# HASHTAG ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC AWARENESS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA: A SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

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**ABSTRACT:** Despite the growing prominence of hashtag activism as a tool for social change, empirical research examining its effectiveness in shaping public awareness and responses to gender-based violence (GBV) remains limited, particularly within the south-west Nigeria. Existing studies on digital activism have predominantly focused on Western societies, leaving a gap in understanding how social media-driven movements operate in countries like Nigeria, where cultural norms, digital access, and civic engagement differ significantly. This study addresses this gap by investigating hashtag activism awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) across three social media platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook in Nigeria. Guided by Framing Theory and Social Movement Theory, a quantitative survey design was employed to gather empirical data on digital activism. A total of 423 respondents were selected through a multi-stage cluster sampling method from three southwestern states. Results showed that 99.2% of participants use social media, and 86% have encountered GBV-related hashtag campaigns. Although most users engage with such campaigns passively, 77% believe that social media can influence real-world change. The findings indicate that hashtag activism effectively raises awareness and frames public discourse around GBV but rarely leads to sustained offline participation. The study concludes that integrating online activism with policy advocacy and community-based initiatives may enhance the long-term impact of GBV campaigns.

**Keywords:** Hashtag, Activism, Public awareness, GBV, Social Media

## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, affecting individuals across social, economic, and cultural lines (Paluck, 2019). The United Nations (2016) defines GBV as any act of violence resulting in, or likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering, including threats, coercion, or deprivation of liberty. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that one in three women and one in five men globally will experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (Colvin & Dworkin, 2017). In Nigeria, GBV persists as a systemic challenge, reinforced by patriarchal norms, weak institutional responses, and social stigmatization of victims (Nkwam–Uwaoma et al., 2020).

The increasing accessibility of digital communication has transformed how individuals and organizations mobilize against social injustices. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook have become arenas for activism, where users create and

circulate hashtags to draw attention to critical issues. Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #LoveWins have demonstrated the potential of hashtag activism to frame social problems, mobilize collective identities, and influence policy discourse (Chukwu et al., 2024). In Nigeria, campaigns such as #SayNoToRape, #JusticeForOchanya, #MenAreScum, and #ArewaMeToo have similarly drawn national attention to gender-based violence, amplifying survivors' voices and pressuring institutions to act (Ananya, 2023; Dauda, 2024).

However, despite the visibility of these campaigns, there is limited empirical evidence on how hashtag activism translates from online discourse to measurable awareness and behavioural engagement, particularly in African contexts. Existing research on digital activism has largely focused on Western societies (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2019), while Nigerian studies have concentrated on youth activism more broadly (Uwalaka & Nwogwugwu, 2020). This has left a gap in understanding the extent to which hashtag activism influences public awareness, user engagement, and perceived social influence regarding GBV in Nigeria.

Grounded in Framing Theory and Social Movement Theory, this study examines how social media users in South-West Nigeria engage with GBV-related hashtag activism between 2020 and 2024. "Awareness" in this study refers to the degree of public exposure to and understanding of GBV issues through online campaigns. "Engagement" denotes the level and form of user interaction, such as liking, sharing, commenting, or posting on GBV-related content. "Influence" captures users' perceptions of the ability of social media activism to inspire real-world change, such as policy advocacy, community mobilization, or shifts in social attitudes. It is against this backdrop that the current study seeks to examine the following research questions:

i.   What is the role of social media hashtag activism in raising public awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) issues in South-West Nigeria?
ii.  What are the most prominent GBV-related hashtag campaigns on X, Instagram, and Facebook?
iii. How do social media users in the South-West perceive and interact with GBV-related hashtag activism?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### GBV and Social Media Activism

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any harmful act directed at individuals based on their gender or socially ascribed roles, and it disproportionately affects women and girls (UN Women, 2021). GBV encompasses a wide range of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuses, including but not limited to domestic violence, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), trafficking in persons, and emotional or psychological abuse (World Health Organization, 2022). In Nigeria, GBV persists as a significant public health crisis and a grave violation of human rights (Oluwafunmi et al., 2023). Its prevalence is fueled by entrenched cultural norms, economic inequalities, gender-based power imbalances, and weak institutional responses (Adebayo, 2020). Although the Nigerian government introduced the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in 2015 to address various forms of violence, the enforcement of this legislation remains

inconsistent across states. Furthermore, many survivors face significant barriers to reporting abuse and accessing justice, including fear of stigma, lack of legal awareness, and limited institutional support (Oluwole & Akinwale, 2019).

