

Role of Social Media in Eradicating Violence among Young Nigerian Females: A Study of Nigerian Students in Eastern Mediterranean University

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Abstract

The 21st century social media has been described as a veritable tool to campaign and speak for the female gender. This study seeks to find out how social media is used to eradicate violence and sexual harassments in Nigeria. The study adopts quantitative methodology, a random sampling of 350 Nigerian students studying at the Eastern Mediterranean University in North Cyprus participated and questionnaires were administered to these Nigerian students in the 2016-17 fall semester. Findings reveal that 94% of the females attest to the fact they have been exposed to one form of violent abuse or the other from the opposite sex. Majority of the respondents representing 79.6% also attest to the fact that social media helps in the campaign on violence against women. The study reveals that poverty is one of the leading issues that is currently increasing the abuse against the female gender in Nigeria. Social Media was affirmed as one of the tools that have been helping women speak for their rights and as well serves a mechanism for proper enlightenment on how to protect themselves.

Key words: Feminism, social media, violence, sexual harassment, gender

Introduction

The continuous clamor against a society that is unfair, unjust and highly discriminatory against the feminine gender is the framework of this study. Women have increasingly been treated as a second fiddle and sometimes not seen as members of the society who should be at the point of decision making process at home and even the society at large. It is therefore not an understatement to state that “Feminism is (still) frequently associated with unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism” (Scharff, 2011, p. 460). Questions are being continually asked on what roles the media play in ensuring a gender balance society. “To some extent, feminist scholars compete with international media in disseminating political accounts of femininity, and challenging regressive stereotypes that circulate in global gender economies” (Craven, 2002, p. 123).

There has been continuous to uproar for a society where post-feminism can become highly achievable. “Post feminism more easily embraces a performative, pleasurable femininity and regards men as potential friends, as well as (sometimes problematic) lovers and partners” (Winship, 2000, p. 28). This has been seen as the way forward in achieving a balanced, liberal and progressive society as the male and female gender need not be antagonistic of each other. The need to continually examine the word ‘transnational feminisms’ is quite pertinent, this is because “It points to the multiplicity of the world’s feminisms and to the increasing tendency of national feminisms to politicize women’s issues beyond the borders of the nation state” (Gupta, 2006, p. 24).

Over the years, there have been campaigns tailored towards violence against the female gender. These campaigns have spanned through women activists presenting papers at conferences, rallies, protests, having meetings with stakeholders and many more. In the new millennium, all over the world, the rate at which women are being negatively portrayed still needs attention. Numerous women have continually been used as sex objects as well as

objects of seduction. Thereby “voluntarily compelling” them to accept certain in human offers due to the fact that the women want to make ends meet and also want to have a say in their family. This has also exposed the feminine gender to a lot of abuses violently, sexually and otherwise (D’Enbeau, 2011). Therefore issues of gender identity, sexuality, race and class need to be consistently looked into. Research has shown that women in some parts of Africa are been harassed and intimidated in their relationships and businesses (Harpe & Boonzaier, 2011).

On its part, social media has become a veritable tool for campaigns, rallies, mobilization and propagation. Numerous feminist oriented groups, individuals as well as human right activists have continued to become quite visible on the various social media platforms, thereby using this “free” medium to get across to their colleagues and counterparts. Social media use has also encouraged women participation in series of protests and sensitizations (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). This has given the women a boost in their campaign for equal rights, balanced and fair treatment of the women. With the help of the social media, people can now share pictures, videos, create group pages and even links to other websites, thereby allowing others to comment and share their opinion about a particular phenomenon (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). This has also enhanced the unification of the feminine gender such that they can have group discussions and meetings regardless of their location, time and circumscises. Most women can also through such social media platforms, share their experiences with their husbands, friends and others as well as educate others on how to handle such situations.

Today, Nigeria has started witnessing a turnaround in the clamor and debate for equal rights between the male and female gender. This study therefore, seeks to find out the roles of social media in educating the feminine gender, eradicating violence and sexual harassments in Nigeria. It also seeks to find out if social media in anyway promote violence on young

females in Nigeria. This study makes use of the words sexual violence, sexual abuse, attack, harass and intimidate interchangeably as well as well as categorises females and women as same.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions;

RQ1: How prevalent is violence against women in Nigeria?

