

Contributions of Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts to Creating Awareness of Domestic Violence against Women in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, and X—in creating awareness about domestic violence against women in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. Domestic violence remains a pervasive and underreported issue in many parts of Nigeria, often perpetuated by entrenched cultural norms and systemic inequalities that marginalise women. With the rapid proliferation of digital communication tools, social media has emerged as a potent channel for disseminating information, mobilising public opinion, and advocating for victims' rights. Guided by the Cultivation Theory and the Feminist Theory, this study employed a quantitative survey design using a purposive sampling technique to collect data from 384 women across the six area councils of the FCT. The findings revealed that respondents frequently encountered posts related to domestic violence on these platforms. These posts served multiple purposes: educating women about their rights and available support systems, encouraging public discourse, and influencing attitudes toward domestic violence prevention. Posts identified included those providing psychological and legal assistance, highlighting survivor experiences, and those advocating for stronger institutional responses. Respondents perceived these messages as both informative and empowering. The analysis further affirmed that consistent exposure to such content shaped users' perceptions, in line with the propositions of Cultivation Theory, while also reinforcing the emancipatory aims of Feminist Theory. The study concludes that social media platforms are significant tools for raising awareness and fostering behavioural change regarding domestic violence. It recommends that government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and individuals intensify their use of digital platforms to combat domestic abuse. Future research should consider broader geographical contexts and examine the intersection of social media use with traditional communication channels. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on digital activism, gender equity, and the transformative potential of technology in addressing human rights violations against women in Nigeria.

Keywords: Digital Activism, Gender-Based Violence, Social Media Awareness, Feminist Media Studies.

Introduction

Domestic violence against women is a form of abuse predominantly perpetrated by men. It occurs daily across the globe and is particularly prevalent in developing countries where legal

protections for women are often weaker. Studies indicate that women suffer abuse by male partners in over 95% of domestic violence cases. Typically, social, economic, political and interpersonal power in most societies remains predominantly with men, meaning that power dynamics are highly gendered (Purna, 1998). Such violence can be fatal: repeated abuse often culminates in the death of the victim. Aina and Igyuve (2023), citing Smith et al. (2018), note that factors like economic dependency, cultural norms and ineffective policies continue to perpetuate this violence, while cultural or religious justifications often obscure and hinder efforts to combat it. Data from other countries illustrate the scale of the problem. In India, 32% of married women have experienced various forms of spousal violence. Similarly, Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights reports that over 90% of Pakistani women have faced domestic violence at some point in their lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly one in three women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence, and roughly the same proportion in the WHO African Region. For example, Guracho and Bifftu (2018) found that 76.5% of Ethiopian women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. In Ghana, the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey reports that 33% of women (aged 15–49) have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a partner.

The situation in Nigeria is similarly alarming. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics reports that 30% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence, while 68% have suffered emotional, economic or sexual violence. This widespread abuse, rooted in cultural views that treat women as property, restricts women's participation in society and perpetuates cycles of cruelty. Even in Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory), domestic violence remains a pervasive issue. For example, the recent case of singer Osinachi Nwachukwu, who died as a result of domestic abuse, underscores the urgent need for media advocacy on this issue. Social media has become a powerful tool for reporting and discussing societal issues, including domestic violence. Both professional journalists and citizen journalists use platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and X to report, educate and raise awareness about domestic violence. Aina and Igyuve (2023) argue that these platforms are important in shaping how the public discusses and reacts to domestic violence against women, serving as significant means for reporting incidents and increasing public consciousness. Likewise, Nwafor et al. (2022) note that individuals who have experienced abuse now turn to social media to share information about the impact of domestic violence and to challenge societal norms on this issue.

Several studies have examined media coverage of gender-based violence. Lucas and Laguma (2020) analysed newspaper reports of rape (a form of domestic violence) in Nigeria. Safiyan (2024) examined social media's role in addressing gender violence in Kaduna North, Nigeria. Nwafor et al. (2022) explored how Imo State residents perceive domestic violence reports on Facebook. However, the perspectives of residents in the FCT of Abuja regarding Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts on domestic violence against women have not been studied. This gap is addressed by the present research.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine the frequency of Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts on domestic violence against women in the FCT, Abuja.
- To examine the various types of posts about domestic violence against women shared on Facebook, WhatsApp and X.
- To explore the effectiveness of Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts in raising awareness of domestic violence against women in the FCT, Abuja.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is grounded in Cultivation Theory and Feminist Theory.

