



## Using social media to explore users' reactions towards social media messages on domestic violence against women in southeast Nigeria

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### Abstract

Throughout history, practically every society has recorded domestic violence. In patriarchal cultures, inequality and repression that end in physical, mental, or emotional violence have long been accepted as the norm. The objective of the study was to ascertain how social media could be employed in Exploring Users' Reactions towards Social Media Messages on Domestic Violence against Women in Southeast Nigeria. The survey research method was utilized for the study, with the online questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The study population comprises adult internet users in southeast geo-political zone amounting to 14,684,504 internet users. A sample size of 400 was obtained using the Cochran formula of sample size determination. The findings of the study show that respondents generally agree that social media messages on DVAW enlighten them about heinous social practices supporting abuse against women. Additionally, Social media is perceived as a potential tool to combat practices that promote abuse against women. However, the majority of respondents acknowledge that social media fuels certain negative practices against domestic violence (DV) victims, including trivialization, blame, bullying, and decreased empathy. Based on the findings, it is recommended that institutional intervention is an essential strategy. School and church-based initiatives would be a low-cost approach to reach a massive number of children and teenagers and educate them on the dangers of gender stereotypes and norms.

**Keywords:** social media, domestic violence, women

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### Introduction

Domestic violence may include any abusive treatment against a person sharing the same house with an abuser. It could be verbal, physical, financial, religious, digital, psychological, or sexual (Odenigbo, Chinweobo-Onuoha & Anyakoha, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. Hence, when it is targeted against women, it becomes domestic violence against women. There are measures put in place to check these abuses and improve gender diversity by international organisations such as the WHO, UN Women, Global Protection Cluster, Network about Gender-based Violence, Women Peace Security, Center for Health and Gender Equity, Network about Preventing GBV in Africa, and the host of others.

Similarly, the government has enacted guidelines and laws aimed at improving gender parity and closing the yawning gaps created by gender chauvinism. However, most of these laws are highly criticised by human rights organisations for their deep patriarchal tone.

Izzi and Umunna (2020) <sup>[7]</sup> aver that despite the existence of numerous international and regional treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory, the legal response to gender-based violence (GBV) still leaves much to be desired. Owing to the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, violent behaviours of male abusers are condoned and justified. Moreover, there appears to be a gap between law and its practice, and gender-based violence seems to be on the increase.

According to Ott (2021) <sup>[13]</sup>, gender-based violence may occur in private and public spheres and can take various forms; many types of GBV are contested as traditions in several nations.

It can be an early marriage in some developing countries, rape in South Africa and other countries around the world, human trafficking in India, sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, femicide in Guatemala, female genital mutilation in Nigeria, or the so-called honour killings in Iraq or Pakistan.

In Nigeria, women's protection and psychological stability have been exploited for decades. Various women die yearly in Nigeria because of emotional torture and battering, with others battling depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Odenigbo and Anyakoha (2021, p 237) <sup>[11]</sup> stress the importance of mental health by stating that the psychological well-being of every individual is undoubtedly cardinal. Being in the right frame of mind becomes evident in interactions with others and invariably in the love of self. A psychological disorder can decelerate one's future if not properly managed. Liu, Xue, Zhao, Wang, Jiao and Zhu (2021) <sup>[8]</sup> concur that domestic violence has a detrimental impact on people's mental health. As shown in victim and non-victim groups on Sina Weibo, the aftermath of domestic violence includes an increase in depressive symptoms, a higher risk of suicide, and a worse level of life satisfaction.

Government, NGOs and international organisations cannot effectively mitigate the problem of domestic violence against women without utilizing the media. The traditional media have played the watchdog role for centuries. However, the traditional media have been heavily criticised for poor reportage and framing of domestic violence stories, especially the Nigerian newspapers (Odenigbo, Chinweobo-Onuoha & Anyakoha, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. Moreover, several people have shifted to the new media for information and gratification. It is irrefutable that digital technologies are significantly multifaceted and are advancing rapidly by the day.

