

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION AMONG WOMEN IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF IRENE SALAMI-AGUNLOYE'S MORE THAN DANCING

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Abstract

The expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital communication technologies has transformed the dynamics of collective action, particularly among marginalized groups seeking social and political inclusion. In Nigeria, women increasingly engage digital platforms to challenge systemic gender inequalities and mobilize for representation. This study examines the intersection of artificial intelligence and women's collective action through a critical analysis of Irene Salami-Agunloye's More Than Dancing. The play portrays the political exclusion of women who are relegated to ceremonial roles within the male-dominated political structures and dramatizes their eventual mobilization to demand leadership and representation. Although the play predates contemporary AI developments, it dramatizes patterns of exclusion, resistance, and solidarity that resonate with present-day digital feminist activism. Anchored in feminist theory and collective action theory, the study employs qualitative textual analysis to explore how the play constructs women's political awakening and strategic mobilization. The findings indicate that More Than Dancing anticipates key elements of modern collective action, including network-building, leadership emergence, and resistance to patriarchal power structures. The paper argues that literary texts such as Salami-Agunloye's play can function as conceptual frameworks for interpreting technologically mediated activism. It concludes that integrating AI-driven tools with feminist cultural narratives can enhance women's political participation and collective agency in Nigeria.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, collective action, feminist drama, Nigerian women, digital activism

Introduction

The relationship between technology and social transformation has become increasingly central to contemporary scholarly discourse. The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the modes of social interaction, communication and activism largely driven by advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital communication tools has redefined how individuals and groups organize, mobilise, and advocate for social change enabling new forms of collective action that transcend geographical and institutional barriers (Tufekci, 2017, Eubanks, 2018). For women, particularly in developing societies such as Nigeria, these technological advancements offer new opportunities to confront longstanding structures of exclusion and inequality. Historically, Nigerian women have played active roles in political movements, from pre-colonial resistance to post-independence activism. Women's activism in Nigeria has also been shaped historically, by socio-cultural constraints that limit access to political power, also, their participation which has often been

constrained by patriarchal norms, economic marginalization and institutional biases continue to limit and restrict women's access to leadership and decision-making spaces. Furthermore, despite their numerical strength and active participation in political campaigns, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions (Aina, 2012; Nwankwo, 2018). While women contribute significantly to political campaigns and grassroots mobilisation, they remain underrepresented in formal governance structures.

Literature and drama have served as important sites for interrogating these inequalities. Feminist playwrights in Nigeria have used theatre as a medium to critique social injustice and imagine alternative futures. Irene Salami-Agunloye's *More Than Dancing* (2003) is a notable example, presenting a narrative in which women move from passive political participants to active agents of change. Despite increasing global attention to gender equality, Nigerian women continue to face structural barriers to meaningful political participation. While policies promoting inclusion exist, the practical realities of political engagement often reinforce gender hierarchies. Women are frequently relegated to peripheral roles within political parties, limiting their influence on policy and governance.

However, rise of artificial intelligence and digital technologies, has introduced new possibilities for activism, collective mobilization women's empowerment. Women now use social media platforms, data analytics, algorithmic tools, digital networks to advocate for change, challenge patriarchal systems and AI-driven communication systems now facilitate advocacy, awareness and mobilization of unprecedented scales (Ajayi, 2020). Nigerian women increasingly leverage these tools to challenge gender inequality and demand representation. However, scholarly research has not sufficiently examined how these technological developments intersect with cultural representations of women's resistance. Studies existing on more than *Dancing* primarily focus on marginalisation and empowerment. There is limited attention to how the play's depiction of collective action relates to contemporary digital activism. This gap highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach that connects literary analysis with technological discourse. This study addresses this gap by examining how Salami-Agunloye's play reflects a pattern of collective action that are relevant to AI-driven activism among Nigerian women. Although the play was written before the proliferation of AI technologies, its thematic concerns align closely with contemporary forms of digital activism. This study therefore explores how the representation of collective action in *More Than Dancing* can be understood in relation to AI-enabled feminist mobilisation in Nigeria despite increasing global attention to gender equality, Nigerian women continue to face structural barriers to meaningful political participation. While policies promoting inclusion exist, the practical realities of political engagement often reinforce gender hierarchies. Women are frequently relegated to peripheral roles within political parties, limiting their influence on policy and governance. The rise of artificial intelligence and digital technologies has introduced new possibilities for activism and collective mobilisation offering new tools for organization, advocacy and resistance. Women now utilize social media platforms, data analytics, and digital networks to advocate for change and challenge patriarchal systems. Women are increasingly utilizing these technologies to mobilize collective action and challenge inequality (Ajayi, 2020; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). However, scholarly research has not sufficiently examined

