

## **Influence of Social Media on Gender Role Perceptions among Female Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities**

**Otega Okinono PhD**

Department of Sociology and Criminology Studies,  
University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria

[otegaokinono@gmail.com](mailto:otegaokinono@gmail.com)

**+2348037245802**

### **Abstract**

Prior studies examined the general role of social media in political communication and social interaction, little attention has been paid to the specific impact of gender-focused digital campaigns on female university students in developing societies. This study addresses this gap by investigating the influence of social media campaigns on egalitarian gender role perceptions among female undergraduates in two Nigerian universities. The study is anchored on cultivation theory and feminist theory. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with twenty purposively selected participants (ten from the University of Abuja and ten from the University of Benin). The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that female undergraduates engage with gender-related campaigns at global, national and campus levels, and that exposure to such campaigns challenges traditional gender norms, enhances self-confidence, and encourages gender-related advocacy. However, the depth of impact is mediated by institutional climate and socio-cultural context, with students in more supportive university environments demonstrating stronger internalisation of egalitarian ideals. The study concludes that while social media campaigns have significant potential to transform gender role perceptions, their effectiveness ultimately depends on contextual support within the offline environment.

**Keywords:** Social media campaigns; gender role perceptions; egalitarianism; Nigerian universities; female undergraduates

## Introduction

Despite the significant growth of gender equality advocacy and the formal recognition of women's rights in Nigeria, traditional gender role perceptions remain deeply embedded in societal structures and cultural norms (Mensah, 2023; Adamu (2023). These patriarchal norms frequently limit women's participation in key sectors such as education, politics, and leadership, perpetuating a gender gap in opportunities and outcomes (Yewande, & Olawunmi, 2023). While various national and international bodies have championed initiatives to challenge these conventions, their impact has often been constrained by the pervasive influence of traditional beliefs perpetuated through family and community structures. The formal education system itself, while a vehicle for progress, has not been entirely successful in dismantling these long-held perceptions, leaving a clear gap in the effort to foster more egalitarian attitudes. With the emergency of social media as new approach to awareness leading to social attitudinal change there is there for the need to explore perceived changes in attitudes or beliefs regarding gender equality as a result of social media exposure.

In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for social and political change, providing an alternative public sphere for discourse. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have become pivotal in hosting campaigns and digital activism aimed at promoting new ideas about gender roles, challenging stereotypes, and advocating for women's empowerment (Chiluwa, 2023; Okorie, & Olagunju, 2025). These campaigns, characterised by hashtags, viral content, and personal narratives, have a unique ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers and reach a large, diverse audience, particularly young people. For many, social media represents a primary source of information and a space for the formation of identity and belief systems, offering a counter-narrative to the traditional

norms they encounter in their physical environments. This study is geared towards identifying the types of social media campaigns on gender equality most frequently accessed by female undergraduates

Importantly, social media exposure is not merely about passive receipt but involves active engagement, interpretation, and sometimes resistance. This relevance extends to well-being and academic contexts; research reveals that exposure to harmful content, such as cyberbullying or misleading gender representations, correlates with increased academic stress and has complex relationships with performance among female students ([Permansah et al., 2025](#)). Moreover, female youth reportedly experience higher personal exposure to social media content, leading to alterations in social behaviors and psychological states, further underscoring their vulnerability and the need for targeted study ([Osl & Rosales, 2023](#)). This approach situates female undergraduates at the nexus of technological advances, gender discourse, and educational outcomes, laying a foundation for comprehensive understanding and intervention.

While the potential of social media to influence attitudes through public campaigns is widely acknowledged, there is a limited empirical understanding of how these specific campaigns shape the gender role perceptions of female undergraduates in Nigerian universities (Omotayo, & Folorunso, 2020). Hence this study will examine the ways in which these campaigns shape participants' understanding of gender roles. Again, this demographic is particularly important because they are both active and digitally-native social media users and are at a formative stage in developing their long-term beliefs about gender roles. Most existing research has focused on the broad use of social media for political communication or general socialisation, with insufficient attention paid to the specific impact of gender-focused campaigns on this critical population (Alozie, & Akpan-Obong, 2017). Consequently, it remains unclear whether these digital advocacy efforts are effectively leading to a tangible shift in the attitudes of female undergraduates or if the exposure to such content is merely a superficial engagement that does not translate into a profound change in their deeply held beliefs. This gap in knowledge presents a significant barrier to the effective design of future digital interventions aimed at

fostering gender equality. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this lacuna by empirically investigating the influence of social media campaigns on the gender role perceptions of female undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The study will also compare perspectives between students from the University of Abuja and the University of Benin.

### **Importance of Gender-Specific Features and Content**

Social media platforms are equipped with a myriad of features that influence gender representation and expression. Hashtags, stories, visual posts, unboxing videos, and microcelebrity culture are typical modes through which gender narratives are constructed and disseminated. Hashtags provide means for collective identity formation and mobilization around gender-related causes, while stories and posts serve as personal or communal narratives reinforcing or challenging traditional gender roles.

Visual content, such as images, videos, and live streams, plays a particularly pivotal role in shaping gender discourses. The visual modality intensifies the impact of gender performance, often emphasizing physical appearance, style, and aesthetics, areas commonly laden with societal gender expectations. For example, beauty-related content and influencer marketing strategies can perpetuate stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity, while activist visual narratives often aim to disrupt these norms.

Platform affordances, the technical and structural possibilities available to users, mediate how gender can be expressed and understood in digital environments. For instance, Instagram's emphasis on images and videos alongside features like filters and photo editing tools affects self-presentation and body image, often creating conflicting spaces where empowerment and objectification coexist. Similarly, platforms like YouTube empower creators to engage in extended storytelling or activism, though such creative potentials may be simultaneously constrained by platform algorithms and monetization pressures.