Social media have been acknowledged as a platform that breaks stories as they unfold while also being recognised by several researchers as an effective tool for research, a tool for social change and domestic violence interventions (Christia, Larreguy, Muhab & Parker-Magyar, 2021; Carlyle, Guidry, Dougherty & Burton, 2019; Abdulgaffar, Özad & Saudat, 2017) <sup>[5, 4, 1]</sup>.

Standing on the tenet of George Armitage Miller's theory of information processing of 1956, which posits that a comprehended message guarantees knowledge, which, if accepted, reforms behaviour, attitudes and practices. It becomes evident that the new media could successfully influence public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours about domestic abuse against women by disseminating clear and concise messages about the mental and physical dangers of abuse to women through public groups and social media campaigns.

Hence, there is a need to leverage these digital resources to explore how social interaction platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and others, which receives torrent of domestic abuse stories from around the world can be utilized in exploring the reactions of users towards social media messages on domestic violence against women in Southeast, Nigeria.

## Objective

1. Examine the responses of social media users on domestic violence against women in Southeast, Nigeria.

## Research Methodology

The survey research method was used to gather the required quantitative data for the study; this is because the audience's responses are paramount in generating valuable and original data. There are different types of surveys in social science research, and the most appropriate survey approach for this study is the online survey since the intended respondents are social media users. It is expected that the instrument of data collected (questionnaire) should be administered to these respondents through an e-based platform.

Similarly, an online or web survey is a more recent type of survey administered over the Internet using interactive forms. As a significant proportion of the population currently in the world is digitally connected, there is a shift from paper-pencil to online survey use in research. The internet-based technologies are equally considered feasible and effective in collecting data on sensitive issues (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Regmi, Waithaka, Paudyal, Simkhada & Teijlingen, 2016) <sup>[2]</sup>. The study population comprises adult internet users in the southeast geo-political zone (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states). The study population was 14,684,504 (Abia-2,829,782; Anambra--4,259,397; Ebonyi-1,286,048; Enugu-3,043,685; and Imo-3,265,592), according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021).

A sample size of 400 was drawn from the research population of 14,684,504. The sample size was statistically determined using the Cochran formula of sample size determination. Using the purposive sampling technique ten groups were selected on WhatsApp and Telegram to serve as the platforms for administering the online questionnaire created using Google form.

These groups were selected because they have a reasonable number of people domiciled in Southeast Nigeria. Secondly, the groups have people who are knowledgeable and vast in varied areas under discussion, and finally, similar stories have been shared on these platforms.

Experts through face validation, validated the instrument for data collection. To establish the reliability of the instrument of data collection, a pre-test was conducted using the online questionnaire limited to 20 respondents. After two months, another set of 20 copies was administered to the same set of individuals with slightly modified questions. The computation of the degree of consistency between the two sets of reactions was done with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method using SPSS.

**Table 1:** Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Item
.809	2

The result showed that the instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .809 indicating it is 80% reliable.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 2:** Analyses of Audiences' Reactions towards Social Media Messages on Domestic Violence against Women in terms of the mean of the research items