how these technological developments intersect with cultural representations of women's resistance. Existing scholarship has also largely treated feminist literary analysis and digital activism as separate domains. Studies on *More than Dancing* focus primarily on gender representation and political empowerment, with little attention to its relevance in the context of technological activism. Therefore, the problem lies in the absence of an interdisciplinary framework that connects literary representations of women's collective action with contemporary AI-driven activism this study seeks to bridge this gap by demonstrating how the themes of solidarity, resistance and leadership in *More than Dancing* resonate with modern digital feminist movements in Nigeria. There is limited attention to how the play's depiction of collective action relates to contemporary digital activism. This gap highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach that connects literary analysis with technological discourse.

Conceptual Definition

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making and learning (Russell & Norvig,2020).AI systems rely on computational models such as machine learning algorithms and data-driven analytics to process large volumes of information and generate predictive or adaptive outcomes (Russell & Norvig,2021).In the context of the humanities, AI extends beyond its technological meaning into a metaphorical space, symbolizing adaptive knowledge, predictive reasoning and the capacity to recognize existing structures. For this study, AI represents both a technological tool capable of transforming education and economy in Nigeria and a cultural lens for interpreting how women in drama ,like those in *More than Dancing* ,collectively harness intelligence ,creativity and solidarity to challenge oppressive systems .Beyond its technical scope, AI can also be viewed as a socio-technological tool that shapes communication ,governance and social organization particularly by enabling new forms of interaction and participation within digital environments (Eubanks,2018).

Collective Action

Collective action is the coordinated effort of individuals or groups working together to achieve shared goals, particularly in response to common challenges interest or grievances.(Olson,1965). Collection action involves the mobilisation of resources, the formation of group identity and the development of strategies aimed at influencing social, political or economic outcomes. Additionally, Olson says collective action is rooted in cooperation and interdependence often ranging in response to perceived injustices or inequalities (Olson,1965).In contemporary contexts, collective action extends beyond physical gatherings to include digitally mediated forms of engagement where technology facilitates coordination and amplifies collective voices (Tufekci,2017).In feminist discourse, collective action emphasises solidarity among women to resist patriarchy, create new social norms and push for political, economic and educational reforms (Mama,1997).Thus, within *More than Dancing*, collective action is dramatised as women uniting against restrictive cultural practices while simultaneously re-imagining their roles as agents of transformation.

Women In Nigerian Drama

Women in Nigerian drama as a concept deals with the representation of female characters within dramatic texts and the contributions of women playwrights to the evolution of Nigerian theatre. Women in Nigerian drama involves the exploration of women's roles, identities and agency as portrayed in dramatic narratives as well as the ways in which these representations challenge or reinforce societal norms whereby Nigerian drama ,historically positioned women as both victims of cultural marginalisation and as powerful agents of change (Adelugba & Obafemi,2004).Nigerian playwrights such Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme and Irene Salami-Agunloye use the stage to interrogate gendered hierarchies while presenting women as collaborative forces who negotiate tradition and modernity. Nigerian feminist drama, in particular foregrounds issues such as gender inequality, political exclusion and social justice, presenting women as active participants in processes of resistance and transformation (Onwueme, 1995).Through characterisation dialogue and plot development, drama becomes a critical medium for interrogating patriarchal structures and advocating women's empowerment. Therefore, in this study, the women in *More than Dancing* are not merely characters but symbolic representations of Nigeria's broader struggle for gender equity, economic participation and educational inclusion.

