INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS INSTRUMENT FOR MOBILIZATION AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF OWERRI WEST LGA RESIDENCE

by

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Abstract

This study evaluated the influence of social media as instrument for mobilization against gender-based violence in an era of digital transformation. Gender-based violence is any form of violence directed towards a person based on gender. This study was anchored on media framing theory which suggests the way an issue such as gender-based violence is presented by the media such as the social media influences and how the public perceive and understand it. The researchers adopted a survey research method and used Taro Yamane sample size formula to arrive at a sample size of 399 that was drawn from the population of 143,400 people who are residence of Owerri west local government area of Imo State. The researchers administered 399 copies of the questionnaire using face to face availability technique and retrieve 350 copies while the remaining 49 copies were unusable. The retrieved copies were analyzed using frequency and percentage tables. From the data analyzed, it was deduced that majority of the respondents are females and these respondents made use of social media for their information dissemination and gathering. Respondents' responses also showed that Facebook and Twitter were their most preferred social media for information gathering. The findings further revealed that those campaigns against gender-based violence are done on social media as respondents indicated they have seen such on Twitter and Facebook more. The researchers further recommended that governments should implement a massive public sensitization and reorientation program to educate their citizens on the negative effects of gender-based violence, encourage victims to speak out and provide them with the necessary support to leave abusive relationships.

Keywords: Influence, Social Media, Mobilization & Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a constant act of violence or harm that is done to a certain gender of human beings in the society as a result of such gender's inability to withstand or fight back such violent act when it happens in most cases. The World Health Organization described gender-based violence as the intentional use of force, power or authority which can threaten oneself, another person or against a group which may result in injury, death, psychological damage or any form of deprivation. Gender-based violence is any form of violence directed towards a person based on gender including acts that inflict physical, mental, sexual harm or threat of such acts, coercion or other forms of deprivation of freedom. United Nation Girls Initiative defined gender-based violence as a fundamental violation of human rights and a violence that occurs due to normative role expectations attributable to one's gender and an unbalanced power distribution between genders. It is believed that gender-based violence is extreme manifestation of gender inequality that usually affects women and girls because of their subordinate social status in the society. Though in recent times here in Nigeria and in Owerri west as a focus point, gender based violence is tilting towards the young boys in the streets who are frequently harassed, arrested and detained merely because of their kind of appearance, vehicle or cell phone they use. Some of these boys are innocent as they are most times released after some level of extortions by the uniform men.

Gender-based violence over the years has become an issue that has called for undivided attention not just in Nigeria but also in the world at large. Cross (2014), in his research on Women's experiences of online harassment in online gaming communities argued that social media has become a major concern when it comes to gender-based violence since it is ineffective in the control of gender-based violence in online gaming communities. The above assertion was opposed by the Global Women's Health Rights and Employment initiative who stated that social media is one of the avenues of fighting violence against women as content is created in form of flyers, short articles, videos and images. Without the use of social media in curbing gender-based violence especially knowing the diverse importance of social media in spreading of relevant information that can help in such issue, there can be several dire consequences like affecting the victims psychological, physically and can even lead to death of the victim, that is why this study investigated the various important contributions of social media to the control of incessant rate of gender-based violence in Owerri west local government area society.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of social media tools as instruments of mobilization can never be over emphasized. The advent of social media in the 21st century according to Bullock (2007), has become part of the daily lives of millions of people around the world in mobilizing people for a common course. Social media has been shown to challenge and change power relations in society, dividing platforms for debate, reflection, influencing and mobilizing people. These sites have become central to conversations about social issues as anti-violence work has focused on reducing risk among potential victims and perpetrators (McMahon & Banyard, 2011).

Regrettably, cases of gender-based violence in our society like Owerri west local government area of Imo state such as constant attack on female farmers in the locality, abduction and sexual harassment of young girls in the area especially in the night and many other related issues are becoming rampant and these call for urgent attention to curb the menace. Sequel to the above, it became imperative to carry out this study to ascertain if social media which is believed to be an effective instrument for mobilization in many aspects can still be a viable tool for societal sensitization against

gender-based violence in Owerri west local government of Imo state in the era of digital transformation.

Gender Based Violence: An Overview

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women offered the first official definition of gender-based violence. Gender based violence (GBV) is defined as any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Gender Based Violence (GBV), is defined by the United Nations (UN) in the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as any act that is likely to or results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats or acts of coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, private or public in the family or community.

Researchers use a variety of criteria to define violence and these criteria depend not only on the type of violence that occurs but also on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (WHO, 2005). Again, an example of a definition of violence based on the nature of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, Ishrat and Abdul (2016), define violence as a destructive behavior in an intimate relationship where one person attempts to dominate and control the other in a dating, married or cohabiting relationship resulting in physical, psychological or sexual harm. Gender-based violence is violence involving men and women in which the female is usually the victim and which is derived from unequal power relationships between men and women. Violence is directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman or affects women disproportionately.

Social Media and the Fight for Women Right

The use of social media has become the main scenario of contemporary online communication, therefore, it plays a key role in the process of creating a global identity. Thus far, it has been the place where new names, icons, slogans or mottos have been shared and where the revolutionary narrative has shaped and created the basis for the emerging activism trends and collective actors that played a crucial role during certain social movements (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015).