SN	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	Decision
		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	Positive $\geq$ 2.5	Negative $\leq$ 2.5
1.	Social media messages on DVAW enlightened me on heinous social practices that support abuse against women (Wife-beating, killing, etc.)	2(.5)	20(5.0)	229(57.3)	149(37.3)	3.31 $\pm$ 0.588	Positive
2a.	Social media messages could combat the following practices that promote abuse against women: Patriarchal norms	1(.3)	102(25.5)	167(41.8)	130(32.5)	3.06 $\pm$ 0.766	Positive
2b.	Gender Roles and women's servitude	7(1.8)	68(17.0)	165(41.3)	160(40.0)	3.20 $\pm$ 0.777	Positive
2c.	Wife battery	46(11.5)	30(7.5)	138(34.5)	186(46.5)	3.16 $\pm$ 0.988	Positive
2d.	Stigmatization against women	4(1.0)	20(5.0)	215(53.8)	161(40.3)	3.33 $\pm$ 0.619	Positive
3a.	Some of these practices against domestic violence (DV) victims are fuelled by Social media: Trivializing abuse against women	0(.0)	64(16.0)	234(50.5)	102(25.5)	3.09 $\pm$ 0.638	Positive
3b.	Increased propensity to blame and bully victims of abuse	5(1.3)	90(22.5)	160(40.0)	145(36.3)	3.11 $\pm$ 0.791	Positive
3c.	Decreased empathy for victims of abuse	0(.0)	79(19.8)	181(45.3)	140(35.0)	3.15 $\pm$ 0.725	Positive
4a.	These strategies could help prevent DVAW and promote gender parity: Inculcating gender equality education in school curriculums and church bible classes	3(.9)	5(1.3)	58(14.5)	334(83.5)	3.81 $\pm$ 0.475	Positive
4b.	Identifying the warning signs and providing counselling to couples	0(.0)	8(2.0)	146(36.5)	246(61.5)	3.59 $\pm$ 0.531	Positive
4c.	Voicing out abuse by sharing victims' stories to educate others	11(2.8)	5(1.3)	180(45.0)	204(51.0)	3.44 $\pm$ 0.662	Positive
4d.	Launching social and mass media awareness and prevention campaigns on DV	1(.3)	2(.5)	150(37.5)	247(61.8)	3.61 $\pm$ 0.514	Positive
4e.	Prosecuting offenders	0(.0)	14(3.5)	98(24.5)	288(72.0)	3.68 $\pm$ 0.535	Positive
5.	Social media messages on DVAW made me treat my spouse better	0(.0)	68(17.0)	116(29.0)	216(54.0)	3.37 $\pm$ 0.758	Positive
<b>Batch Mean</b>						<b>3.351<math>\pm</math>0.669</b>	<b>Positive</b>

The result presented in the above table shows the frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation of the respondents' practices towards social media messages on domestic violence against women in Southeast Nigeria.

Item one sought to ascertain whether social media messages on DVAW enlighten respondents on heinous social practices supporting abuse against women. Two (.5) strongly disagree with the assumption, 20 (5.0) disagree, 229 (57.3) agree, and 149 (37.3) strongly agree. It implies that most respondents agree that social media messages on DVAW curb social and cultural norms that support abuse against women, with the mean and standard deviation of (3.31 $\pm$ 0.588), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item two (a) examines whether social media messages could combat patriarchal norms, which is one of the practices that promote abuse against women. One (.3) respondent strongly disagrees with the statement, One hundred and two (25.5) respondents disagree, 167 (41.8) agree, and 130 (32.5) strongly agree. It suggests that most respondents agree that social media could combat patriarchal norms, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.06 $\pm$ 0.766), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item two (b) examines whether social media messages could combat gender roles and women's servitude, which is one of the practices that promote abuse against women. Zero (.0) respondent strongly disagrees with the submission. Sixty-four (16.0) respondents disagree, 234 (50.5) agree, and 102 (25.5) strongly agree. It suggests that more than half of the respondents agree that social media messages could combat gender roles and women's servitude, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.09 $\pm$ 0.638), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item two (c) examines whether social media messages could combat wife battery, which is one of the practices that promote abuse against women. Five (1.3) respondents strongly disagree with the statement, 90 (22.5) respondents