Education and Economy in Nigeria

The economy and education in Nigeria are conceptually interconnected systems that influence national development and social mobility. Education refers to the formal and informal processes of acquiring knowledge, skills, values and competences necessary for personal and societal advancement. Economy on the other hand, encompasses the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services within the country .Education, conceptually, functions as a key driver of economic growth by developing human capital, enhancing productivity and fostering innovation. Education in Nigeria is both a means of individual empowerment and a driver of national development. However, systemic inequalities, gender bias and inadequate policies often exclude women from full participation (Ajayi & Adeniji,2021).Furthermore, Todaro and Smith opine that in Nigeria, however, challenges such as inadequate funding ,unequal access and unemployment affect the extent to which education contributes effectively to economic development. (Todaro & Smith).

Review of Literature

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

The political participation of women in Nigeria remains constrained by socio-cultural norms and institutional barriers. Aina (2012) notes that patriarchal ideologies continue to define political leadership as a male domain. Similarly, Nwankwo (2018) argues that structural inequalities limit women's access to political power despite policy interventions

Feminist Perspective and Women's Agency in African Drama

Scholarly engagements with feminist theory have emphasized the structural nature of gender inequality and the need to interrogate systems that marginalise women. Early feminist thought as articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft foregrounded the question of women's seclusion from education and civil life thereby

establishing a foundation for later critiques of gender disparity .Simone de Beauvoir later expanded the foundation by conceptualizing Womanhood as a social construct shaped by patriarchal norms rather than biological determinism .In the African context, Obioma Nnaemeka, propounds nego-feminism as a culturally grounded framework that provides negotiation, complementarity and pragmatic resistance over confrontation (Nnaemeka, 2004). Feminist criticism has been instrumental in examining how theatrical text represents women's struggles and agency in the drama sector. Onwueme is one of the scholars who highlight that African women playwrights utilize drama as a medium for articulating resistance against patriarchal domination and for envisaging alternative social realities (Onwueme, 1995).These works often depict women transitioning from positions of marginalization to active participation in socio-political transformation. However, while existing studies have extensively analysed gender representation in African drama, limited attention has been paid to how such representations intersect with emerging digital technologies and new modes of activism

Collective Action and Social Mobilisation

Collective action as a concept has been widely explored in sociological and political theory as a framework for understanding how individuals organize to pursue shared goals. A foundational perspective is provided by Mancur Olson, a key proponent of this theory who argues that individuals are often reluctant to contribute to collective efforts due to the free-rider problem, where benefits can be obtained without active participation (Olson, 1965).This insight challenges the assumption that shared interests automatically lead to collective mobilisation. Recent studies have expanded this perspective by emphasizing the social and political dimensions of collective action .Charles Tilly underscores the role of political opportunity structures and sustained interactions in shaping social movements while Sydney Tarrow highlights the importance of collective identity ,framing processes and cycles of protest in mobilisation (Tarrow, 2011).These approaches shift the focus from individual rationality to the broader dynamics of group formation and action. An argument has been put forward by Zaynep Tufekci that social media platforms and networks have transformed the nature of mobilisation by lowering barriers to participation and enabling rapid coordination across large populations (Tufekci,2017).Scholars such as Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) in the Nigeria context have observed that digital platforms have become critical tools for enhancing women's political participation and amplifying marginalised voices

The impact of digital technologies on collective action however has been examined in more recent studies. Zaynep Tufekci argues that social media platforms and digital networks have transformed the nature of mobilisation by lowering barriers to participation and enabling rapid coordination across large populations (Tufekci, 2017).Scholars such as Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) in the Nigerian context observe that digital platforms have become critical tools for enhancing women's political participation and amplifying marginalized voices. In spite of these developments, a gap still remain in studies regarding the intersection of collective action, gender and artistic representation. Specifically, there is limited research on how dramatic texts not only depict collective mobilisation but also anticipate or reflect contemporary forms of digitally mediated activism

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on two theories namely Feminist theory and Collective Action Theory.

