity and transformation.

At the level of public perception management, relational discourses in Texts 1, 2, 9, and 10, and moral discourses in Texts 10 and 8 function to humanise Tinubu, thereby countering perceptions of aloofness and projecting intimacy and integrity. Moreover, the strategic targeting of diverse constituencies constructs an image of inclusivity designed to broaden Tinubu's political reach. Ideologically, the tributes reinforce multiple strands: nationalist discourse cultivates unity (Texts 1, 5, 3, 4); meritocratic framing foregrounds competence and achievement (Texts 1, 2); relational discourse resonates with the logic of patronage politics (Text 10); cultural and religious hegemony elevates Yoruba and Christian values as central to legitimacy (Texts 5, 7, 6, 8); while democratic ideals are reinforced through associations with historical struggles for justice and governance continuity (Texts 5, 4).

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the tributes reveals that they function as far more than ceremonial gestures of honour; rather, they operate as sophisticated sites of discourse that actively construct and reinforce Tinubu's political and cultural legitimacy. Through the interplay of nationalist, heroic, leadership, relational, human rights, literary, and meritocratic discourses, supported by auxiliary strands of religion, royalty, familial intimacy, and resilience, the texts weave a multi-layered narrative of authority and belonging. By aligning Tinubu with iconic figures such as Soyinka, Obasanjo, Buhari, and Adeboye, the tributes strategically leverage symbolic capital, embedding him within reservoirs of national prestige and continuity. Equally, references to shared historical struggles, institutional interventions like the

renaming of the National Theatre, and narratives of democratic resilience and governance continuity further consolidate his credibility, situating him at the nexus of transformation and tradition.

At the level of perception management, the tributes carefully balance the projection of Tinubu as a statesman with the humanisation of his persona through relational and moral discourses that foreground intimacy, integrity, and shared values. This dual strategy not only counters perceptions of aloofness but also extends his appeal across diverse constituencies by incorporating cultural, religious, and moral frames that resonate with different segments of Nigerian society. Ideologically, the texts affirm unity, competence, and achievement while simultaneously reinforcing cultural and religious hegemony, thereby broadening the scope of political legitimation beyond policy and governance into symbolic and affective realms. Taken together, these findings underscore the potency of commemorative discourse in African political contexts, highlighting how ceremonial texts can act as powerful ideological instruments that shape leadership narratives and contribute to the reproduction of political authority.

Future research could extend this study by, thematically, comparing Tinubu's interdiscursive strategies with those of other Nigerian or African political leaders on X to establish whether his style is unique or part of broader regional patterns in political communication. Analysing tributes by past presidents or regional leaders would offer a comparative perspective on how interdiscursivity is mobilised to legitimise authority. Since this study focused on birthday tributes as a distinct genre, further work could examine other genres on X, such as condolence messages, policy announcements, or campaign posts, to determine whether nationalist, heroic, and relational discourses remain consistent or shift according to communicative purpose.

Methodologically, future research could incorporate quantitative approaches like corpus linguistics or sentiment analysis to map interdiscursive patterns across larger datasets. Examining word frequencies, collocations, and audience engagement metrics such as likes, retweets, and comments would help quantify the salience of particular discourses. This would also complement the present qualitative insights by linking discourse strategies with measurable audience reception. Another promising direction is to analyse replies, retweets, or comments on Tinubu's tributes to explore how different audience groups, including supporters, critics, and regional communities, interpret and negotiate these strategies. Such reception-oriented analysis would enrich Fairclough's CDA framework by more explicitly bridging discursive practice with social practice.

Contextually, this study covers the first two years of Tinubu's presidency (2023–2025), a longitudinal analysis spanning his full term could reveal how interdiscursivity responds to shifting political, economic, or social contexts. For instance, nationalist discourses may intensify during national crises, while relational discourses might recede under mounting political pressures, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of digital political communication. Furthermore, while this study centres on X, Nigerian political elites also engage through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Future research could compare interdiscursivity across these platforms to assess whether Tinubu adapts his discursive strategies to platform-specific audiences or maintains consistency, thereby highlighting the influence of platform affordances on political communication.

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