disagree, 160 (40.0) agree, and 145 (36.3) strongly agree. It suggests that the majority of the respondents agree that social media messages could combat wife battery, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.11 $\pm$ 0.791), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item two (d) examines whether social media messages could combat stigmatization against women, which is one of the practices that promote abuse against women. Zero (.0) respondent strongly disagrees with the postulation, 79 (19.8) disagree, 181 (45.3) agree, and 140 (35.0) strongly agrees. This implies that the majority of the respondents agree that social media messages could combat stigmatization against women, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.15 $\pm$ 0.725), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item three (a) examines whether trivializing abuse against women is one of the practices against DV victims fuelled by social media. Four (1.0) respondents strongly disagree with the statement, 20 (5.0) respondents disagree, 215 (53.8) agree, and 161 (40.3) strongly agree. It confirms that the majority of the respondents agree that trivializing abuse against DV victims is one of the practices against women fuelled by social media, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.33 $\pm$ 0.619), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item three (b) examines whether the propensity to blame and bully victims of abuse is one of the practices against DV victims fuelled by social media. Seven (1.8) respondents strongly disagree with the assertion, 68 (17.0) disagree, 165 (41.3) agree, and 160 (40.0) strongly agree. It shows that most respondents agree that the propensity to blame and bully victims of abuse is one of the practices against DV victims fuelled by social media, with a mean and standard deviation of (3.20 $\pm$ 0.777), above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item three (c) examines whether decreased empathy for victims of abuse is one of the practices against DV victims

fuelled by social media. Forty-six (11.5) respondents strongly disagree with the assertion, 30 (7.5) disagree, 138 (34.5) agree, and 186 (46.5) strongly agree. It shows that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that decreased empathy for victims of abuse is one of the practices against DV victims fuelled by social media, with a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.16 \pm 0.988)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item four (a) examines whether inculcating gender equality education in the school curriculums and church bible classes could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity. Three (0.9) respondents strongly disagree with the assertion, 5 (1.3) disagree, 58 (14.5) agree, and 334 (83.5) strongly agree. It signifies that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that inculcating gender equality education in school curriculums and church bible classes could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity, with a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.81 \pm 0.475)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item four (b) examines whether identifying the warning signs and providing counselling to couples could prevent DVAW and advance gender parity. Zero (.0) respondent strongly disagrees with the assumption, 8 (2.0) disagree, 146 (36.5) agree, and 246 (61.5) strongly agree. It reveals that a greater percentage of the respondents strongly agree that identifying the warning signs and providing counselling to couples could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity, with a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.59 \pm 0.531)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item four (c) examines whether voicing out abuse by sharing victims' stories to educate others could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity. Eleven (2.8) respondents strongly disagree with the assumption, 5 (1.3) disagree, 180 (45.0) agree, and 204 (51.0) strongly agree. It indicates that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that voicing out about abuse by sharing victims' stories to educate others could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity, with a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.44 \pm 0.662)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item four (d) examines whether launching DV awareness and prevention initiatives on social and mass media could prevent DVAW and advance gender parity. One (.3) responder strongly disagrees, two (.5) disagree, 150 (37.5) agree, and 247 (61.8) strongly agree. With a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.61 \pm 0.514)$ , it suggests that a majority of respondents strongly believe that establishing social and mass media awareness and prevention efforts on DV could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity.

Item four (e) examines whether prosecuting offenders could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity. Zero (.0) respondent strongly disagrees with the assumption. Fourteen (3.5) disagree, 98 (24.5) agree, and 288 (72.0) strongly agree. It indicates that a preponderance of the respondents strongly agree that prosecuting offenders could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity, with a mean and standard deviation of  $(3.68 \pm 0.535)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

Item five examines whether social media posts and pictures on DVAW made you treat your spouse better. Zero (.0) respondent strongly disagrees with the assumption, 68 (17.0) disagree, 116 (29.0) agree, and 216 (54.0) strongly agree. It indicates that more than half of the respondents strongly agree that social media posts and pictures on DVAW made them treat their spouse better, with a mean and standard

deviation of  $(3.37 \pm 0.758)$ , above the criteria mean of 2.5. It makes the statement valid.

The batch means and standard deviation of  $(3.351 \pm 0.669)$ , which is the overall mean, is above the criteria mean of 2.5, indicating that social media messages on DVAW influence audiences' practices toward domestic violence against women. It shows that research question five is positive and valid.