Digital activism or cyber-activism represents a new paradigm used to build up an online community, connect with other users and spread a message within and beyond country borders. Furthermore, social media can also serve as a platform to mobilize people to seek justice for any human rights violations such as "Bring Back our Girls" (2014). It is through social media campaigns, online petitions, blogs, crowd funding platforms etc., where people seek justice and solidarity.

Nonetheless, it is clear that before the hashtag becomes viral, there's a reason behind them that goes beyond the action. For example, #BringBackOurGirls was not only a hashtag that sought justice for the 200 schoolgirls that were abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria, but also served as a ground-breaking movement to advocate for social changes in the socio-cultural, political and economic fields in the country (Akpojivi, 2019).

Media Framing Theory

The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. In essence, framing theory suggests how something presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the

choices people make about how to process that information. They are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience. In this way, it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting. They not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory).

In relations to the study at hand, social media is used to influence the perception of the public on gender equality and against domestic violence through social media campaigns, space hosting on Twitter (X) etc. Non-governmental organizations and other bodies who are dedicated to the fight against gender-based violence, utilizes social media campaign to achieve their aims.

Survey Results

Table 1: *Do you consider the campaigns against gender-based violence on social media effective?*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	240	69
No	85	24
No Idea	25	7
Total	**350**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025

From the above table, respondents' response showed that the media campaigns against gender-based violence have been positive and effective as 69% of the respondents indicated this, 24% opposed it while 7% were unsure.

Table 2: *Are there factors influencing the increase of gender-based violence in Nigeria?*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	252	71
No	98	29
Total	**350**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025

From the above table, 71% of the respondents believe there are factors influencing the increase of gender-based violence in Nigeria while 29% said No.

Table 3: *What are the factors influencing the increase of gender-based violence cases in Nigeria?*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	109	31
Illiteracy	87	25
Society Influence	70	20
Masculinity	40	11
Drug Addiction	44	13
Total	**350**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025

From the above table, respondents believe poverty is the roots cause of the increase in gender based violence with a response rate of 31% while 25% said Illiteracy, 20% said Society influence while 11% said masculinity and 13% said drug addiction.

Table 4: *Are there other ways social media can be used in the campaign against gender-based violence?*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	230	66
No	80	23
No Idea	40	11
Total	**350**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025

From the above table, respondents' responses showed that there were other ways social media can be utilized in the campaign against gender-based violence which represented 66% of the total respondents. 23% said they are no other ways while 11% were indecisive about the question.

Table 5: *What other ways can social media be used in the campaign against gender-based violence?*

Option		Frequency	Percentage
Tiktok and Snapchat	and	160	46
Instagram and Telegram	and	97	28
Whatsapp and others	and	93	27
Total		**350**	**100**

Field Survey, 2025

The above table showed respondents responses on other ways social media can be utilized in the campaign against gender-based violence. The greater number of respondents representing 160% believed that other forms of social media like Tiktok and Snapchat can be used effectively to fight gender based violence. 28% out of the total respondents were of the view that Instagram and telegram will do a better job while almost the same number 27% believe that WhatsApp and the likes can do the job in addition to Facebook and Twitter(X).

Discussion of Findings

This study analyzed the data collected using percentage and tables. From the data analyzed, it was deduced that majority of the respondents are females and these respondents make use of social media for their information gathering and dissemination. Respondents' responses also showed that Facebook and Twitter were their most preferred social media usage. The findings further revealed that campaigns against gender-based violence are done on social media as respondents indicated that they have seen such on Twitter and Facebook more. Also, respondents agreed that the campaign against gender-based violence on social media have been active especially on Twitter and Facebook. They also believed other social media platforms can be utilized in the campaign against gender-based violence, to increase the information reach.

Conclusion

From the foregone, it has been established that violence against women is an entrenched epidemic in our society with devastating consequences. It is essential that all relevant stakeholders including community and religious leaders; school teachers and administrators; health care workers; police, prosecutors, judiciary, government officials, media, parents and of course, girls and boys understand and commit to their role in ending violence against women. Below are some recommendations to curb gender-based violence in our society.

Recommendations

The researchers in this study to help resolve the issue of gender-based violence, recommended the following:

1. Government should as a matter of urgency work on the economy of our society and country at large and create job opportunities in the society to reduce the alarm rate of poverty in our society since the present study has shown that poverty is the major cause of gender based violence in the society.

2. The governments should implement a massive public sensitization and reorientation program to educate their citizens on the negative effects of gender-based violence, encourage victims to speak out and provide them with the necessary support to leave abusive relationships.

3. To achieve socio-economic development, the government must ensure that women who constitute more than half of the population, have equal rights and access to opportunities, free from gender stereotypes and cultural barriers that encourage their reliance on men.

4. To ensure the efficacy of the various initiatives and programs aimed at empowering women and liberating them from abuse, these

organizations must also educate men who are the primary perpetrators of violence on the necessity of accepting change and employing alternative conflict resolution techniques when interacting with women.

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