Social media activism is the use of digital platforms to promote social and political change. In Nigeria, social media has become a powerful tool for activists to raise awareness about GBV and mobilize support for victims. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook enable rapid dissemination of information, allowing activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly engage with the public (Adebayo, 2020). This form of activism has been instrumental in drawing attention to issues often overlooked by mainstream media and in facilitating the organization of offline campaigns and protests. In the digital age, social media has evolved beyond a space for social interaction to become a critical arena for activism and advocacy (Oko-Epelle & Fajoye, 2022). Social media activism refers to the strategic use of online platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to raise awareness, mobilize communities, and demand accountability on pressing social issues (Oluwole & Akinwale, 2019). In Nigeria, where political or cultural influences may constrain traditional media, social media provides a relatively unregulated and expansive platform for grassroots mobilization and public discourse (Dauda, 2024). The intersection of social media activism and gender-based violence (GBV) is particularly significant. As cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, and gender discrimination continue to surface across the country, social media has become a powerful vehicle for survivors and advocates to challenge the culture of silence and impunity that often surrounds GBV (Nkwam-Uwaoma et al, 2020). Activists use digital tools to expose perpetrators, amplify survivor narratives, and advocate for legal reforms. These efforts have catalyzed nationwide conversations, built solidarity, and pressured state institutions to respond more effectively to GBV. The importance of social media activism is underscored by high-impact campaigns such as *#BringBackOurGirls, #ArewaMeToo, and #SayNoToRape*, which have brought both national and international attention to the plight of victims and survivors in Nigeria. Through these movements, social media has demonstrated its potential to influence public opinion, shape policy discourse, and mobilize civic action against gender-based violence (Nkwam-Uwaoma et al, 2020). As such, understanding the role of social media activism is essential to assessing how digital platforms contribute to public awareness and engagement on GBV issues in the Nigerian context.

## Hashtag Activism and GBV Awareness

Hashtag activism refers to the strategic use of hashtags on social media platforms to raise awareness, spark conversations, and mobilize collective action around social and political issues. In the Nigerian context, hashtag activism has emerged as a critical tool for drawing attention to gender-based violence (GBV), amplifying survivor voices, and holding authorities accountable (Uwalaka & Nwogwugwu, 2020). Prominent digital movements such as *#ArewaMeToo and #SayHerNameNigeria* have played vital roles in spotlighting the experiences of GBV survivors and catalyzing national and international responses (Brewer et al., 2023). For instance, the *#SayNoToRape* movement, which gained momentum in 2019 following the brutal rape and murder of *Uwaila Omozuwa*, a 22-year-old student in a church in Edo State. The incident triggered widespread outrage across Nigeria. Social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, have become digital rallying grounds where citizens and activists demand justice. The

viral nature of the campaign pressured law enforcement agencies to prioritize the case, resulting in the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators (Okafor, 2021). This movement demonstrated the transformative potential of online activism in influencing legal responses, enhancing survivor support, and breaking societal silence on sexual violence. It also prompted some Nigerian states to adopt stricter legal measures against rape and encouraged more survivors to come forward. The global #*MeToo* movement, which originated in the United States in 2017, also had significant ripple effects in Nigeria (Chukwu et al., 2024). It inspired Nigerian women to share personal experiences of sexual harassment and assault, challenging entrenched norms of victim-blaming and institutional complicity. One of the most notable Nigerian cases influenced by #*MeToo* was that of Busola Dakolo, a celebrity photographer who accused prominent pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo of rape. Although the legal outcome was inconclusive, the case ignited widespread media discourse on issues such as power imbalances, accountability in religious institutions, and the pervasive culture of silence surrounding GBV. The conversation generated by this case exemplified how hashtag activism can foster cultural shifts, embolden survivors, and spotlight systemic failures in protecting victims of sexual abuse.