Studies examining Indonesian women's activism on platforms like Instagram highlight how social media features facilitate dissemination of feminist and empowerment content among youth, thereby influencing gender perceptions and encouraging gender equality discourse ([Archer & Delmo, 2023](#)). Meanwhile, research on Korean female content creators

shows how user-generated media provides opportunities to resist traditional gender hierarchies even as platform algorithms impose limitations (Kim, 2025). Furthermore, brand representation studies, such as those analyzing luxury and non-luxury femvertising on social media, demonstrate how visual and textual content can both promote and undermine feminist ideals through gendered advertising practices (Xi Han, 2025).

### **Gender Role Perceptions**

Gender role perceptions are socially and culturally constructed beliefs about appropriate roles, responsibilities, and behaviours for men and women, shaped through family, education, media, and broader societal interactions (Heise et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2019). In Nigeria, as in many other societies, these perceptions are influenced by both deeply rooted traditional norms and rapidly expanding exposure to global ideas through digital platforms.

Early gender socialisation often occurs within the family, where parental attitudes and expectations reinforce norms that can persist into adulthood (Reardon et al., 2019). In educational contexts, these norms may either be challenged or reinforced through curricula, peer influence, and exposure to diverse role models. Research from other contexts, such as rural China and the United Arab Emirates, indicates that restrictive gender norms can limit women's opportunities, whereas egalitarian influences promote educational aspirations and leadership ambitions (Li, 2024; Shukla et al., 2023).

Media, particularly social media, plays an increasingly significant role in shaping gender role perceptions among young people. Unlike traditional media, social media offers interactive spaces where narratives can be contested, feminist campaigns can gain momentum, and young women can encounter alternative visions of gender equality (Arianto & Ramadhan, 2024). Exposure to diverse and empowered female portrayals has been shown to shift attitudes toward more egalitarian norms (Lalukota, 2023). These changes are also mirrored in education, where deliberate efforts to reduce gender stereotyping in textbooks and online educational resources contribute to reshaping perceptions (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022).

In Nigeria's university context, female undergraduates are particularly active social media users, engaging with campaigns on platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. These campaigns, often linked to global movements like #HeForShe and local activism, have the potential to challenge patriarchal norms by promoting images of women in leadership, STEM fields, and political participation. As studies in other regions have shown, adolescents in more egalitarian environments tend to develop less rigid occupational aspirations and more supportive attitudes toward gender equality (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017).

The influence of social media campaigns on gender perceptions is therefore highly relevant to Nigeria's socio-development landscape. While digital activism may help bridge the gap between traditional norms and contemporary egalitarian ideals, the extent of this impact depends on users' engagement, the credibility of sources, and the socio-cultural receptiveness of their communities (Heise et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2019). Investigating how female undergraduates perceive and respond to such campaigns provides insights into both the transformative potential of social media and the persistence of entrenched gender norms in higher education contexts.

### **Social Media Campaigns and the Shaping of Egalitarian Gender Role Perceptions**

Social media has emerged as a central space for shaping and contesting gender role perceptions among young women. For female undergraduates in Nigerian universities, platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Facebook host campaigns promoting gender equality, ranging from global initiatives like #HeForShe and #MeToo to local movements advocating women's rights. These campaigns operate within a complex digital environment that simultaneously empowers and challenges students' beliefs about egalitarian gender roles.

Research indicates that frequent social media use can reinforce narrow beauty ideals and influence self-esteem, leading to body dissatisfaction and, in some cases, unhealthy appearance-related behaviours (Dayan et al., 2024; Kim & Jeon, 2025; Sattarpanahi et al., n.d.). Upward social comparison, where women measure themselves against idealised images, often reduces self-worth and confidence (Vendemia et al., 2025; Liu, n.d.), which may undermine participation in gender advocacy. Cyberbullying and harassment, experienced by up to 40% of young women in some studies, further harm mental well-being (Dayan et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2025). Nonetheless, body-positive content and online communities have been shown to improve mood, resilience, and openness to equality narratives (Cohen et al., 2019; Primo-Simes et al., 2025; Hill & Oz, 2024).

Beyond self-image, social media frequently perpetuates gender stereotypes, portraying women through restrictive roles or objectified images (Dayan et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2025). Nigerian students may encounter tension between these representations and the egalitarian ideals promoted in campaigns. Women who are visible online, particularly those engaging in advocacy, face heightened risks of harassment and sexualisation (Rahman et al., 2025; Kim & Jeon, 2025). However, digital platforms also serve as tools for resistance, enabling women to challenge stereotypes, highlight marginalised voices, and promote inclusive identities (Hill & Oz, 2024; Primo-Simes et al., 2025).

In terms of empowerment, social media facilitates networking, entrepreneurial ventures, and activism, allowing women to mobilise support and influence policy (Rahman et al., 2025; Vendemia et al., 2025). Hashtag activism, including *#MeToo*, has proven effective in raising awareness and fostering solidarity (Dayan et al., 2024). Yet barriers such as online harassment, limited digital literacy, and unequal access to technology restrict the transformative potential of these spaces (Hill & Oz, 2024).

The effectiveness of social media campaigns in shaping egalitarian gender role perceptions is further influenced by intersectional factors such as ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status (Primo-Simes et al., 2025). For Nigerian undergraduates, cultural background and local gender norms can either reinforce or resist campaign messages. As

previous studies on educational media suggest, without deliberate reform, such platforms can sustain rather than dismantle stereotypes (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022).