• Feminist Theory

This theory evolved through the contributions of several scholars and activists across different historical periods. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the early foundational thinkers whose work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) argued for women's educational and social equality. The twentieth century brought scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir who expanded the feminist discourse by examining how society constructs women as "the Other" in *The Second Sex* (1949). This theory has been contemporary shaped by scholars like Bell Hooks who emphasises the intersection of gender, race and class in understanding women's oppression (Hooks, 2000). Obioma Nnaemeka within the African context introduced the concept *negro-feminism* which highlights negotiation, complementarity and cultural specificity in African women's struggles (Nnaemeka, 2004). Feminist theory critically examines the structures and ideologies that sustain gender-based inequalities in the society. This theory informs that the oppression of women is not a natural phenomenon but a socially constructed condition reinforced by cultural practices, political systems and economic arrangements (Hooks, 2000).

Feminist theory is relevant to this study because *More than Dancing* centers on the marginalisation and eventual empowerment of women within a patriarchal political system. Highlights of the play include how women are initially confined to symbolic roles but later resist these limitations through collective action. In addition, feminist theory provides a critical lens for understanding how contemporary technologies including AI can either reinforce or challenge gender inequalities. Therefore, the choice of this theory makes it highly suitable for linking the play's themes to modern digital activism.

Collective Action Theory

This theory is mostly associated with Mancur Olson in his seminal work *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) which laid the intellectual foundation for understanding how groups organise to pursue shared interests. In this theory, Olson challenged the assumption that individuals will naturally act in pursuit of collective goals, arguing instead that rational individuals often prioritise personal benefit over group outcomes, thereby creating obstacles to collective mobilisation (Olson, 1965). As a result of Olson's foundational work, the theory was further developed by scholars such as Charles Tilly and Zeynep Tufekci. Tufekci has examined how digital technologies and social media platforms transform collective action enabling rapid coordination and large-scale participation without traditional hierarchical structures (Tufekci, 2017).

Collective action theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a comprehensive framework for analysing how women in *More than Dancing* organize to challenge their marginalisation. Additionally, the application of collective action theory allows the study to connect the events in the play to contemporary AI-enabled activism. For instance, just as the women in the play rely on communication and organisation to mobilise, modern feminist movements in Nigeria utilise digital

platforms and AI tools to coordinate actions, share information and advocate for change (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). Furthermore, collective action theory helps explain how individual discontent can evolve into organised resistance making it an essential analytical tool for understanding both the dramatic narrative and its relevance to real-world activism.

The combination of feminist theory and collective action theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for the study. While feminist theory explains the structural inequalities and gender dynamics depicted in *More than Dancing*, collective action theory elucidates the processes through which women mobilise to challenge these inequalities. Together, these theories enable a deeper understanding of both the literary representation of women's resistance and its relevance to contemporary AI-enabled activism in Nigeria.

Synopsis of Irene Salami –Agunloye's *More than Dancing*

The play, *More than Dancing* consists of sixteen movements with a clarion call on women to desist from the traditional roles of dancing, feeding, serving, entertainment and cheering assigned to women at political rallies. This "cultural programming" reflects a system where women are valued for performance but not for leadership. The women are advised to steer clear from being satisfied with receiving tokens of rice, salt and wrappers and aspire for serious positions such as decision-making. Reading this through the AI metaphor, the opening presents an algorithmic limitation imposed by patriarchy. The play challenges patriarchy that is entrenched culturally thereby reserving politics for men and relegating women to the background, politically. This is further reinforced as the play begins with movement one depicting women performing traditional dances during political gatherings thereby highlighting the stereotypical role assigned to women. *More than Dancing* revolves around the quest for female political leadership in Nigeria thereby challenging the traditional roles assigned to women in politics. An advocacy for women active participation in politics promoting collaboration between men and women to achieve shared goals is witnessed in the play. In the play, the character Nona Odaro is used to showcase the potential for women to rise to leadership position and influence positive change.