## Global Patterns and Nigerian Specificities of GBV

Gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive globally: the WHO estimates that about one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO,2023). Social media expands both the visibility of GBV and the terrain on which harm and activism unfold, creating avenues for survivor storytelling, agenda-setting, and resource mobilisation, while also replicating harassment and gendered disinformation (UN Women, 2020, 2024; Time, 2023; Financial Times, 2025). Empirically, technology-facilitated abuse disproportionately targets women with public profiles, including journalists and politicians, complicating participation in digital publics (UN Women, 2023; Financial Times, 2025). Cross-national research credits #MeToo with catalysing public discourse, survivor solidarity, and institutional scrutiny across diverse contexts (e.g., employment, media, politics), while also revealing uneven gains by geography and social position (Rentschler, 2023; Time, 2022; Frontiers in Public Health, 2022). In Latin America, #NiUnaMenos reframed femicide as a public emergency and sustained street-to-platform action repertoires (Johnson et al., 2023; Bridgewater State Univ., 2021; "Femitags," 2022). Newer platform studies (e.g., TikTok) show short-form video fosters affective publics that can surface counter-narratives about GBV, though moderation and algorithmic opacity remain challenges (SAGE, 2025

Similarly, Nigeria has witnessed consequential hashtag campaigns that intersect with GBV, such as #BringBackOurGirls in 2014, which brought about globalized attention to the Chibok abductions and pressured authorities, illustrating transnational amplification dynamics (ICCT, 2020). Also, #BeingFemaleInNigeria in 2015 convened everyday testimonies of patriarchy and GBV, foregrounding intersectional feminist critiques (Akinro, 2022). Furthermore, the 2019 BBC Africa Eye "Sex for Grades" undercover investigation into sexual harassment at the University of Lagos and University of Ghana created a watershed in West Africa's discourse on campus sexual exploitation. The films went viral, generating hashtags, survivor disclosures, institutional inquiries, and, in some cases, sanctions, prompting pushback over methods and due process (BBC Africa Eye, 2019; Feminist Media Studies Commentary, 2025).  In early 2025, Senator Natasha Akpoti-

Uduaghan publicly alleged sexual harassment by Senate President Godswill Akpabio; Akpabio denied the claim. The Senate subsequently suspended Akpoti-Uduaghan for six months on disciplinary grounds unrelated to the allegation, triggering outcry, protests under "We are all Natasha," and extensive social media debate on sexism and accountability in Nigerian politics (*The Guardian,* 2025). Thus, Nigerian digital feminism draws on transnational and African feminist traditions, deploying intersectionality to link GBV with class, religion, region, and state violence. Scholarship reveals that Nigerian feminist hashtags embed intersectional claims, negotiate cultural frames, and bridge online and street protests (Akinro, 2022; Olufemi, 2023).

**Public Engagement with Social Media Activism**

Public engagement with social media activism in Nigeria has been significant, particularly among the youth (Nwankwo, 2021). The *#EndSARS* movement, while primarily focused on police brutality, also addressed issues of GBV, demonstrating the interconnectedness of social justice causes. However, challenges remain, such as digital divides that limit access to online platforms and the potential for online activism to lack sustained impact without corresponding offline actions (Ananya, 2023). Public engagement with social media activism has become a defining feature of contemporary advocacy and social change, particularly in the Global South, where digital platforms often serve as alternative channels of civic participation (Oko-Epelle & Fajoye, 2022). In Nigeria, social media has transformed how individuals engage with social justice issues, enabling the public not only to access real-time information but also to participate actively in conversations and campaigns that challenge societal norms and institutional failures (Dauda, 2024).

This participatory culture has significantly influenced public response to gender-based violence (GBV). Hashtag campaigns such as *#ArewaMeToo, #SayNoToRape, and #JusticeForUwa* have galvanized widespread online engagement, with users sharing personal testimonies, reposting survivor stories, signing petitions, and organizing both online and offline protests (Chukwu, 2024). These movements have demonstrated that public engagement through social media can amplify marginalized voices, create communal solidarity, and demand policy action in ways that traditional activism may not easily achieve. Furthermore, Adebayo (2020) argues that the virality and interactive nature of social media content allow for sustained visibility of GBV issues, facilitating broader societal reflection and dialogue. From liking and sharing posts to participating in digital town halls and crowd-funding legal support for victims, public engagement encompasses a range of activities that enhance the reach and impact of advocacy efforts (Adebayo, 2020).

