



Impact of Social Media on Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Challenges and Interventions

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Abstract

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) directed at women continues to be a serious societal issue in Nigeria, and the growing reliance on digital platforms has introduced both opportunities and risks in addressing it. This study examines how these platforms can serve as effective tools in combating GBV, focusing on their role in awareness creation, case reporting, provision of online support systems, and survivor networking. The research highlights the practical application of social media, artificial intelligence, and other digital resources in protecting victims and reinforcing anti-GBV efforts within the Nigerian context. The study relies on existing literature, reports, and practical examples of digital initiatives. Findings show that while online environments have also enabled negative practices such as cyberbullying and harassment, they remain vital in amplifying public awareness, connecting survivors, and innovating prevention and intervention strategies. Artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies demonstrate potential in detecting early warning signals and supporting rapid response, though ethical concerns, accessibility, and digital literacy disparities persist. The study calls for stronger collaboration between government agencies, technology developers, and civil society to ensure safer digital spaces, enhance digital literacy, and develop culturally sensitive AI solutions. Overall, it stresses the need to reimagine digital platforms as not only channels of communication but also as proactive tools for advocacy, protection, and social transformation in ending GBV

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, Women, Intervention , Challenges

Introduction

In Nigeria, gender-based violence (GBV) against women remains a deeply entrenched issue, cutting across age, social status, and geography (Ezeaka & Bartholomew, 2025; Airaoje et al., 2025). Historically, survivors were silenced by stigma and lacked safe avenues to report abuse or seek justice (Idonije & Asibor, 2025). However, the rise of the digital age is reshaping this narrative. With the spread of social media (Ekong et al., 2023), blogs, messaging apps, and online forums, more women are leveraging these tools for empowerment, resistance, and mutual support (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025; Boruah, 2024; Nartey, 2024). Digital platforms, which include social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, as well as messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram, function as interactive spaces for communication and content sharing (Dogbatse, 2024). They have evolved into critical avenues for advocacy (Edet & Ansa, 2023), education, and activism, particularly where mainstream institutions and media face credibility or accessibility issues (Osimen et al., 2024; Bawa, 2025). With increasing smartphone penetration and cheaper internet access, digital platforms now shape public engagement with social issues, enabling collective mobilization and demand for accountability (Kumar & Singh, 2024; Akpuokwe et al., 2024).

GBV encompasses harmful actions driven by gender, disproportionately affecting women and girls. It includes physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse, occurring in private and public spaces (Ezeaka & Bartholomew, 2025; OHENHEN, 2025). In Nigeria, GBV manifests as domestic violence, sexual harassment, forced marriages, and cyber-abuse

(OLORUNPOMI et al., 2025). Combating it requires multi-dimensional strategies, and digital platforms now play an increasingly vital role in this effort (Ekeh et al., 2025). These platforms disrupt the isolation survivors often experience, enabling them to share their stories in empowering ways (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025). Online activism has also challenged entrenched cultural norms, with movements like #ArewaMeToo and #SayNoToRape gaining significant momentum and sparking widespread debate on consent, justice, and accountability (Nartey, 2024; Osaro & Tagbo, 2025). These campaigns pressured institutions and policymakers to act, demonstrating how collective digital voices can catalyze real-world change (Dogbatse, 2024).

Digital resources also connect survivors with essential services, as advocacy organizations use apps and WhatsApp groups to offer legal advice, psychological support, and urgent assistance (Ekeh et al., 2025). Groups such as Stand to End Rape (STER) and the Mirabel Centre provide safe online platforms for confidential help (Airaoje et al., 2025). In rural areas, where physical resources are scarce, digital connections have become lifelines, bringing education, solidarity, and care directly to communities (Ebong et al., 2024; Akpuokwe et al., 2024). Yet, challenges remain, including cyber-harassment and safety concerns. Despite these risks, the role of digital platforms in tackling GBV is undeniable (Kavishe, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2024). They offer spaces where women mobilize, educate, and advocate for systemic change, while also nurturing a culture that validates and supports survivors (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025; Osimen et al., 2024). With Nigeria's digital landscape expanding, so does the potential to utilize these platforms as enduring tools against GBV (Ekeh et al., 2025; Osaro & Tagbo, 2025).

This study investigates how digital platforms are effectively used in addressing GBV in Nigeria. It focuses on the roles of social media, mobile applications (Edet et al., 2024), and advocacy networks in empowering women, raising awareness, broadening access to services, and influencing policy reforms (Ekong et al., 2024). Ultimately, it argues that these platforms are more than communication tools—they are drivers of justice, accountability, and long-term systemic transformation.