RQ2: How has social media helped in eradicating violence on young females in Nigeria?

RQ3: How has social media helped to increase understanding of Nigerians on violence against women?

Feminism in the Nigerian Society

Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa. Though, women are given the opportunity to thrive in any of their chosen carriers such that in the academic world women are found considerably and even occupying managerial positions like their male counterpart (Iwe, 2001). The continuous experiment of social change is also quite pertinent as the men are increasingly coming to terms with the fact that the Nigerian woman is able and can leave up with any responsibility or assignment (Akanle, Adesina, & Nwaobiala, 2016a).

Today, the Nigerian woman is seen everywhere and most importantly at the fore front in the society, this is sometimes because they want to prove a point of capability and availability of skills to do anything (Turner & Brownhill, 2004). Therefore, it is somewhat important to start educating the generality of the African girl child of the enormous potentials of the African and most importantly Nigerian woman and girl (Ajayi, 2015).

One of the challenges women in Africa and to be specific in Nigeria face is the issue of the dominant traditional practices, and most times, women are at the receiving end. According to Chika (2012a), “Nigerian citizens are predominantly in polygamous marriages

under customary law and custom demands that the husband exercise exclusive sexual rights and obedience from his wife” (p. 128). This leaves the woman with no choice or right to question her sexual rights. There are quite a number of ways women are being abused in Nigeria. They include; marriage below the age of 18, forceful marriage, domestic violence, widow inheritance, bride price, predominant preference to the male child and lack of education to the girl child amongst others.

As we are currently witnessing a multi paradigmatic era where authoritarianism is no longer marketable, totalitarianism is intolerable and where the media and most importantly social media is changing the face of the society, women in Nigeria have started to make use of the current global age to sanitize, motivate and encourage themselves.

Social Media Campaign on Sexual Violence in Nigeria

Social media has been used for a lot of campaigns against sexuality, women and child abuse. This has in no small way contributed to the level of awareness and enlightenments of citizens across the continent on the need to treat the female gender appropriately. With the aid of social media a number of revolutions have taken place as well as counter reactions of issues against the feminine gender, as women have now been able to raise their voice with the aid and support of social media (Roy, 2002: Takahashi, 2010).

Fig 1: Instagram campaign on violence against females



Figure 1 is one of the campaign methods used in Nigeria. It is an Instagram graphic campaign that is designed to create awareness against rape.

From the perspective of the Uses and Gratification theory, social media has become the tool in which women use to gratify and satisfy their desire to voice out their pains and anger on the wounds that have been inflicted on them. Many times we see pictures and videos of women and children who have been molested or harassed by their husbands or spouses for several years but have been threatened not to voice out (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). With their interactions and associations on the social media platforms, they get the opportunity to share their challenges and as such get some help. When these women get in contact with some of these organizations, they are mostly helped and persuaded. This is because social media is a good tool for persuasion (Nicoleta, 2012).

Methodology

This research is based on finding out the role of social media in eradicating violence/sexual harassments among young Nigerian females. In carrying out this research we adopted a quantitative methodology and based on the fact that the study was carried out in the Eastern Mediterranean University which has a sizable number of Nigerians as students, the study adopted Nigerian students in Eastern Mediterranean University EMU as its population. EMU is a state University in North Cyprus and is ranked among the best Universities in Turkey. The Quantative method is one of the most popular methods in social sciences (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

The total number of registered Nigerian students for the 2016-17 fall semester was 1500. Therefore, a random sampling of 350 Nigerian students was carried out, this enables us generalize the findings of this study. An in house questionnaire was administered to these Nigerian students through a non proportional stratified random sampling technique. The

questionnaire had 33 items and was tailored to help answer the research questions. The questionnaire was in two segments (i.e. demographics and the other segment which sought to help provide answers to research questions). Analysis of respondents was done with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science using the descriptive and inferential statistical methods. As stated earlier, 350 questionnaires were randomly distributed to Nigerian students studying at both the Undergraduate and Graduate levels (Masters and Ph.D.). Only 343 were returned thereby making 96.5% return rate which is quite significant.