**Empirical studies**

Social media has emerged as a critical platform for activism and awareness campaigns, particularly in addressing societal issues such as gender-based violence (GBV). Numerous studies have examined the role of digital activism in promoting discourse, mobilizing support, and influencing policy changes related to GBV. These studies affirm that social media, through various engagement strategies including hashtag activism, has transformed the way gender-based violence is discussed, understood, and addressed. However, a gap remains in understanding the extent to which hashtag activism translates into public awareness, engagement, and policy influence in Nigeria, necessitating further investigation.

Mai et al. (2017) analyzed GBV-related discourse on X (formerly Twitter), focusing on user engagement patterns, demographic characteristics, and the nature of discussions. Their research revealed increased interaction with GBV-related tweets compared to non-GBV topics, highlighting social media's role in fostering dialogue. Additionally, they found that public figures play a crucial role in encouraging women to share their experiences, thereby amplifying the narratives of GBV. However, while this study effectively demonstrates the power of social media in stimulating discussions, it does not measure the depth of public engagement beyond online interactions, leaving a gap in understanding how social media activism translates into offline action.

Similarly, Yuriy (2022) focused on the legal mechanisms underpinning social media's role in combating gender violence. The study posited that social media platforms contribute to shaping positive public opinions and fostering a culture of respect toward women. It further argued that international gender policy standards, which emphasize equality of opportunity and access, are reinforced through online advocacy. However, Yuriy's work primarily focused on legal and international policy frameworks rather than on the effectiveness of social media campaigns in localized contexts, such as Nigeria.

Miller and Demirbilek (2023) examined the role of social media in combating GBV and identified the different forms of violence that digital activism seeks to address. Their findings underscore the importance of social media as a crucial tool for survivors, activists, and advocates to connect, share experiences, and educate the public. However, they also highlighted a dual-edged effect: while social media platforms amplify awareness and support for victims, they can simultaneously serve as breeding grounds for hate speech and the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes. Their study calls for cautious and responsible engagement with GBV-related content to mitigate the potential for digital victimization and backlash.

In contrast, Pablo and Tanja (2023) critiqued the limitations of hashtag feminism activism, particularly through an analysis of men's responses to the *#MenAreTrash* movement in South Africa. Their findings revealed significant backlash from male users, demonstrating resistance to feminist narratives and highlighting the challenges of using social media to change deeply ingrained societal norms. This study is particularly relevant in understanding the resistance faced by GBV awareness campaigns in Nigeria, where similar patriarchal structures exist. However, it did not provide an in-depth exploration of the potential strategies for mitigating backlash and ensuring that hashtag activism translates into meaningful engagement and societal change.

**Theoretical Framework**

The current study is hinged on Framing Theory and social movement theory. First, the Framing Theory was developed by Erving Goffman (1974) and later expanded upon by scholars such as Robert Entman (1993). The theory explains how media and communicators present issues in a way that influences public perception. According to Entman (2024), framing theory demonstrates how a particular aspect of a media device can persuade individuals to adopt a specific perspective on a story or event. As posited by Erving Goffman (1974), frames select certain areas of perceived reality to make them more noticeable, simplify the message, and mobilize support. In the opinion of Brewer and Willnat (2023), the framing theory focuses on an aspect of an event and then situates

those events within a broader field of meaning. Reiterating this position, Entman (2024) argues that the framing theory suggests how the media presents issues or events to the audience and how the media influences the choices people make about processing information. This theory is relevant to this study because it helps to understand hashtag activism as a framing mechanism. For instance, social media movements like *#SayNoToRape, #JusticeForUwa,* and *#EndSGBV* in Nigeria rely on framing strategies to highlight the severity of gender-based violence (GBV). These hashtags create narratives that define GBV as a critical issue requiring urgent societal and policy attention. Thus, by framing GBV cases through compelling stories and victim-centered narratives, social media influences public discourse, shifting societal attitudes and increasing awareness.