Overall, the literature suggests that while social media campaigns hold promise for promoting egalitarian gender role perceptions among Nigerian female undergraduates, their impact is mediated by self-image issues, entrenched stereotypes, and structural inequalities. Maximising their influence will require media literacy initiatives, inclusive content representation, stronger protections against gender-based violence, and expanded opportunities for women's digital leadership (Cohen et al., 2019; Dayan et al., 2024; Hill & Oz, 2024; Rahman et al., 2025).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study on the influence of social media on gender role perceptions among female undergraduates in Nigeria is underpinned by two key theoretical frameworks: Cultivation Theory and Feminist Theory. These theories offer complementary perspectives for understanding how media consumption shapes individual beliefs and how these beliefs are situated within broader societal power structures.

**Cultivation Theory:** Cultivation Theory, initially developed by George Gerbner in the 1960s, posits that the more time individuals spend consuming media, the more likely they are to perceive the social world in a way that is consistent with the messages and portrayals they encounter in that media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The core premise of George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory is that long-term, heavy exposure to television and media shapes viewers' perceptions of social reality, making their beliefs more closely align with the "artificial world" presented by the media. This process is driven by the concepts of mainstreaming, where differences in perception converge for heavy viewers, and resonance, where media messages resonate more strongly with viewers' real-life experiences, reinforcing their cultivated views. This theory is highly relevant to the study of social media, which acts as a powerful and ubiquitous media environment. Unlike traditional media, social media's constant and interactive nature can lead to an even more immersive and long-term cultivation effect (Morgan et al., 2015).



In the context of this research, Cultivation Theory was used to examine how long-term exposure to gender-focused campaigns and a wide variety of user-generated content on social media platforms may cultivate specific perceptions of gender roles among female undergraduates. The theory suggests that repeated exposure to egalitarian gender role messages, such as those promoting female leadership and challenging patriarchal norms, can gradually lead to a shift in the audience's perceptions toward a more progressive view of gender. Conversely, prolonged exposure to content that reinforces traditional gender stereotypes could entrench those beliefs. Therefore, this study investigated the extent to which the media reality presented on social media aligns with the gender role perceptions held by the students. Criticisms of cultivation theory include its failure to establish clear causality, the weakness of statistically observed effects, the overlooking of individual differences in viewers, the potential for other social factors to explain observed correlations, and the lack of variation in effects by content genre. Some also argue that the methodology used in early studies was flawed, particularly in how it controlled for variables like demographics and real-world experience

**Feminist Theory:** The idea of feminist theory is credited to historical figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Christine de Pisan and modern figures such as Alison Jagger, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet. The modern formal academic and political movement gained significant traction during the 1960s and 1970s, often referred to as the second wave of feminism, with works like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) being key. Feminist Theory provides a critical framework for analysing the power dynamics embedded in gender relations and how social structures perpetuate inequality. It moves beyond simply observing media effects to critically evaluating the content and its underlying ideological message (hooks, 2014). This broad framework allows for the analysis of social media as a battleground where patriarchal structures are both challenged and reinforced.

This study employed Feminist Theory to critically examine how social media campaigns serve as a tool for challenging patriarchal structures in Nigeria. It focused on how these platforms are used to promote gender empowerment and consciousness among female

undergraduates. The theory is essential for understanding the motives behind digital activism and for assessing the effectiveness of these campaigns in dismantling traditional gender norms (Adewale & Eke, 2020). By using Feminist Theory, the research can move beyond a simple cause-and-effect analysis to explore how female undergraduates interpret and internalise these messages, and whether they are empowered to reclaim their voice and agency in both online and offline spaces. The theory is crucial for understanding the potential for social media to not only change perceptions but also to inspire tangible social change and activism.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory design to investigate the key influence of social media on the gender role perceptions of female undergraduates in Nigeria. An exploratory design is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex and subjective experiences of participants, which may not be captured by quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). This approach enabled the researcher to delve into the "how" and "why" behind the participants' perceptions, exploring the various ways in which social media content is interpreted and internalised.

The research employed a purposive sampling method to select participants who are most likely to provide rich and relevant data for the study. The criteria for selection was female undergraduates who are active users of at least two of the following social media platforms: Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok. Furthermore, participants must have encountered gender-related campaigns or discussions on these platforms, as this is central to the research objectives.

A total of 20 participants were recruited for the study, with 10 from the University of Abuja and 10 from the University of Benin. This selection of two universities from different geopolitical zones of Nigeria helped to capture a broader range of experiences and minimise the risk of geographically-specific bias, thus enhancing the study's transferability (Patton, 2015).

Data was collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This method was chosen because it allows for a flexible yet focused discussion, enabling the researcher to ask a pre-determined set of core questions while also having the freedom to probe for deeper insights based on the participants' responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted through face-to-face on campus and via online WhatsApp video calls, based on the preference and availability of each participant. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. The data collection continued until saturation – when no new idea was added to the discourse. The coding and analysis were carried out using NVivo 14 software for qualitative analysis.