Table 1: Reliability test for scaled variables

Variables	Number of Items	N	Alpha
Level of violence against women in Nigeria	10	343	0.78
Use of social media in eradicating violence on young females in Nigeria	8	343	0.71
Use of social media in the increase of understanding of Nigerians on violence against women	7	343	0.74

Table 1 shows the result of the reliability test conducted to check the appropriateness and consistency of the conceptual and operational definitions. The Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.71 to 0.78. Use of social media in eradicating violence on young females in Nigeria is reported with the lowest Cronbach's Alpha at 0.71, while use of social media in the increase of understanding of Nigerians on violence against women is at 0.74 and level of violence against women in Nigeria with the highest Cronbach's Alpha at 0.78. Therefore, results from the reliability test are quite satisfactory.

Participants

The demographics of the respondents (n=343) shows that (61.5%; n=211) are Females while Males are 38.5% (n=132), therefore a significant number of participants in this study are females. The age categories of the respondents show that those within 18-23 years are 51.9% (n=178), 24-29 years 37% (n=127) while those within 30-35 years are 11.1% (n=38). The analysis of their educational background show that Undergraduate Students are more in this study with a total of 63.8% (n=219), then Masters with 24.5% (n=84) and Ph.D. with 11.7% (n=40). The results also show that most of the respondents are single with 48.4% (n=166), then in-a-relationship with 40.2 (n=138) and then 11.4% are married (n=39).

Findings

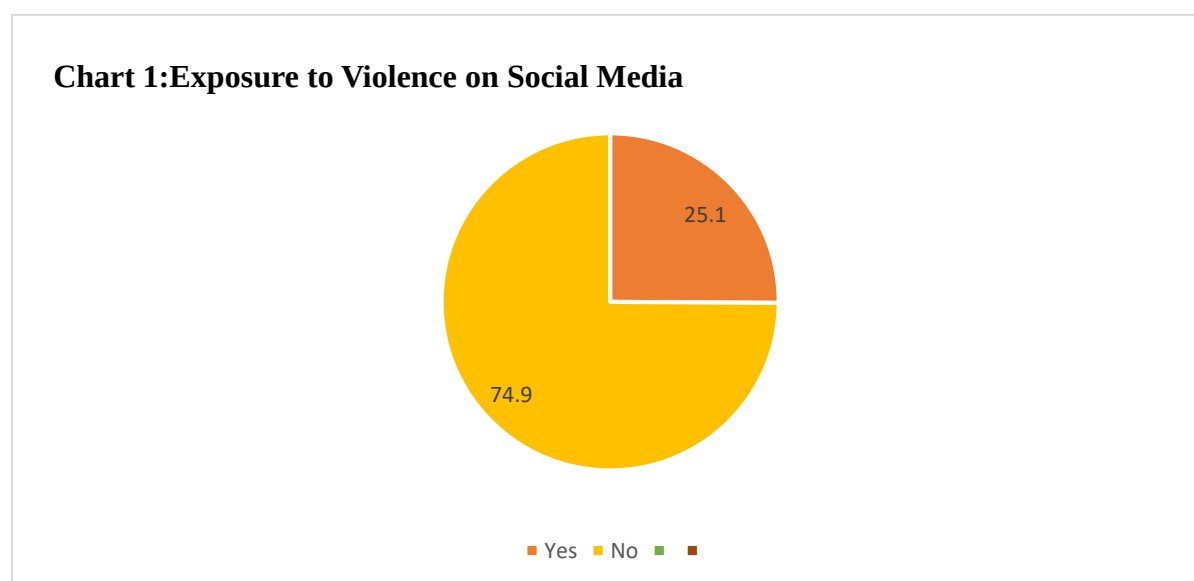
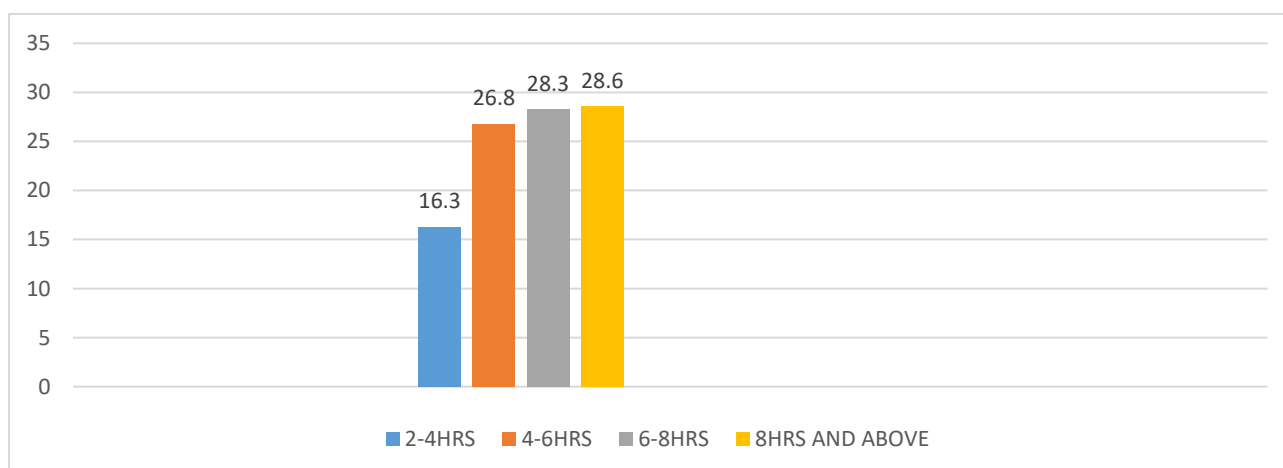