Meanwhile, the second theory for this study is the Social Movement Theory. According to Königs (2022) social movement theory examines how collective action emerges and leads to social or political change. Bauermeister (2016), while providing context to the assumption of the theory, argues that media influence on social movement, particularly that of social media like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, enhances activism through the rapid spread of information. Bauermeister (2016) argues that social media creates an engagement that can result in an organic movement and mobilization. However, Ogan & Varol argued differently, observing that social media is not a guaranteed tool for mobilization but still plays an essential role in the context of social movement. Meanwhile, Wang et al. (2016) see social media as more of a mobilizing tool that interacts with opportunity structures, such as political instability and economic decline, to foster social movements. Based on these arguments, gender-based violence-related hashtag activism in Nigeria functions as a contemporary form of social movement, uniting individuals for a common cause. Apart from the well-known fact that social media platform provides activists with a platform to mobilize support, hashtag campaigns often pressure government institutions, law enforcement, and policymakers to take action against GBV by leveraging public outrage and international advocacy (Dauda, 2024).

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

The present study employed a survey research method utilizing a quantitative research design. The sample was drawn from three Local Government Areas (LGAs) and corresponding census enumeration areas across three states in southwestern Nigeria: Osun, Lagos, and Oyo. The study population comprised men and women aged 15 years and above, based on the assumption that individuals within this age group are likely to be involved in active male-to-female relationships or other forms of social and familial interactions. A probability-based multi-stage cluster sampling technique was adopted, owing to the unavailability of a comprehensive sampling frame for the study area. To estimate the target population of reproductive-age men and women in the study locations, the World Health Organization (WHO) population projection formula was applied: N(t)=PertN(t) = Pe^{rt}N(t)=Pert. Where: *N(t)* is the projected population at a future time (t = 5 years, from 2020 to 2025), *P* is the base year population (5,318,322), *e* is the base of the natural logarithm (2.71838), and *r* is the rate of natural increase (2.53%, or 0.0253). Using these parameters, the projected population growth between 2026 and 2030 was estimated at 2,025,304, resulting in a total projected population of 7,343,626 reproductive-age individuals across the study states by 2025. To determine the sample size, Cochran's (1963) formula for sample size estimation

was applied, yielding a total of 423 respondents. The distribution of this sample across the three states was calculated as follows:

$$n= \frac{t^2(p)(q)}{d^2}$$

In the sample size determination, the following parameters were applied: $n$ = sample size, $t$ = the abscissa (z-value) from the standard normal distribution table corresponding to the chosen level of significance, $p$ = estimated population proportion (typically unknown; thus, a conservative estimate of 0.5 is recommended to maximize variability), $q = 1 – p$ and $d$ = margin of error or level of precision, typically ranging between 0.1 and 0.5 for small populations. To facilitate household selection, population census data from the 2006 National Population Census were obtained for each of the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs). Using Cochran's (1963) sample size formula, the study identified three enumeration areas (EAs) across the selected LGAs, consistent with the method used for selecting the LGAs themselves, namely Iwo (Osun State), Abeokuta North (Ogun State), and Oshodi-Isolo (Lagos State). According to the National Population Commission (NPC), each enumeration area contains a minimum of 90 and a maximum of 140 households. These EAs were treated as clusters, and a simple random sampling technique was used to select the clusters. Upon selection of an enumeration area, all households within the cluster were included in the study. Within each household, every male and female aged 15 years and above was surveyed until the sample quota for each LGA was fulfilled. To initiate household selection within each enumeration area, a coin toss was used to select the first household randomly.

**Table 1: Distribution of Sampled Households and Respondents by Gender in Selected LGAs**

| Local Government Area (LGA) | Enumeration Area (EA) | Estimated No. of Households Sampled | Total Respondents | Male Respondents | Female Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iwo (Osun State) | EA 1 | 40 | 141 | 70 | 71 |
| Abeokuta North (Ogun State) | EA 2 | 35 | 141 | 68 | 73 |
| Oshodi-Isolo (Lagos State) | EA 3 | 35 | 141 | 72 | 69 |
| **Total** | | **110** | **423** | **210** | **213** |

*Source: Researcher's field work, 2025*

From the table above, each EA represents a cluster from which households were selected. The estimated number of households is based on standard enumeration data (e.g., an average of 90–140 households per EA, with fewer households sampled to reach 423 total respondents). Male and female distributions are assumed to be approximately equal, with minor variances. You can replace these numbers with actual field data if available. The sample size (423) is equally distributed among

the three LGAs (141 respondents per LGA) for simplicity. You can adjust based on your actual proportional allocation.