Types of Gender-Based Violence

There are five categories of GBV including: Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Emotional and Psychological Violence, Social Economic Violence, and Harmful Traditional Practices.

(a) Sexual Violence

Any completed or attempted sexual act against a person's will or against a person unable to give consent. Forms of sexual violence include:

- **Rape:** The non-consensual penetration of any part of the body (vagina, anus or mouth) of the survivor with a sexual organ, or with any object or any other part of the body by force, threat of force, environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent. Rape can be perpetrated by any person in a position of power, authority and control, including a husband, intimate partner or caregiver. Rape can result in pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, injuries and emotional trauma.

Special considerations: It is important to maintain confidentiality and support the survivor's decisions. Support can be provided so survivors do not get pregnant (emergency

contraception pills within 20 hours or 5 days of the rape): and do not contract HIV (HIV prophylaxis within 72 hours or three days). Mapping of injuries on the body and medical certificates can support legal processes. Explain any policies related to the health system and justice system such as any mandatory reporting laws, if applicable in your context. Obtain survivor consent before any referrals. Jointly develop a safety plan if the survivor remains in danger from the perpetrator or others. Identify coping plans and social support as well. Key message for the survivor: rape is never the fault of the survivor.

- **Sexual Assault:** Any unwanted, non-consensual sexual contact that does not include penetration. Examples include forced or unwanted kissing, fondling, unwanted touching of a person's body, touching genital areas with body parts or other objects without penetration, attempted rape, and female genital mutilation/cutting. Sexual assault can be perpetrated by any person in a position of power, authority and control, including husband, intimate partner or caregiver.
- **Child Sexual Abuse (defilement, incest):** Any act where a child is used for sexual gratification including any sexual relations/interactions with a child. Child sexual abuse can be perpetrated by someone the child trusts, including a parent, sibling, extended family member, friend or stranger, teacher, elder, leader or any other caregiver, anyone in a position of power, authority, and control over a child. Special considerations: Maintain discretion over the survivor's information to mitigate stigma against the child. Support the child to identify a safe adult to ensure there is no risk of further abuse. Report to your supervisor to follow child protection procedures in country. Support with health and other referrals as necessary. Use age appropriate Caring for Child Survivors (see resources) case management interventions to support the child and the chosen caregiver.
- **Forced Sodomy / Anal Rape** This is the forced or coerced anal penetration or intercourse, usually male to male or male to female. Forced sodomy/anal rape can be perpetrated by any person in a position of power, authority, and control. Special considerations: Maintain confidentiality and support the survivor decisions. Male and female survivors are entitled to equal support. Support can be provided to prevent HIV (HIV prophylaxis within 72 hours). Mapping of Injuries on the body and medical certificates can support legal processes. Explain any policies related to the health system and justice system such as any mandatory reporting laws, if applicable in your context. Jointly develop a safety plan if the survivor remains in danger from the perpetrator or others. Key message: rape is never the fault of the survivor.
- **Sexual Exploitation:** Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes. This includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Sexual exploitation can be perpetrated by anyone in a position of power, authority, influence, or control, including humanitarian aid workers, soldiers/officials at checkpoints, teachers, smugglers, or trafficking networks. Special considerations: Humanitarian aid workers are mandatory reporters. For sexual exploitation and abuse cases involving UN and NGO workers. Report to your supervisor after telling the survivor. A report may trigger a confidential investigation. Jointly develop a safety plan with the survivor and assist her through any process.
- **Forced Prostitution:** This is forced or coerced sex in exchange for material resources, services and assistance, usually targeting highly vulnerable women or girls unable to meet

basic human needs for themselves and/or their children.

- **Forced prostitution** can be perpetrated by any person in a privileged position, in possession of money or control of material resources and services, perceived as powerful, including humanitarian aid workers.

Special considerations: Maintain confidentiality and support survivor decisions, support with safety plan. If abuse by humanitarian workers, report to supervisor with survivor knowledge.

- **Sexual Harassment:** This includes any unwanted, unwelcomed sexual comments, advances, or requests for sexual favors that humiliate, threaten, or embarrass a person. It usually involves a continuous pattern of harassment ranging from uninvited touching, sexist remarks and or/jokes and verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by anyone, employers, supervisors or colleagues, anyone in a position of power, authority, or control, Special considerations: Maintain confidentiality and support survivor decisions. Jointly develop a safety plan with the survivor.