Feminist Theory: This approach examines the status of women and men in society with the aim of improving women's lives. Feminist scholars analyse differences among women – considering factors like race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality and age – to understand

how these intersect with gender. Patricia Hill Collins's concept of intersectionality, for example, highlights how overlapping identities shape women's experiences. In general, feminist theory seeks to amplify women's voices and highlight the various ways women contribute to society. Key feminist perspectives – including gender difference, structural inequality, and systemic oppression – are particularly relevant for this research, as they emphasise challenging societal norms and improving women's status.

Cultivation Theory: Introduced by George Gerbner in the 1960s, cultivation theory posits that the extent to which individuals engage with media content influences their perceptions and attitudes. According to Gerbner, frequent exposure to media (including television, news and social media) can shape viewers' understanding of social reality. In this study's context, cultivation theory provides a framework for understanding how communication on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, X) might influence women in Abuja regarding domestic violence. Although originally developed in the context of television viewing, the theory has been extended to digital and social media platforms, where frequent exposure to content similarly shapes perceptions and attitudes. Gerbner suggests that regular contact with media messages – such as social media posts about domestic violence – can cultivate certain beliefs and attitudes about the issue. This implies that exposure to social media discussions of domestic violence could increase women's awareness and shape their perceptions, making cultivation theory relevant to this research.

Review of Literature

Recent literature highlights the significant role of social media in domestic violence contexts. Liu et al. (2021) note that social media is used to report domestic violence incidents, sparking research into the reach and influence of such messages. The extensive accessibility and interactive features of social media have positioned it as a vital platform for communicating the consequences of domestic violence and supporting victims (Subramani & O'Connor, 2018). Survivors also utilise social media to challenge the violence they have experienced (Ajaegbu et al., n.d.). Ultimately, sharing information about domestic violence on social media can significantly impact both victims and perpetrators by raising awareness and fostering public discourse. Panyandee (2022) found that many victims of domestic violence turn to social media to share their experiences and seek assistance from friends, family and organisations. Panyandee noted that fear and panic often prevent victims from reporting abuse to authorities, but social media provides an anonymous way to disclose their challenges to the public. Similarly, Adekoya and Olaseinde-Fayomi (2020) confirmed that social media reporting of domestic violence cases has shaped public perceptions of the issue. These findings suggest that social media can serve as an important outlet for victims and influence community awareness of domestic violence.

Bazan (2024) investigated the impact of social media on domestic violence awareness at a Philippine university. Surveying 657 participants, Bazan found that social media reporting of domestic violence was attracting public attention. His results highlighted that social media platforms raise public consciousness about domestic abuse and can positively influence attitudes toward preventing it. Bazan suggested that government and NGOs should use social media to boost awareness and change abusers' behaviour. In a related study, Saqib et al. (2023) examined the influence of social media on attitudes toward violence against women. Using mixed methods, they found that social media had a significant impact on women's perspectives about combating violence. Saqib et al. concluded that social media's accessible, interactive nature helps disseminate information and strategies to fight abuse. They recommended that media organizations (both traditional and social) improve their dissemination of gender-violence information to further support women.

Safiyan (2024) explored social media's role in addressing gender violence in Kaduna North, Nigeria. Surveying 252 respondents, Safiyan found that most participants received numerous social media messages emphasising the harms of gender violence. The study concluded that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X and Instagram have been instrumental in combating gender violence through regular postings. Safiyan recommended that individuals and organisations intensify their use of social media to raise awareness about gender-based

violence. Aina and Igyuve (2023) examined Abuja residents' perspectives on Facebook reports of domestic violence. Their 2022–2023 survey of 384 participants found that while domestic violence incidents were frequently reported on Facebook, these reports seldom led to effective action. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how social media framed such cases, highlighting a need for public education on effective reporting. Similarly, Agbasiere (2021) studied social media's role in fighting sexual violence. Using a questionnaire, Agbasiere found that women's social media posts about sexual violence were often ignored, and recommended that women's organisations and prominent female figures use social media more effectively to educate and empower women on these issues.

Finally, Ajaegbu, Ikpegbu and Olorunpomi (n.d.) reviewed social media's role in reporting violence against men. They used purposive sampling in their analysis and found that social media has become a key platform for sharing information about such abuse. However, domestic violence against men was still infrequently shared online. Ajaegbu et al. urged greater reporting of all domestic violence cases on social media to influence public perceptions.

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating the research questions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to female respondents. The purposive sampling technique was used to target women who are familiar with accessing information via social media, as this aligns with the study's focus. Although purposive sampling has limitations (such as limited generalisability and potential for bias), it allowed the researcher to select participants based on their relevance to the study objectives. The questionnaire method was chosen for its efficiency in gathering information from a large population. The instrument was validated by experts, and reliability was ensured by a test-retest procedure: the questionnaire was administered twice to a small group of individuals knowledgeable about domestic violence and social media, producing consistent results. This pre-test was conducted in three locations and yielded reliable data. The study population comprised women residing in the six area councils of the FCT: Kwali, Abaji, Kuje, Gwagwalada, Bwari and Abuja Municipal. According to City Population (2024), the estimated total number of women in the FCT is 673,067. Based on this population, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table yielded a required sample of 384. Consequently, 64 questionnaires were distributed in each area council with the assistance of six trained research assistants. In data analysis, mean score tables were used based on a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). A criterion mean of 3.0 was set as the threshold for agreement. Percentages and frequency distributions were also employed. The data were interpreted deductively to draw conclusions from the responses.