## Discussion

The data from this research question show that the majority of the respondents agree that social media messages on DVAW could enlighten the audience on heinous social practices that support abuse against women. The finding aligns with Christia, Larreguy, Muhab and Parker-Magyar (2021) <sup>[5]</sup>, who found WhatsApp to be a more effective way to deliver the intervention on gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. Essentially, the campaign did increase women's knowledge on the subject. Another study by Carlyle, Guidry, Dougherty and Burton (2019) <sup>[4]</sup> noted that Instagram messages increased engagement by providing public health facilities insight into how best to utilise their resources to enhance IPV prevention efforts.

Additionally, the majority of the respondents agree that social media messages could combat patriarchal norms, gender roles and women servitude, wife battery, and stigmatization against women, which are some of the practices that promote abuse against women. Abdulgaffar, Özad and Saudat (2017) <sup>[1]</sup> state that the majority of the respondents attest to the fact that social media helps in the campaign against violence against women. They added that Social media are one of the tools that have been helping women fight for their rights and serve as a mechanism for proper enlightenment on how to protect themselves.

Furthermore, most respondents strongly agree that inculcating gender equality education in school curriculums and church bible classes, voicing out abuse by sharing victims' stories to educate others, and launching social/mass media awareness and prevention campaigns on DV, identifying the warning signs/providing counselling to couples and prosecuting offenders could prevent DVAW and promote gender parity. Mathews, Achyut, October, and Makola (2021) <sup>[9]</sup> concur by asserting that schools are a critical site for engaging multiple stakeholders and preventing violence from occurring both within and outside schools, with the potential for sustained effects. El-Khodary and Samara (2020) <sup>[6]</sup> added that a school-based counselling program was effective in decreasing PTSD symptoms among children and adolescents after exposure to war-traumatic events. Another study by Parfanovich, I., Parfanovich, A., Панок, Зданевич and Romanovska (2020) <sup>[14]</sup> shows that the pedagogic tools for addressing domestic abuse and violence had a positive impact on students' awareness of legal and psychological aspects of domestic abuse and violence. Overall, social media messages on DVAW influence audiences' practice toward domestic violence against women.

Theoretically, the framework adopted for this study avers that attitude change will influence practice/behaviour. Consequently, attitude change enables a social transition from the institutionalised standards that justify the mistreatment of women to a new era replete with individuals who believe in the concept of treating both men and women as humans without gender segregation (Anaeto, Onabajo &



Osifeso, 2008).

### Conclusion

The study was conducted using the survey research method and the online questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The respondents comprise internet users of varied academic backgrounds, careers, ages, religious affiliations, and genders. Studies that align with the objectives of the research across several disciplines relating to domestic violence against women were reviewed.

Respondents generally agree that social media messages on DVAW serve to enlighten them about heinous social practices supporting abuse against women. Additionally, Social media are perceived as a potential tool to combat practices that promote abuse against women, such as patriarchal norms, gender roles, women's servitude, wife battery, and stigmatization. However, the majority of respondents acknowledge that social media fuels certain negative practices on domestic violence victims, such as trivialization, blame, bullying, and decreased empathy. This recognition underscores the need for interventions to counteract these harmful influences.

Respondents strongly support various preventive measures against DVAW, including gender equality education in curriculums and church classes, identifying warning signs, voicing out about abuse, launching awareness initiatives, and prosecuting offenders. These strategies are perceived as effective in preventing DVAW and promoting gender parity.

### Recommendations

1. Community intervention is required to curb domestic violence against women. In a patriarchal society like ours, there is broad social acceptance and cultural approval for violating women in marriages and cohabitation. To alter these beliefs that link manhood to dominance and violence. There is a need to extinct gender roles and men supremacy from infancy by treating both genders as equals. It will foster peace and promote gender equality from the family to the community level and beyond.
2. Institutional intervention is as essential as the other strategies. School and church-based initiatives would be a low-cost approach to reach a massive number of children and teenagers and educate them on the dangers of gender stereotypes and norms. Inculcating gender equality education in school curriculums, church sermons, and bible classes would be a great avenue to leverage what has been taught in the home settings and expand it.

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