## Data Analysis

### Demographic Profile of Informants

The sample for this study consisted of 20 female undergraduates recruited from the University of Abuja (n=10) and the University of Benin (n=10). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 24, with a mean age of 21.4 years. They were drawn from a variety of academic disciplines, including Law, Mass Communication, Arts, and the Social Sciences. All participants reported being active users of at least three social media platforms, with Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook being the most commonly cited. The following table and chart summarise the key demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1

#### *Demographic Profile of Informants*

<b>Informant Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Year of Study</b>	<b>Field of Study</b>	<b>Primary Social Media Platforms Used</b>	<b>Daily Social Media Usage (Hours)</b>
Inf. UniAbuja 1	20	2	Social	Instagram, Twitter (X)	4

Sciences						
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 2</b>	21	3	Arts	Instagram, TikTok	5	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 3</b>	19	1	Sciences	Facebook, WhatsApp	3	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 4</b>	22	4	Business Administrati on	Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok	6	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 5</b>	20	2	Law	Facebook, Instagram	4	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 6</b>	23	3	Education	Instagram, TikTok	5	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 7</b>	18	1	Engineering	Twitter (X), Facebook	2	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 8</b>	21	3	Social Sciences	Instagram, WhatsApp	7	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 9</b>	24	4	Arts	Twitter (X), Facebook	4	
<b>Inf. UniAbuja 10</b>	19	2	Sciences	Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok	3	
<b>Inf. UniBen 11</b>	20	2	Social Sciences	Instagram, TikTok	5	
<b>Inf. UniBen 12</b>	22	3	Arts	Facebook, Twitter (X)	6	
<b>Inf. UniBen 13</b>	21	1	Sciences	Instagram, WhatsApp	4	

<b>Inf. UniBen 14</b>	23	4	Business Administrati on	Instagram, TikTok	7
<b>Inf. UniBen 15</b>	19	2	Law	Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (X)	3
<b>Inf. UniBen 16</b>	20	3	Education	Instagram, Twitter (X)	5
<b>Inf. UniBen 17</b>	18	1	Engineering	Facebook, Instagram	2
<b>Inf. UniBen 18</b>	24	4	Social Sciences	Instagram, TikTok	8
<b>Inf. UniBen 19</b>	21	3	Arts	Twitter (X), Instagram	4
<b>Inf. UniBen 20</b>	22	2	Sciences	Instagram, TikTok, Facebook	6

## Results and Findings

The raw interview data were analysed thematically in order to address the central aim of this study, namely, to investigate the key influence of social media campaigns on egalitarian gender role perceptions among female undergraduates in Nigeria. Four major themes were generated in accordance with the research objectives. Each theme contains themes and themes, and is discussed below together with supporting quotations from the informants. Interpretation is offered prior to each set of direct quotations in order to demonstrate how the informants' voices collectively illustrate each point.

### Theme 1: Identification of Gender-Related Campaigns

This theme relates to **Objective 1** and focuses on the types of social media campaigns most frequently accessed by the students. Findings clearly indicate that female undergraduates draw on a diverse range of online campaigns, spanning the global, national and campus levels.

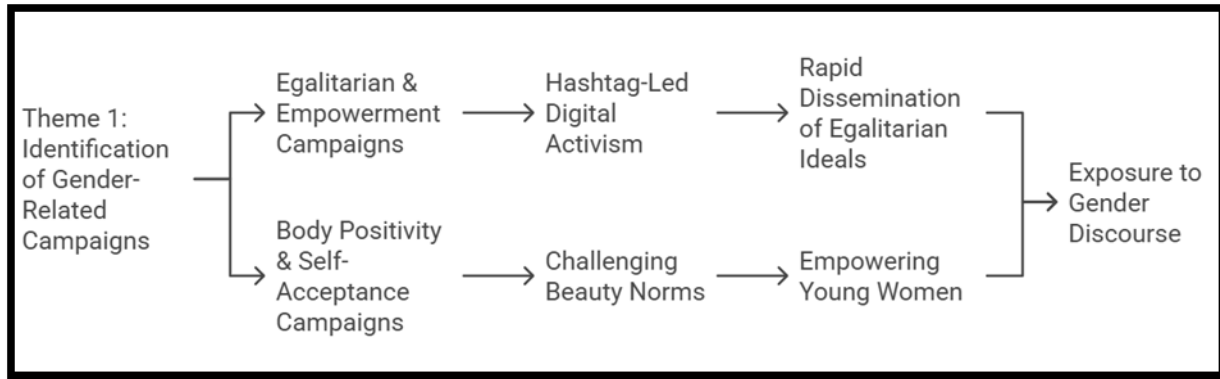


Figure 1 Social media campaigns most frequently accessed by the students

### Egalitarian & Empowerment Campaigns

#### Hashtag-Led Digital Activism

The data show that the informants engage consistently with hashtag-based campaigns on platforms such as X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok. These campaigns are considered accessible, highly visible and credible because of the perceived authority of the organisations behind them. Several informants described how the use of hashtags makes gender-related messages easier to locate and follow. For example, Inf. UniAbuja 4 observed: *"I see a lot of campaigns with hashtags like #HeForShe or #GenderEqualityNow... they are quite effective in getting a message across quickly."* This sentiment is echoed by Inf. UniBen 14, who noted that *"it's not just a Nigerian thing, it's a global thing... the hashtags make it easier to find relevant content on gender issues."* Similarly, Inf. UniBen 18 highlighted the reach of TikTok, stating *"#FeministTok is a popular one"* and identifying how short educational videos helped contextualise gender issues. Together, these quotations suggest that hashtag-led campaigns facilitate the rapid dissemination of egalitarian ideals and serve as a catalyst for exposure to gender discourse among young women.

### Body Positivity & Self-Acceptance Campaigns

#### Challenging Beauty Norms

In addition to equality campaigns, many informants reported regularly viewing body-positivity content which explicitly challenges conventional beauty standards. These campaigns appear to have a strong emotional impact and contribute to a more positive perception of self-worth. Inf. UniAbuja 8 recalled, *"I used to feel bad about my size, but seeing these campaigns and how confident these women are has changed my perception about body positivity and self-acceptance."* In a similar vein, Inf. UniBen 11 added, *"The comments are so encouraging... It makes us feel that we are not alone... It makes us feel we are enough."* These accounts suggest that campaigns which encourage self-acceptance play an important role in empowering young women and reinforcing egalitarian ideologies by undermining restrictive physical ideals.