Chart 1 shows the result of the level of exposure of Nigerians to violence on social media. 74.9% of the respondents say they are exposed to different kinds of violence while 25.1% are not exposed to the different forms of violence and harassments on the social media.

Chart 2: Level of Use of Social Media

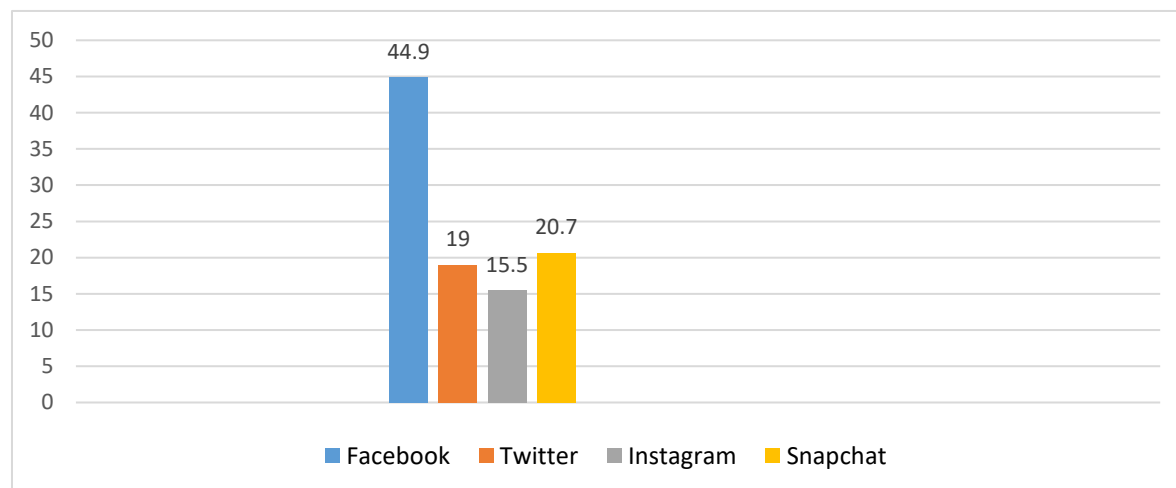
In chart 2, we are able to see how much Nigerians make use of the social media platforms, significant number of the respondents use the Social Media Very Often with 45.2% (n=155) while 30% use it often (n=103), 16.6% (n=57) only use the social media sometimes while only 8.2% (n=28) say they do not make use of the social media platforms. Therefore this table has shown that many Nigerians make use of the Social Media.