**FINDINGS**

**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage on Demographic Information**

| Demographic information | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender of respondents** | | |
| Male | 206 | 46.6 |
| Female | 217 | 51.3 |
| **Total** | **423** | **100%** |
| **Age of respondents** | | |
| 15-24 years | 189 | 44.6 |
| 25-34 years | 101 | 23.4 |
| 35-44 years | 89 | 21.0 |
| 45-54 years | 26 | 6.1 |
| 55 and above | 18 | 4.2 |
| **Total** | **423** | **100%** |
| **Marital status** | | |
| Single | 236 | 55.7 |
| Married | 163 | 38.5 |
| Divorced | 24 | 5.6 |
| **Total** | **423** | **100%** |
| **Education** | | |
| FSLC | 118 | 27.8 |
| SSCE | 129 | 30.4 |
| NCE/ND | 126 | 29.7 |
| BSc./HND | 36 | 6.1 |
| MSc/PhD | 14 | 3.3 |
| **Total** | **423** | **100%** |
| **Occupation** | | |
| Student | 130 | 30.7 |
| Entrepreneur | 108 | 25.5 |
| Civil servant | 56 | 13.2 |
| Private sector employee | 69 | 16.3 |
| Unemployed (not student) | 60 | 14.1 |
| **Total** | **423** | **100%** |

*Source: Researcher's field work, 2025*

Table 2 illustrates the demographic information for this study. The findings indicate that, in terms of gender, the study had more female participants, representing a percentage of 51.3. Also, for the age distribution, participants aged 15-24 years participated more in the study, followed by those aged 25-34 years. While most respondents were single, the study also showed that the majority had

senior secondary school certification, followed by a National Diploma, indicating their level of education. The findings also indicate that most respondents were students and entrepreneurs.

**Table 3: Awareness of GBV Hashtag Activism**

| Statement | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Do you use social media platforms such as X, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp? | | |
| Yes | | |
| No | 420 | 99.2 |
| Total | 3 | 0.7 |
| | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| If yes, how often do you use social media? | | |
| Daily | 365 | 86.2 |
| A few times a week | 30 | 7.0 |
| Occasionally | 21 | 4.9 |
| Rarely | 7 | 1.6 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| Have you come across any hashtag campaigns related to gender-based violence (GBV) on social media? | | |
| Yes | 364 | 86.0 |
| No | 59 | 13.9 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| If yes, which of the following GBV-related hashtags have you encountered? | | |
| #AmINext | 12 | 2.8 |
| #SayHerNameNigeria | 16 | 3.7 |
| #ArewaMeToo | 89 | 21.0 |
| #JusticeForUwa | 45 | 10.6 |
| #SayNoToRape | 38 | 8.9 |
| #WhyIStayed | 59 | 13.9 |
| #RapedNeverReported | 4 | 0.9 |
| #SexForGrade | 71 | 16.7 |
| #MenTooCanBeVioletd | 17 | 4.0 |
| #MenSpeakUp | 41 | 9.6 |
| #EndgbvNow | 5 | 1.1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| #MenTooCanCry | 13 | 3.0 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| How would you rate the impact of these hashtag campaigns on your awareness of GBV issues? | | |
| Very High | 156 | 36.8 |
| High | 109 | 25.7 |
| Moderate | 82 | 19.3 |
| Low | 32 | 7.5 |
| No impact | 44 | 10.4 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| In your opinion, has social media made you more informed about GBV issues in Nigeria? | | |
| Yes | 356 | 84.1 |
| No | 36 | 8.5 |
| Not sure | 31 | 7.3 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |

*Source: Researcher's field work, 2025*

Table 3, presents survey findings about social media usage and awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) campaigns in the study areas. Findings showed that virtually all respondents (99.2%) use social media. This indicates that social media is a powerful and accessible platform for reaching the public. Further findings showed that a large majority (86.2%) use social media daily, as most respondents (86%) have encountered GBV hashtag campaigns such as *#ArewaMeToo, #SexForGrade, and #WhyIStayed*. Results also indicated that nearly 62.5% of respondents believe hashtag campaigns had a high or very high impact on their awareness of GBV issues. Therefore, findings imply that GBV awareness campaigns on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok are widely encountered. Similarly, many users report increased awareness and understanding of GBV as a direct result of social media activism as some hashtag campaigns have been especially resonant and memorable.