### **Theme 2: Shaping Perceptions of Gender Roles**

The second theme relates to **Objective 2** and highlights how social media campaigns have shaped the participants' understanding of gender roles.

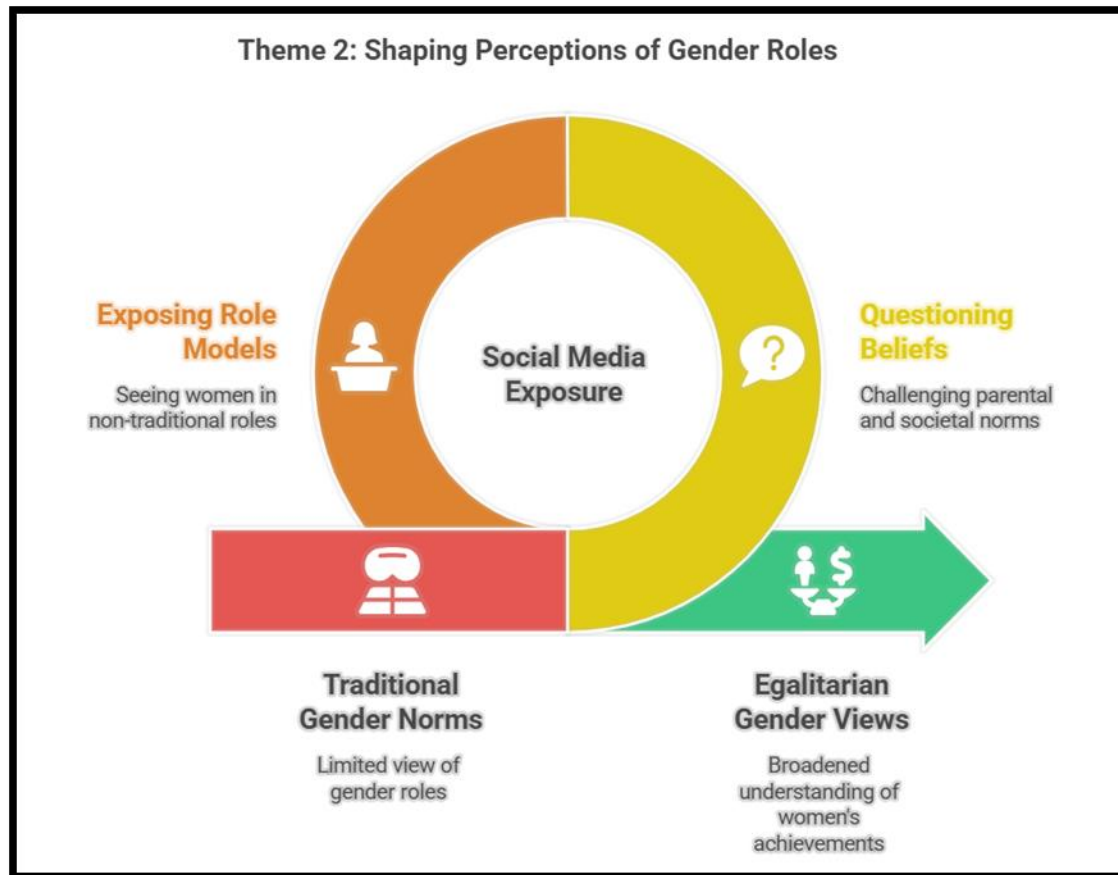


Figure 2 How social media campaigns have shaped the participants' understanding of gender roles

## Re-evaluation of Traditional Norms

### Questioning Parental and Societal Beliefs

Participants repeatedly indicated that social media exposure has prompted them to question long-held, culturally embedded expectations regarding gender. Inf. UniAbuja 1 stated that *"after seeing so many women on Instagram and Facebook doing big things in business and politics, I started to question if that was really my only destiny."* Likewise, Inf. UniBen 15 commented, *"I had to unlearn the idea that these are strictly 'women's jobs', social*



*media is challenging that.*" These experiences demonstrate how digital content functions as a counter-narrative, offering alternative models of gender that diverge from traditional expectations learned within the family and community.

## **Exposing New Role Models**

### **Seeing Women in Non-Traditional Roles**

Beyond challenging stereotypes, social media provides exposure to women actively breaking traditional barriers. Informants identified this exposure as a major influence on their developing perceptions of gender roles. For instance, Inf. UniAbuja 5 explained, *"I follow female CEOs, engineers, and even female mechanics... it makes me see that my gender doesn't limit me."* Equally, Inf. UniBen 16 observed, *"it breaks the stereotype that you can't have it all... social media shows it is possible to be a strong woman in politics and a good mother at the same time."* Taken together, these responses demonstrate that contact with empowered female role models online broadens students' understanding of what women can achieve and promotes egalitarian views of leadership and professional participation.

## **Theme 3: Perceived Changes in Attitudes and Beliefs**

This theme relates directly to **Objective 3**, capturing self-reported changes in participants' attitudes following exposure to online campaigns.