Data Presentation

A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed, with 371 returned, all considered valid for analysis.

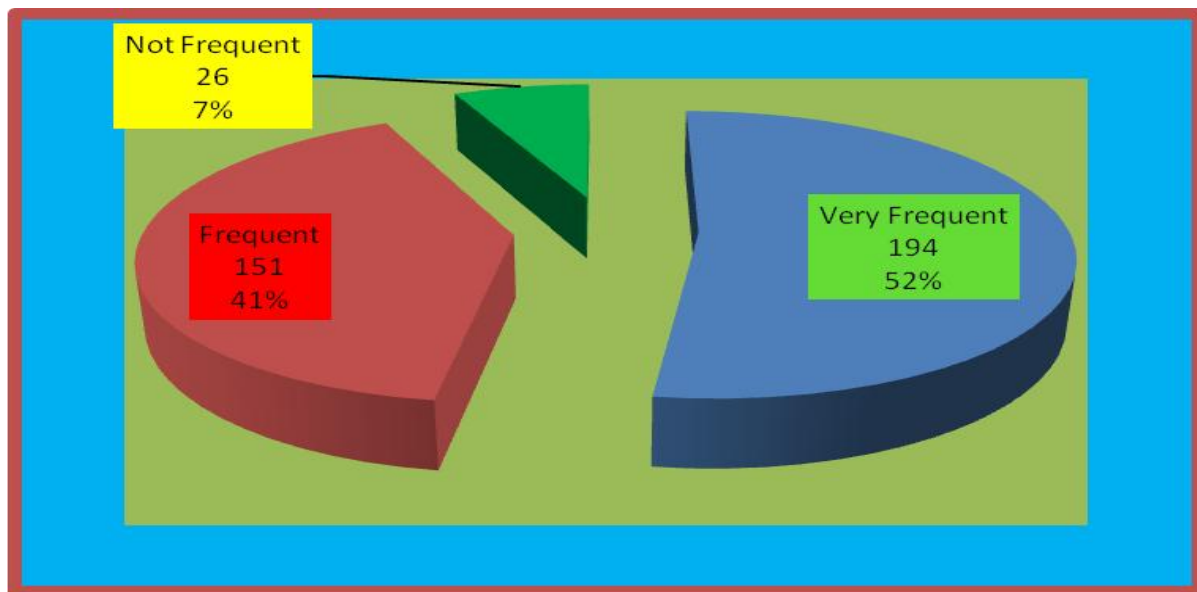


Figure 1: Frequency of Respondents' Exposure to Domestic Violence-Related Posts

Figure 1 indicates that social media platforms like X, Facebook, WhatsApp, and similar services are vital communication tools for educating individuals about the risks of domestic violence against women.

Table I: Types of Posts on Domestic Violence against Women made on Facebook, WhatsApp and X

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Posts that educate and enlighten you on how to confront domestic violence against you	131	208	13	8	11	371	4.1	Accepted
Posts that capture the attention of the government and other relevant organisations regarding how to propose and implement policies to combat domestic violence against women.	112	214	6	22	17	371	4.0	Accepted
Posts that empower women with the necessary legal processes, advice, and legal practitioners to assist with domestic violence against women.	134	185	9	18	25	371	4.0	Accepted
Posts featuring the experiences of women who have suffered domestic abuse.	111	223	3	23	11	371	4.0	Accepted
Posts that provide the needed psychological, economic and emotional advice to women on how to deal with domestic violence emotionally,	127	182	14	31	17	371	3.9	Accepted

economically and psychologically								
Posts aimed at changing harmful male attitudes toward committing domestic violence.	99	219	18	29	6	371	4.0	Accepted
Posts urging women activists to enhance their support for women who have experienced domestic violence and encouraging government action.	152	183	11	9	16	371	4.2	Accepted
Posts identifying organisations and websites offering support to women who have experienced domestic violence.	202	133	17	8	11	371	4.3	Accepted
Posts on where women who have experienced domestic violence can access mental health professionals.	158	177	5	22	9	371	4.2	Accepted