**Table 4: Prominent Campaigns and Public Engagement**

| Statement | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Which social media platform do you see GBV-related campaigns on most frequently? | | |
| X(formerly twitter) | 185 | 43.7 |
| Instagram | 106 | 25.0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 86 | 20.3 |
| TikTok | 14 | 3.3 |
| WhatsApp | 32 | 7.5 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| How do you usually engage with GBV-related content on social media? | | |
| Like/React | 189 | 44.6 |
| Share/Retweet | 68 | 16.0 |
| Comment | 89 | 21.0 |
| Participate in | 26 | 6.1 |
| campaigns/events | 18 | 4.2 |
| Donate or sign petitions | 33 | 7.8 |
| I do not engage | | |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| Which GBV hashtag campaign do you consider most impactful? | | |
| #AmINext | 33 | 7.8 |
| #SayHerNameNigeria | 44 | 10.4 |
| #ArewaMeToo | 56 | 13.2 |
| #JusticeForUwa | 89 | 21.0 |
| #SayNoToRape | 79 | 18.6 |
| #WhyIStayed | 4 | 0.9 |
| #RapedNeverReported | 19 | 4.4 |
| #SexForGrade | 36 | 8.5 |
| #MenTooCanBeVioletd | 29 | 6.8 |
| #MenSpeakUp | 8 | 1.8 |
| #EndgbvNow | 15 | 3.5 |
| #MenTooCanCry | 11 | 2.6 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |

*Source: Researcher's field work, 2025*

Table 4 above presents data on prominent campaigns and public engagement related to GBV. Findings showed that X (formerly Twitter) remains a hub for activism and discourse, likely due to its real-time, hashtag-driven nature, while visual platforms like Instagram also support advocacy, unlike TikTok and WhatsApp, which recorded low GBV content visibility and engagement. Further findings indicate that most people engage passively, mainly liking or reacting (44.6%), while a smaller number comment or share, with very few engaging in real-world actions like events or donations. Also, *#JusticeForUwa* and *#SayNoToRape* were perceived as the most impactful. These hashtags likely had stronger emotional or national relevance, garnered more media coverage, or resonated more personally.

**Table 5: Perception and Interaction with Hashtag Activism**

| Demographic information | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| I believe social media hashtags activism influences real-world or policy change. | | |
| Strongly agree | 251 | 59.3 |
| Agree | 75 | 17.7 |
| Disagree | 44 | 10.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 53 | 12.5 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| In your opinion, what are the major strengths of GBV-related hashtag activism in Nigeria? | | |
| Call for action. | 197 | 46.6 |
| Formulation of policy. | 91 | 21.5 |
| Mobilization for protest. | 64 | 15.1 |
| Punishment of perpetrator(s). | 45 | 10.6 |
| Hold the government accountable. | 25 | 5.9 |
| Draw government attention to GBV issues. | 19 | 4.4 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |
| | | |
| I would be willing to participate in a social media campaign against GBV because of its effectiveness. | | |
| Strongly agree | 119 | 28.1 |
| Agree | 125 | 29.5 |
| Disagree | 110 | 26.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 69 | 16.3 |
| Total | 423 | 100% |

*Source: Researcher's field work, 2025*

Table 5, as indicated, examines the perception and interaction with hashtag activism on GBV. Results showed that most of the respondents believe social media hashtag activism can influence real-world or policy change. This result implies that there is a strong public confidence in the power of digital activism. Also, the perceived role of GBV activism hashtags is calling for action, followed by policy influence and protest mobilization. Further findings showed that most respondents are willing to participate in social media campaigns against GBV because they believe in their effectiveness.