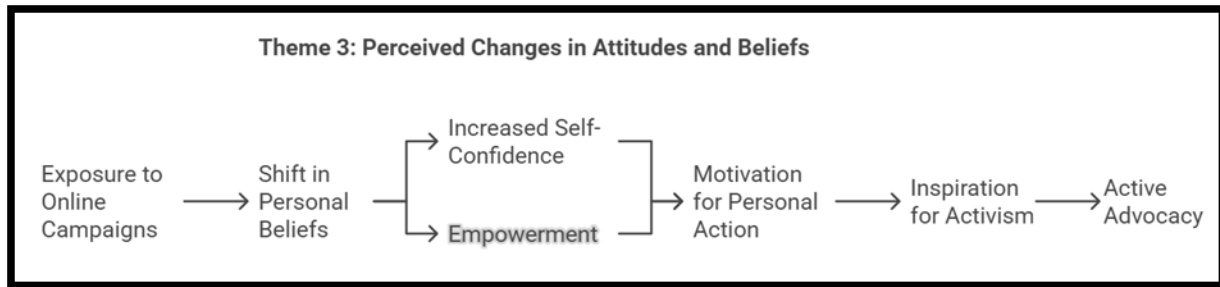


Figure 3 Self-reported changes in participants' attitudes

### Shift in Personal Beliefs

#### Increased Self-Confidence and Empowerment

The findings show that engagement with online advocacy content often leads to a rise in individual confidence and a willingness to challenge inequalities. Inf. UniAbuja 9 explained, *"Before, I was scared to talk about feminism... but social media ... encouraged me to find my own voice."* Likewise, Inf. UniBen 19 stated, *"I now believe I can be independent and still be fulfilled... I now live by that message."* These examples indicate that campaigns act not merely as information sources, but also as mechanisms of empowerment that build self-efficacy and internalised egalitarian values.

#### Motivation for Personal Action

#### Inspiration for Activism

Beyond personal confidence, a number of informants reported translating their beliefs into action. Inf. UniAbuja 7 highlighted this shift by noting, *"I now challenge my male friends when they make sexist jokes."* In a similar vein, Inf. UniBen 12 explained, *"I started sharing more educational content about gender equality... it's like a chain reaction."* These statements demonstrate that social media campaigns have moved participants from passive consumption to active advocacy, signalling deeper attitudinal change.

### Theme 4: Comparative Engagement in Gender Advocacy

The fourth theme addresses **Objective 4** by comparing how context influences campaign reception across the two universities.

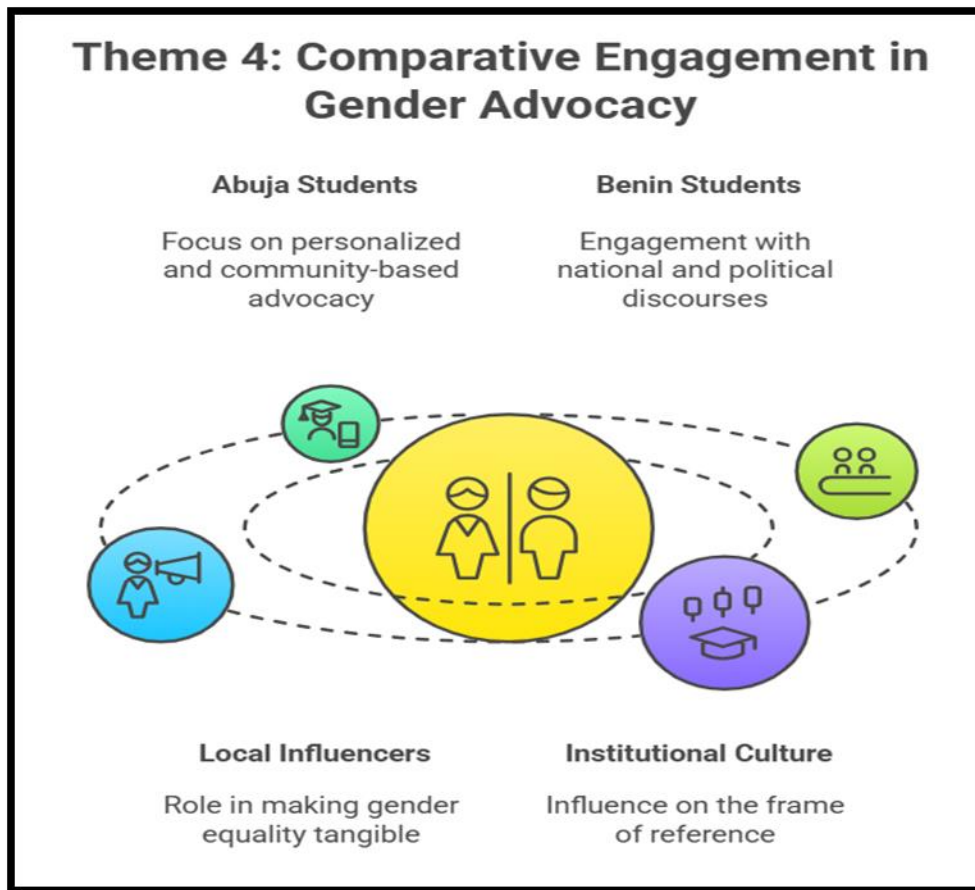


Figure 4 comparing how context influences campaign reception across the two universities

### Exposure to Local vs National Campaigns

### Campus-Specific vs Broader Activism

The analyses reveal that students in Abuja tend to interact more with personalised and community-based gender advocacy, while students in Benin report greater engagement with national and political discourses. Inf. UniAbuja 2 stated, *"A lot of the gender discussions... are through Instagram stories and WhatsApp groups. It's more personal and*

*immediate.*” Conversely, Inf. UniBen 20 emphasised broader engagement, noting, *“We discuss what happens in politics... I feel we’re more tuned into the broader Nigerian conversation.”* A similar trend is seen in Inf. UniAbuja 6’s comment that *“it is more about personal expression”*, while Inf. UniBen 17 noted that *“seeing local influencers... makes the concept of gender equality more tangible.”* These responses suggest that although both sets of students draw on online campaigns, the frame of reference, localised versus national, is influenced by institutional culture.