Chart 3: Number of Hours Spent on Social Media

In the 3rd chart, we are able to determine how much time respondents spend on the social media. This helps us measure the expected level of exposure they have on the various social media contents and as well the level of impact it would likely have on them. Findings show that majority of the respondents spend more than 8hours on social media everyday with

28.6% (n=98) while those who spend within 6 to 8 hours are 28.3% (n=97), within 4-6 hours are next with 26.8% (n=92) while those who spend between 2 to 4 hours are 16.3% (n=56)

Chat 4: Most Accessed Social Media Platform



In chart 4, we are able to find out the social media platform respondents use most often. 44.9% (n=154) say they use more of Facebook while 19% (n=65) say often times they use their twitter handles. 15.5% (n=53) of the respondents say the make more use of their Instagram handles while the last group representing Snapchat with 20.7% say they more often use their snapchat handles (n=71)

Table 2: Cross tabulation of level of violence against males and females

		Violence		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender	Female	94.9%	57.2%	61.5%
	Male	5.1%	42.8%	38.5%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2 shows a cross tabulation of respondents' level of exposure to violence according to their gender. Results show that 94% of the females attest to the fact they have been exposed to one form of violent abuse from the opposite sex or the other while 5.1% of

males say they have also been exposed to violence from the opposite sex. Also the females (57.2%) who have not been exposed to violence in this study are more than the males (42.8%) who have been. This is because the number of female respondents in this study is more than male. Therefore, the result of the cross tabulation analysis of the level of exposure of females and males to violence shows that more of the Nigerian females are more exposed to violence from their male counterparts to that of the males by their female counterparts.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of Mean and Attitude of Statements

Statement	Means	Attitude
1. Social Media helps in the campaign on violence against women	2.37	A
2. Through Social Media I learn about women's rights	2.36	A
3. Nigerian females are often harassed by their male counterpart	2.32	A
4. Nigerian culture promotes violence against women	2.31	A
5. Social Media stimulates abuse against the Nigerian women by Nigerian men	2.31	A
6. Social Media has become a platform for the Nigerian woman to tackle societal inequalities	2.30	A
7. Nigerian men are fond of harassing women	2.26	A
8. The girl child is treated as a minor gender in Nigeria	2.20	A
9. Violence against women is high in Nigeria	2.14	A
10. Through Social Media I learn how to protect women against violence	2.09	A
11. Nigerian men engage in different forms of abuse against their wives	2.07	A
12. Social Media is a platform to receive educative messages on violence against women	2.04	A
13. Social media has been very helpful in protecting girls from being	2.04	A

harassed

14. I Repost pictures about violence against women on Social Media	2.01	A
15. I React to posts about violence against women on Social Media	2.00	A
16. Women should be treated equally as men	1.92	A
17. Poverty is the leading cause of violence against women in Nigeria	1.92	A
18. Social Media helps reduce violence against women	1.91	A
19. Social Media encourages females on protecting girls from violence	1.91	A
20. I talk about violence against women on Social Media	1.88	A
21. Social Media helps to sensitize the women on their rights and responsibilities	1.83	A
22. I Challenge men who bully women on Social Media	1.79	SA
23. Social Media gives women a voice of their own	1.70	SA
24. Girl child marriage is a form of violence against the Nigerian girl	1.00	SA

n=343

Table 3 shows a descriptive statistics of the means and corresponding attitude found for each statement, “Social Media helps in the campaign on violence against women” had the highest score with (M=2.37 Attitude=A) while “through Social Media I learn about women’s rights” and “Nigerian females are often harassed by their male counterpart” followed with (M=2.36 Attitude=A) and (M=2.32 Attitude=A) simultaneously. According to the result, “Nigerian culture promotes violence against women” had (M=2.31 Attitude=A), “Social Media stimulates abuse against the Nigerian women by Nigerian men” reported (M=2.31 Attitude=A) while “Social Media has become a platform for the Nigerian woman to tackle societal inequalities” was also reported with (M=2.30 Attitude=A). “Nigerian men are fond of harassing women”, “The girl child is treated as a minor gender in Nigeria”, “Violence against women is high in Nigeria” “Through Social Media I learn how to protect women against

violence” reported (M=2.26 Attitude=A), (M=2.20 Attitude=A), (M=2.14 Attitude=A) and (M=2.09 Attitude=A) respectively.