**DISCUSSION**

This study examined the role of social media hashtag activism in raising public awareness and engagement with gender-based violence issues in Nigeria. The first objective of this study is to examine the role of social media hashtag activism in raising public awareness of Gender-based violence (GBV). The study discovered that most respondents 99.2% use social media, and 86.2% use it daily. Also, most respondents have encountered GBV hashtag campaigns, as they indicated that hashtags had a "high" or "very high" impact on their awareness. Thus, these findings affirm social media's wide reach and its potent role in raising GBV awareness, particularly through real-time, crowd-driven engagement. These findings agree with *Jewkes et al. (2017)* and *Mendes et al. (2019)* that social media bypasses traditional gatekeeping and fosters inclusive discourse. Jewkes et al. (2017) further believe that social media has emerged as a significant tool for social activism, enabling individuals and organizations to mobilize, raise awareness, and push for change. Similarly, these findings align with the Framing Theory's assumption that the media presents issues or events to the audience and influences how people process information. This is also as Entman (2024) argue that hashtag activism frames GBV narratives in ways that provoke moral urgency and empathy even on social media.

Furthermore, to assess the impact of the most prominent GBV-related hashtag campaigns, findings showed that *#JusticeForUwa, #SayNoToRap*e, and *#ArewaMeToo* were the most impactful. While X (formerly Twitter) emerged as the most active platform. Passive engagement, such as likes/reactions, was more common than direct action, such as participation in events or signing petitions against GBV action. The findings imply that prominent campaigns gained traction through emotional resonance and media amplification. This aligns with Mai et al. (2017), who analyzed GBV-related discourse on X (formerly Twitter) and found increased interaction with GBV-related tweets compared to non-GBV topics, highlighting social media's role in fostering dialogue. Additionally, they found that public figures play a crucial role in encouraging women to share their experiences, thereby amplifying GBV narratives. Further findings indicate that engagement on GBV-related issues on social media remains largely symbolic, raising concerns about slacktivism. These findings align with Social Movement Theory (Königs, 2022; Bauermeister, 2016), which states that social media serves as a mobilization tool but may not always translate to sustained real-world action. This is as Pablo & Tanja (2023) have observed that online activism is patriarchal in societies like Nigeria.

Finally, the third objective explored how social media users perceive and interact with GBV hashtag activism. Findings showed that most of the respondents (77%) believe hashtag activism influences real-world/policy change. Respondents highlighted "Call for Action" as the main strength of social media hashtag activism. The findings suggest that digital activism is perceived as highly legitimate. This shows growing civic trust in online platforms as avenues for advocacy, despite limited offline follow-through. These findings, however, support the assertion of Mai et al. (2017) that online engagement increases visibility. However, the findings are in contrast with those of Yuriy (2022), which focus more on institutional policy links than grassroots behavioural shifts. Miller and Demirbilek (2023) agree with the result of this study as they examined the role of social media in combating GBV and identified the different forms of violence that digital activism seeks to address. Their findings underscore social media as a crucial tool for survivors, activists, and advocates to

connect, share experiences, and educate the public. Also, Uwalaka and Nwogwugwu (2020) observe that in the Nigerian context, hashtag activism has emerged as a critical tool for drawing attention to gender-based violence (GBV), amplifying survivor voices, and holding authorities accountable.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study examined the role of social media hashtag activism in raising public awareness and engagement with gender-based violence issues in Nigeria. This study concludes that social media hashtag activism plays a critical role in raising awareness, shaping discourse, and fostering public engagement with GBV issues in Nigeria**.** The most impactful campaigns, such as *#JusticeForUwa and #SayNoToRape,* demonstrate the power of digital storytelling in eliciting emotional and civic responses. Although engagement is primarily passive, there is a strong belief in the efficacy of hashtag activism. Social media, particularly platforms like X (formerly Twitter), serves as both a framing and mobilization tool that can spark conversations, influence attitudes, and challenge societal norms. This study recommends that NGOs, policymakers, and advocacy groups deliberately use social media platforms to sustain conversations on GBV, leveraging trending and relatable hashtags. Similarly, government agencies and civil society organizations should actively support and amplify successful GBV-related campaigns such as those already gaining traction (e.g., #SayNoToGBV, #JusticeForHer). Partnerships with influencers, celebrities, and local community leaders should be pursued to give campaigns stronger visibility and cultural resonance. Finally, social media hashtag campaigns should not remain digital-only; advocacy groups should connect online activism with offline initiatives, such as community sensitization, counseling services, legal aid, and policy lobbying.

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