Overall, the findings indicate that institutional environment significantly shapes how gender equality campaigns are accessed, interpreted and internalised. Students in the University of Abuja tend to engage with intimate, peer-driven content, whereas those in the University of Benin engage more critically with national policy-focused discussions.

## Discussion of Findings

This study examined the influence of social media campaigns on egalitarian gender role perceptions among female undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Overall, the findings highlight social media as an important site of gender socialisation – offering both opportunities for transformation and spaces where traditional norms are contested and negotiated.

Firstly, students reported engaging with campaigns at global (e.g., *#HeForShe*), national (e.g., *#EndSARS*), and campus levels. This layered exposure reflects what recent research identifies as the “multi-scalar” nature of digital feminism, where global narratives are re-interpreted through local conditions and lived realities (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). Students perceived campaigns originating from recognised institutions as particularly credible, and often used the same hashtags to participate in national debates.

Secondly, social media served as a space in which long-held gender norms were questioned. Exposure to role models and counter-narratives encouraged students to reconsider traditional domestic expectations. Similar to findings by Pruchniewska (2022), participants described a transition from passive consumption to active negotiation of their

own beliefs. As reflected in the quotations from Inf. UniAbuja 1 and Inf. UniBen 15, campaign content prompted them to rethink assumptions about women's social and cultural roles.

Thirdly, and importantly, the data revealed a shift towards self-confidence and empowerment. In line with recent studies reporting that gender equality content fosters agency among young women (Sampson, 2021), participants described feeling more confident to speak out and engage in advocacy. For example, some informants reported challenging sexist comments and sharing their own equality-oriented content online, demonstrating a clear translation of awareness into everyday action.

Finally, institutional context proved to be an important moderating factor. While both universities provided access to similar content, students in the University of Abuja encountered greater support from peers and lecturers. In contrast, participants in the University of Benin frequently reported mockery or resistance from classmates. This supports Ismael and Mohammadzadeh's (2022) observation that the impact of digital gender campaigns is mediated by socio-cultural and institutional receptivity.

In sum, social media campaigns play a significant role in shaping egalitarian gender role perceptions among Nigerian female undergraduates. However, their effectiveness remains dependent on contextual factors that either reinforce or constrain the internalisation of these messages.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the influence of social media campaigns on egalitarian gender role perceptions among female undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The findings revealed that social media serves as a key arena in which young women encounter, negotiate and re-evaluate ideas about gender. Exposure to global, national, and campus-based campaigns provided participants with access to a range of egalitarian narratives that challenged

traditional gender norms, introduced new role models, and fostered a greater sense of empowerment.

Importantly, social media campaigns did not merely disseminate information but facilitated more profound attitudinal changes. Informants reported increased confidence in speaking out, greater rejection of gender stereotypes and, in some cases, the adoption of new career aspirations. However, the findings also indicate that the transformative potential of these campaigns is shaped by wider contextual factors. Institutional culture and peer responses significantly influenced how campaign messages were received and internalised. Participants from the University of Abuja tended to experience a more supportive climate for gender discourse, whereas those from the University of Benin often encountered resistance, suggesting that the impact of social media is moderated by offline socio-cultural environments.

The findings of this study indicate a clear need for targeted intervention at the institutional level. First, universities should strengthen media literacy by integrating relevant training into co-curricular initiatives so that students are able to critically evaluate gender-related content and recognise misleading or stereotypical narratives. In addition, it is important that institutions cultivate a more inclusive institutional culture through gender-responsive teaching, explicit support from academic leaders, and regular training. Such supportive environments are more likely to reinforce the egalitarian ideas promoted through social media campaigns.

Furthermore, there is a need to encourage student-led advocacy. Student societies and associations can play a major role in contextualising gender equality campaigns and producing peer-driven content that reflects local realities. This approach not only increases relevance but also facilitates the translation of belief into concrete action. At the same time, **positive representation** should be enhanced, particularly by showcasing diverse Nigerian female role models in male-dominated fields such as STEM and politics. The visibility of relatable and successful women was shown to have a strong aspirational effect and can further reinforce egalitarian gender role perceptions.

Finally, the issue of online harassment and cyberbullying must be addressed if social media campaigns are to achieve their intended impact. Institutions should establish awareness programmes and user-friendly reporting mechanisms to protect students and ensure continuous engagement with empowering gender equality discourse.

## Reference

- Adamu, R. O. (2023). Women participation in Nigerian politics: Challenges and prospects to Nigerian democracy. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS)*, 6(2), 301-314.
- Adewale, S. T., & Eke, C. O. (2020). Digital feminism and online activism: A study of women's rights campaigns in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 12(1), 1-17.
- Alozie, N. O., & Akpan-Obong, P. (2017). The digital gender divide: Confronting obstacles to women's development in Africa. *Development Policy Review*, 35(2), 137-160.
- Archer, C. & Delmo, K. M. (2023). Play is a child's work (on instagram). Queensland University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2952>
- Arianto, S. D. A., & Ramadhan, M. F. A. (2024). The changing perceptions of gender equality in media and popular culture. *Alinea: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajaran*, 4(3), 1012. <https://doi.org/10.58218/alinea.v4i3.1012>
- Chiluwa, I. (2023). Women's online advocacy campaigns for political participation in Nigeria and Ghana. In *Voice, Agency and Resistance* (pp. 7-26). Routledge.
- Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young