Also the standard deviation results for “Nigerian men engage in different forms of abuse against their wives” show (M=2.07 Attitude=A), “Social Media is a platform to receive educative messages on violence against women” indicates (M=2.04 Attitude=A) while “Social media has been very helpful in protecting girls from being harassed” also show (M=2.04 Attitude=A). The standard deviation results for “I Repost pictures about violence against women on Social Media” show (M=2.01 Attitude=A), “I React to posts about violence against women on Social Media” (M=2.00 Attitude=A) while “Women should be treated equally as men” indicate (M=1.92 Attitude=A). “Poverty is the leading cause of violence against women in Nigeria indicate (M=1.92 Attitude=A) while “Social Media helps reduce violence against women” show (M=1.91 Attitude=A)

The least set of mean results are “Social Media encourages females on protecting girls from violence” (M=1.91 Attitude=A), “I Talk about violence against women on Social Media” (M=1.88 Attitude=A) and “Social Media helps to sensitize the women on their rights and responsibilities” (M=1.83 Attitude=A). Others are “I Challenge men who bully women on Social Media” (M=1.79 Attitude=SA), “Social Media gives women a voice of their own” (M=1.70 Attitude=SA), and “Girl child marriage is a form of violence against the Nigerian girl (M=1.00 Attitude=SA)

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test measuring male and female respondents' relationship on the use of social media in campaigning against violence against women

Statement	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Gives women a voice of their own	-2.939	341	.004
	-2.816	240.294	.005
Helps reduce violence against women	-4.426	341	.000
	-4.239	240.040	.000
Is a platform to receive educative messages on violence against women	-2.066	341	.040
	-2.090	288.580	.037
Helps in the campaign on violence against women	1.319	341	.188
	1.651	224.256	.100
Stimulates abuse against the Nigerian women by Nigerian men	-3.391	341	.001
	-3.234	236.348	.001
Has become a platform for the Nigerian woman to tackle societal inequalities	-5.355	341	.000
	-5.322	272.660	.000
Helps to sensitize the women on their rights and responsibilities	-10.805	341	.000
	-10.125	222.050	.000
Social media has been very helpful in protecting girls from being harassed	-13.081	341	.000
	-11.176	163.192	.000

$p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$ $n=343$

Table 4 shows t-value, degree of freedom and p-value. In the effort to measure male and female respondents' differentiation on the use of social media in campaigning against violence against women, an independent samples independent t-test was run in order to find out whether there is statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level. result shows that participant's response to; "social media gives women a voice of their own" was found to be statistically significantly different; female ($M=1.62$, $SD\ 0.59$) and males ($M=1.83$, $SD=0.71$); $t\ (341) = -2.93$, $p = .005$. "Social media is a platform to receive educative messages on violence against women", was found to be statically significant different; female ($M=1.95$, $SD=0.98$) and males ($M=2.17$, $SD=0.94$); $t\ (341) = -2.07$, $p = .037$. Also, "social media helps to stimulate abuse against the Nigerian women by Nigerian men" was found to be significant male ($M=2.08$, $SD=0.61$), female ($M=2.16$, $SD=0.99$); $t\ (341) = -3.39$, $p = .001$. According to group statistics, result shows that male respondents were accessed higher than female respondents for all three items found to be statistically significantly different.

Discussion

The importance of this kind of study cannot be overemphasized, especially at this time where the use of social media is quite high. This study has therefore been able to illuminate a number of issues surrounding violence against the female gender and most importantly what role the social media is playing to help drastically reduce or eliminate this dreaded act in our society. Violence against females in Nigeria is quite prevalent and can be due to a number of reasons including some aspect of the cultural believes, as well as girl child marriage (Chika, 2012b).