The play is divided into three parts vis-a-vis the rising conflict, climax and resolution. The rising conflict showcases the period when women begin to question their confinement with the play dramatising a period of "reprogramming". The female characters in the play articulate the need for education and social recognition. Their dialogue echoes AI's iterative learning with each challenge leading to more adaptive strategies. The climax on the other hand occurs when women unite to resist the reductive label of dancers. Their solidarity transform them from being passive performers into active agents. This act, thus portrays a powerful enactment of collective intelligence, paralleling how AI systems achieve breakthroughs through networked collaboration. Finally, the resolution period underscores women's triumph in redefining their roles. Their transition from marginal dancers to social actors mirrors the integration of AI into new domains suggesting that re-imagining roles can lead to revolutionary outcomes in education and economy.

Analysis and Discussion of the play *More than Dancing*

Critical scholarship on *More than Dancing* largely presents the drama as a forceful intervention in debates about gender, citizenship and political participation in Nigeria.

Existing studies emphasise that the play moves beyond symbolic representation of women and instead dramatises their active struggle for relevance in public leadership. When considered alongside emerging AI-driven methods of literary interpretation, these critical insights become even more nuanced. Joseph Ali Dameh argues that Salami-Agunloye adopts a consciously resistant feminist aesthetic in the play. In his view, the playwright “has responded radically to patriarchal mechanisms both in Nigeria’s socio-political milieu... and the world of literary drama”(Dameh,2025,p.27).This observation underscores the text’s ideological commitment to dismantling entrenched gender hierarchies. Dameh further maintains that the drama reveals “the potential ability of women to mobilize them for positive socio-political emancipation “(p.33).thereby framing collective female action as viable path to transformation.

Relatively, Friday Akporherhe and Peter U.Oghenerioborue interpret the play as a recovery of women’s political memory and political agency. They contend that the drama depicts “a post –independence nation where women are secluded, perpetually marginalized and deprived of political positions even though they have the resources, leadership capability and social mobilization skills”(Akporherhe & Oghenerioborue,2022,p. 2).The analysis of this duo is important because it highlights how the play draws inspiration from pre-colonial and nationalist heroines thereby linking past female heroism with present-day resistance.

Similarly, Friday Akporherhe and P.O .Udi observe that the play dramatises organized opposition to gender –based oppression. According to them, Salami-Agunloye’s work “presents Nigerian women’s resistance to all forms of continuous cultural imposition, suppression, subjugation and protest against the political structure ”(Akporherhe & Udi,2023,p. 1).Their interpretation suggests that the women in the drama are not merely reacting emotionally to injustice, rather ,they are strategically confronting systemic exclusion.

Additionally, A.O. Eziechine and Q.Esene emphasises the structural barriers confronting women in Nigerian politics. They identify obstacles as “party system structure ,ingrained cultural views ,socioeconomic conditions ,political godfatherism ,thuggery and gangsterism” (Eziechine & Esene,2024,p. 8).Though ,their conclusion is ultimately hopeful, the play advances the idea that women’s access to national leadership is attainable rather than merely aspirational .This reinforces the text’s reformist and visionary outlook.

On the other hand, from an AI-informed critical standpoint, these scholarly arguments can be extended by examining the internal mechanics of the play’s discourse. AI-assisted textual analysis, for example can reveal hoe language patterns encode power. A computational reading could track how frequently female voices are interrupted, ignored, or delegitimized thereby providing measureable evidence of patriarchal silencing. Additionally ,sentiment analysis could be used to map the emotional trajectory of the female characters from frustration and political alienation to solidarity and empowerment .This would strengthen existing feminist readings by demonstrating how emotional shifts correspond with changes in political consciousness .Likewise ,network analysis could visually represent alliances,

conflicts and influence among characters making it easier to show that the play privileges collective female resistance over individual heroism.

Therefore, while earlier critics have rightly focused on feminism, protest and women's political awakening, an AI-based reading offers a fresh scholarly contribution. It deepens the interpretation of *More than Dancing* by exposing subtle patterns of exclusion, solidarity and rhetorical resistance embedded in the text. In this way, the play may be understood not only as feminist protest drama but also as a text well suited to contemporary digital humanities inquiry.