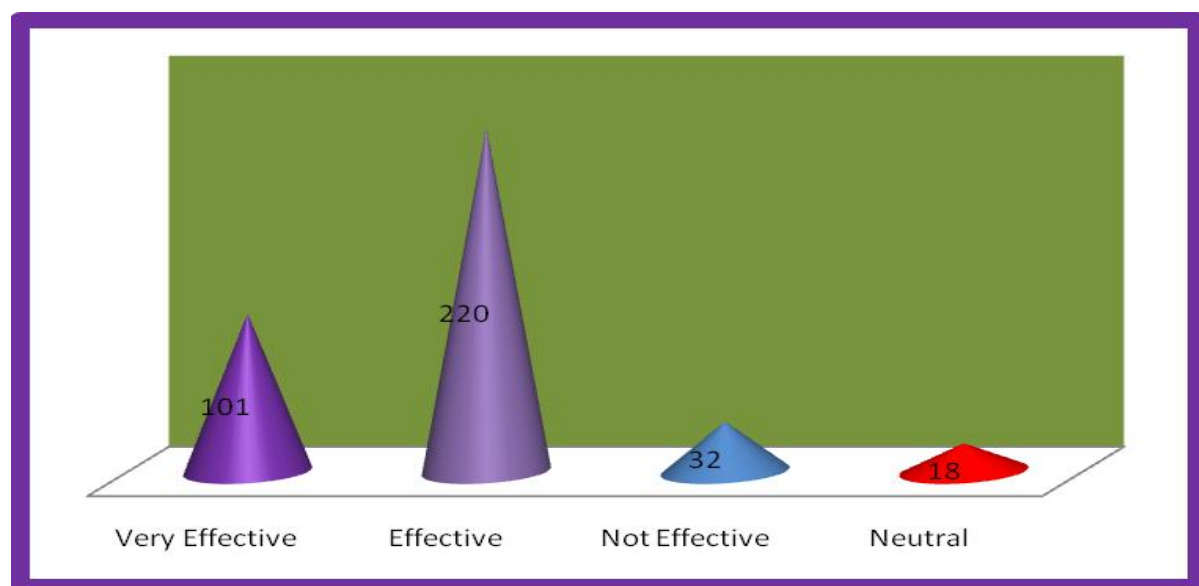


Figure 2: Responses on Effectiveness of Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts on Creating Awareness on Domestic Violence against Women

It could be inferred from the result in Figure 2 that social media networking sites have been playing an important role in the fight against domestic violence against women in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings reveal that a majority of respondents regularly access messages on WhatsApp, Facebook, and X regarding domestic violence against women, and these messages are deemed effective (see Figures 1 & 2 above). This suggests that women have begun to recognise the value of utilising new media communication platforms to engage in conversations about issues like domestic violence. The open nature of social media, along with

its interactive features, helps spread content that can educate, inform, and raise awareness about domestic violence against women.

These findings demonstrate that social media platforms—particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, and X—are effective tools for raising awareness of domestic violence and advising women on how to respond to it. In particular, most respondents reported regularly encountering social media messages that highlight victims' experiences, provide legal advice and support contacts, and urge policy action against domestic violence. These messages effectively empower women by informing them how to seek help and confront abuse.

These findings resonate with recent studies. They align with Safiyan (2024), who found that social media provides women with messages about the harms of gender violence and guidance on seeking support. Similarly, Saqib et al. (2023) observed that the interactive features of social media help disseminate practical strategies for women to combat violence.

The findings also support the theoretical frameworks. According to cultivation theory, frequent exposure to media content about domestic violence can cultivate certain beliefs and perceptions. Here, women's regular engagement with domestic-violence content on social media appears to have increased their awareness of available support and resources. Likewise, the results underscore feminist theory's emphasis on empowerment: by circulating knowledge of women's rights and support mechanisms, social media challenges traditional gender norms and contributes to improving women's lives. Overall, the results justify applying cultivation theory to social media's influence in this context: the repeated exposure to domestic violence messages seems to have nurtured specific attitudes of awareness and resistance among women.

Conclusion

This study evaluated how Facebook, WhatsApp and X posts contribute to raising awareness of domestic violence against women in Abuja. The analysis shows that messages on these platforms have been effective: they have educated women on recognising domestic violence and on where to seek assistance (for example, from legal and health professionals). In conclusion, social media networking sites play a vital role in public education and advocacy on domestic violence. These findings underscore the importance of using digital media to address this pervasive issue.

Individuals, government agencies and non-governmental organisations should continue to intensify efforts against domestic violence – particularly violence targeting women – by leveraging social media as a communication tool. For example, stakeholders should disseminate informative content consistently across Facebook, WhatsApp, and X to maintain public awareness. In addition, further research should be conducted in other regions and on additional social media platforms to deepen understanding of how media can help curb domestic violence across Nigeria.

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