The study reveals that quality number of Nigerians also believe that it is high time females are treated equal as males and this includes politics, business and as well the

opportunity to have a say when matters of national interest are being discussed. The study was also able to discover that Nigerian males engage in different forms of violence against their female counterparts including their wives, not that the men are not also being harassed, the ratio at which the women are being harassed is highly and distinctively significant. It is also evident through this study that the girl child is treated as a minor in Nigeria, as a result, their education and welfare is not taken seriously by their parents and guardians, rather they pay so much attention to the male gender. Poverty has also been attributed as one of the leading issues that is currently heightening the abuse against the female gender, as the women are usually left at the mercy of the men. From a critical perspective, this can be attributed to lack of education and attention on the females from childhood. This also brings about the case of constant abuse, harassments and intimidations the females face from the males (Ejikeme, 2012).

Inevitably, social media is one of the tools that have been helping the women fight back for their rights, enlighten themselves and even the men. For instance, women campaign against and fight for their rights with the strong use of the various social media platforms, this they do through posts on their profiles, broadcast messages, videos, pictures, music or even direct voice campaigns (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012). This has helped reduce the frequent occurrence of violence against the women. The social media has also become a great platform to promote and receive educative messages on the campaign against women abuse. Nigerians have been able to use the social media to tackle the frequent social inequalities against the females as well as sensitise them on their various rights and responsibilities. This study was also able to find out that even though social media is a great tool to campaign against female violence, it stimulates abuse against them. It has also been able to protect the women from the frequent attacks they go through, this is as a result of the “public sphere” opportunities it has created.

Findings from this study has also been able to help understand that a lot of Nigerians talk frequently about how to curb violence against the females and react to posts that in anyway harass the females. They continue to repost pictures they come across to ensure maximum publicity and awareness on the various forms of violence against the females and enlighten them on the menace (Akanle, Adesina, & Nwaobiala, 2016b). Through the various social media platforms, Nigerians also continue to learn about the rights and responsibilities of the Nigerian women, and do not take it easy on people who in one way or the other bully females via the social media. The study was also able to find out that a lot of Nigerian social media users continuously encourage females on the need to protect their colleagues from violence or harassments while also learning more on how to do such from their colleagues.

Conclusion/Recommendation

This study has been able to reaffirm that violence against the feminine gender is quite prevalent in the Nigerian society and could sometimes be attributed to some parts of the Nigerian culture. Future studies could therefore focus on the various Nigerian cultures that promote or encourage violence against the female gender and what functions the media need to perform to halt or reduce to the barest minimum this unpleasant act. The study was also able to find out that to a reasonable extent social media has been used by various individuals, NGOs, groups and organizations to fight back for the feminine gender and protect their rights. Due to the use of the social media this study also discovered that with the level of exposure of Nigerians to social media, they continue to receive and educate themselves about the women's rights thereby knowing what constitutes violence against their rights and what not.

There is the need to encourage Nigerians to speak out and talk to people about the challenges and problems they are facing as there are currently a lot of young females who are suffering in silence and are either shy to speak or don't even know who to talk to. As such most of the women and girl child activists need to be more active and visible on the social

media. They also need to let the girls know they can confidently talk to them. There is the need to enhance the use of social media platforms in the campaign and fight against abuses against the girl child. There is the need to promote global sisterhood which today is not as firm as it should (Wade, 2011).

There is the need to create more platforms through the social media so as to enable the police, women activist and other security agencies to get reports and feed backs on abuses. This platform would be quite interactive and would assure the complainant of her confidentiality. This would encourage more people to report harassment cases and not eventually die in ignorance. This brings about the call for the need to discourage the frequent discrimination and stigmatization attached to harassed women.

There is the need to sensitize those who still hold on to some inhuman cultural believes on the dangers and risks they are putting the girl child through. Nigeria is a multi-cultural country and therefore there is need to enlighten and educate the people on some of the in-human cultural practices and believes as they are acts of crime against the women.

To conclude, social media has the power to put a halt to all forms of abuse, harassment, discrimination and stigmatization that is faced by women and young girls in our society every day. This medium is powerful and its capability to offer self-mass communication to the public provides those who fight for equal rights among all human cannot be ignored.

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