Findings

The analysis of Irene Salami –Agunloye's *More than Dancing* reveals several significant findings regarding women's political agency, women's collective action and the relevance of artificial intelligence in contemporary feminist activism in Nigeria. The paper first of all finds that the play portrays the structural marginalisation of women within political institutions which places women initially as symbolic participants whose roles are limited to entertainment, support and visibility without substantive involvement in decision-making. Therefore, this dramatic representation reflects broader socio-political realities in Nigeria where women's participation in governance remains disproportionately low despite their demographic electoral significance.

The study also discovers that collective action in the play foregrounds women's political consciousness and collective awakening as critical steps toward empowerment where the women in the play gradually develop awareness their shared exclusion and begin to challenge the patriarchal structures that define their roles. This process of consciousness-raising is central to feminist resistance and underscores the importance of solidarity in confronting systemic inequality.

The study also establishes that collective action in the play is portrayed as a strategic and performative process. Through dialogue, organization and mutual support, the women move beyond passive frustration to coordinated resistance. Their eventual support for a female political leadership demonstrates the power of collective agency in disrupting entrenched gender hierarchies.

Furthermore, the play reveals that drama remains a relevant cultural medium for articulating social issues and inspiring public consciousness. Salami-Agunloye's play functions not only as a critique of women's exclusion but also as a visionary text that anticipates evolving modes of feminist resistance in the digital age.

Finally, the study reveals that although *More than Dancing* predates the widespread use of artificial intelligence, its themes resonate strongly with contemporary forms of digital activism. The principles of networking, communication and collective mobilisation dramatised in the play align with the capabilities of AI-driven technologies in facilitating women's advocacy today.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- **Strengthening Women's Political Inclusion**

Government institutions, political parties and civil society organisations should develop more inclusive policies that ensure women's meaningful participation in

political leadership and decision-making processes. Symbolic inclusion should be replaced with substantive representation.

- **Promoting Digital Literacy and AI Access for Women**
There is need for targeted initiatives aimed at improving women's access to digital technologies and AI-related tools in Nigeria. Training in digital literacy, online advocacy and data usage should be prioritised especially for women in marginalized communities.
- **Integrating Feminist Literary Texts into Academic and Civic Education**
Educational institutions should incorporate feminist dramatic texts such as *More than Dancing* into literature, gender studies and civic education curricula. Such texts can enhance awareness of gender inequality and inspire critical thinking about social transformation.
- **Encouraging Interdisciplinary Research**
Scholars should pursue more interdisciplinary studies that connect literature, technology, gender and activism. This will broaden the understanding of how cultural texts engage with contemporary technological realities.
- **Ethical Use of AI In Feminist Activism**
Policymakers and technology developers should ensure that AI systems are designed and deployed in ways that promote inclusivity, protect women from online harassment and prevent the reinforcement of existing biases.

Conclusion

This study examined the intersection of artificial intelligence and collective action among women in Nigeria through a critical analysis of Irene Salami- Agunloye's *More than Dancing*. Anchored on feminist theory and collective action theory, the study explored how the play dramatises women's exclusion from political power and their eventual mobilisation for empowerment. The analysis demonstrates that *More than Dancing* is a significant feminist text that not only critiques patriarchal political structures but also presents collective action as a viable strategy for women's emancipation. The play illustrates how women can transform shared grievances into organised resistance and meaningful political participation.

This study establishes, importantly, that the themes of solidarity, communication and strategic organisation in the play remain relevant in the contemporary digital age. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies now provide additional tools for women's activism, expanding the possibilities for mobilisation, advocacy and visibility.

Therefore, the study concludes that literature and technology are not mutually exclusive domains but can work together in advancing women's rights and social justice. By connecting dramatic representation with contemporary AI-enabled activism, this study contributes to both feminist literary scholarship and broader discussion on technology and social transformation in Nigeria. The paper affirms that meaningful progress toward gender equality require both cultural re-imagination and technological empowerment.

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