- women's mood and body image. *New Media & Society*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819826530>
- Dayan, F., Samadi, N., Nazari, N., Khalil, D., & Arsalan, S. (2024). The adverse effects of social media on women: A case study of risks and harmful impacts. *Sehati Journal*, 2(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.59535/sehati.v2i4.365>
- Dotti Sani, G. M., & Quaranta, M. (2017). The best is yet to come? Attitudes toward gender roles among adolescents in 36 countries. *Sex Roles*, 77(1-2), 30-45.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0698-7>
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 173-199.
- Heise, L., Greene, M. E., Opper, N., Stavropoulou, M., Harper, C., Nascimento, M., ... & Gupta, G. R. (2019). Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: Framing the challenges to health. *The Lancet*, 393(10189), 2440-2454. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30652-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30652-X)
- Hill, P., & Oz, M. (2024). Instagram ideals: College women's body image and social comparison. *First Monday*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i9.13638>
- hooks, b. (2014). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Routledge.
- Ismael, S. M. I., & Mohammadzadeh, B. (2022). Gender representation in EFL textbooks used in state schools in Northern Iraq and teachers' perceptions of gender role stereotypes. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 32(1), 49-65.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2022.2029495>
- Ismael, S. M. I., & Mohammadzadeh, B. (2022). Gender representation in EFL textbooks used in state schools in Northern Iraq and teachers' perceptions of gender role stereotypes. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 32(1), 49-65.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2022.2029495>
- Kim, H.-J., & Jeon, H.-S. (2025). Analysis of perceptions of body image, body satisfaction, and interest in cosmetic surgery based on social media usage trends. *Journal of the Korean Society of Cosmetology*, 31(1), 28-38. <https://doi.org/10.52660/jksc.2025.31.1.28>
- Kim, J. O. (2025). Platformed creativity: female chuktubers in korean football media. *None*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565251320295>
- Lalukota, S. (2023). Adolescent perception of female representation in television and its impact on adolescent views on female gender roles. *Journal of Student-Scientists' Research*, 12(3), Article 4773. <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v12i3.4773>



- Li, M. (2024). Research on the impact of gender role perceptions on women's educational opportunities in urban and rural China. *None*. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/40/20242344>
- Liu, J. (n.d.). Social media and its impact on Chinese women's body image: The effects of body comparison and motivation for social media use. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220110.040>
- Mendes, K., Ringrose, J., & Keller, J. (2019). Digital feminist activism: #MeToo and the everyday experiences of challenging rape culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 19(6), 884–888. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1661868>
- Mensah, E. O. (2023). Husband is a priority: Gender roles, patriarchy and the naming of female children in Nigeria. *Gender Issues*, 40(1), 44-64.
- Mills, J. S., Musto, S., Williams, L., & Tiggemann, M. (2018). Selfie harm: Effects on mood and body image in young women. *Body Image*, 27, 86–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.08.007>
- Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2015). Yesterday's new, tomorrow's reality: Cultivation theory and communication research. In P. J. Schulz & H. J. D. O'Keefe (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Okorie, N., & Olagunju, T. (2025). Digital Feminism, Social Media Campaigns and Violence Against Women in Nigeria: An Ethnographic Inquest. *Agenda*, 1-14.
- Omotayo, F., & Folorunso, M. B. (2020). Use of social media for political participation by youths. *JeDEM-eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government*, 12(1), 132-157.
- Osl, J. E. T. & Rosales, E. C. (2023). Personal exposure to social media and variations by gender among cuban youth. *Psychology in Russia: State of Art*. <https://doi.org/10.11621/pir.2023.0405>
- Permansah, S., Yusuf, M., Subagya, S., Muhtar, M., Indrawati, C. D. S., & Rusmana, D. (2025). Logistic regression of online risks on academic stress and performance undergraduates. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v14i2.30147>
- Primo-Simes, I., Matos-Pina, I., Coimbra, M., & Ferreira, C. (2025). Women's appearance-based social comparison and dysmorphic concern: The moderating role of body appreciation among social media users. *International Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.70070>

- Pruchniewska, U. (2022). Social media and the rethinking of gender roles: Feminist influencers as agents of change. *Social Media + Society*, 8(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221136584>
- Rahman, M. I., Sharmin, K., & Alam, J. (2025). Quiet struggles in a connected world: Social media, mental health, and coping strategies among young women in northern Bangladesh. *Mental Health and Digital Technology Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/mhdt-04-2025-0029>
- Reardon, S. F., Fahle, E. M., Kalogrides, D., Podolsky, A., & Zárate, R. C. (2019). Gender achievement gaps in US school districts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(6), 2474–2508. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219843824>
- Sampson, A. (2021). Digital activism and women's empowerment: A systematic review of online campaigns for gender equality. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(14), 2072–2089. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1807498>
- Sattarpanahi, E., Kiani, L., Hesami, S., Salehi, N., & Kavousighafi, M. (n.d.). Body image and social media: A qualitative investigation of the influence of Instagram on young women's self-perception and body satisfaction. *Psychology of Woman Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.5.2.5>
- Shukla, A., Karabchuk, T., & Neyadi, L. M. A. (2023). Gender roles perceptions and ideal number of children: Case study of Emirati youth. *Reproductive Health*, 20(1), Article 177. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-023-01677-x>
- Vendemia, M. A., Goodboy, A. K., Chiasson, R. M., & Dillow, M. R. (2025). Person-specific effects of women's social media use on body image concerns: An intensive longitudinal study of daily life. *Human Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaf001>
- Weber, A. M., Cislighi, B., Meausoone, V., Abdalla, S., Mejía-Guevara, I., Loftus, P., ... & Gupta, G. R. (2019). Gender norms and health: Insights from global survey data. *The Lancet*, 393(10189), 2455–2468. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30765-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30765-2)
- Yewande, T., & Olawunmi, A. (2023). Exploring the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on women's education in northern nigeria. *Journal of Education Review Provision*, 3(1), 1-10.