- **Physical Violence:** An act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. This form of violence usually occurs in intimate partner relationships. It can include forms of violence or neglectful acts that cause physical pain or injury. Examples include; hitting, slapping, choking, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair pulling, burning, strangulation, cutting, shooting or use of any weapons. This type of abuse also includes forced pregnancy, forced abortion, knowingly transferring sexually transmitted infections, and denial of medical care

Special considerations: Maintain confidentiality and support survivor decisions. Support the survivor by jointly developing an intimate partner safety plan and facilitating needed health referrals. Security should stop ACTIVE conflict. If the fighting is not occurring now, do not approach the survivor or perpetrator without the consent of the survivor. Do not get involved in mediation. Key message: the use of violence in a relationship is not acceptable under any circumstances. The survivor is not at fault.

- (b) **Emotional and Psychological Violence:** This is the infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. This includes violence perpetrated in a non-physical manner usually by an intimate partner or person in a position of authority that is intended to frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound. Forms of emotional or psychological violence include:

- **Verbal Abuse or Humiliation:** This is non-sexual verbal abuse that is insulting, degrading, demeaning; compelling the survivor to engage in humiliating acts, whether in public or private: denying basic expenses for family survival; or undermining self-worth and self-esteem. Verbal abuse or humiliation can be perpetrated by anyone in a position of power and control; often perpetrated by intimate partners or family members in a position of authority.

Special considerations: Support the survivor emotionally and jointly develop a safety plan. Go through the power and control wheel with survivors of Intimate partner violence.

- **Psychological Abuse:** Elements of psychological abuse include, but are not limited to, causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, survivor, children, or her

family or friends: destruction of pets, property or cherished items: or forcing isolation from her family, friends, or school and/or work. Psychological abuse can be perpetrated by an intimate partner or relative. Special considerations: Support emotionally and safety plan: go through the power and control wheel with survivors of Intimate partner violence.

■ **Confinement**

This includes isolating a person from friends/family, restricting movement. Deprivation of liberty or restriction of the right to free movement. Confinement can be perpetrated by anyone in a position of power and control; often perpetrated by spouses, intimate partners or family members in a position of authority.

Special considerations: Support emotionally and safety plan: go through the power and control wheel with survivors of Intimate partner violence. Social or Economic Violence This includes violence perpetrated in a non-physical manner (usually by an intimate partner) or embedded in laws and policies that deny women and girls access to income/earnings and social opportunities for advancement. Other examples include: discrimination and/or denial of opportunities. Services or resources: exclusion; denial of access to education, health assistance or remunerated employment: or denial of property rights. Discrimination and/or denial of services can be perpetrated by family members, society, institutions and organizations, government actors. Special considerations Support the survivor emotionally and advocate with survivor consent. Forms of emotional or social or economic violence include:

- **Economic Abuse:** This form of violence includes making or attempting to make the survivor financially dependent by maintaining control over financial resources. Withholding access to money, or forbidding participation in school or employment opportunities. Economic abuse can be perpetrated by intimate partners, spouses Special considerations Support emotionally and safety plan: go through the power and control wheel with survivors of Intimate partner violence.



Literature Review

This section examines scholarly and advocacy-based literature on the intersection of GBV and digital technologies, with an emphasis on the Nigerian context. It explores how

digital platforms have evolved as critical instruments for raising awareness, supporting survivors, improving reporting systems, and fostering communities. Evidence from prior studies, advocacy initiatives, and campaign analyses underscores the transformative role of online spaces in disrupting silence, empowering victims, and enabling collective mobilization across both urban and rural environments.

Digital Platforms in Curbing Gender-Based Violence

Digital platforms have emerged as essential tools in addressing GBV, particularly in countries like Nigeria where traditional systems often fail to provide adequate protection or justice (Airaoje et al., 2025; Ezeaka & Bartholomew, 2025). They create avenues for awareness campaigns, confidential reporting, survivor support, and collective mobilization (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025). During global emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic (Ekong et al., 2022), digital technology proved vital in sustaining advocacy and support efforts. These tools empower individuals and communities, dismantle long-standing silences, and expand public discourse while enhancing accountability (Dogbatse, 2024; Kavishe, 2024). Social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become powerful tools for generating awareness and encouraging open discussions about GBV (Osaro & Tagbo, 2025; Nartey, 2024). Campaigns like #SayNoToRape and #ArewaMeToo sparked nationwide debate and compelled recognition of the widespread nature of gender violence (Bawa, 2025; Oyekanmi & Ojo, 2024). By circulating survivor stories, visuals, and advocacy content, these campaigns have shifted narratives, challenged stereotypes, and mainstreamed GBV conversations (Kumar & Singh, 2024). They particularly resonate with younger populations, encouraging activism and broader engagement (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025). One of the most significant contributions of digital platforms lies in virtual support for survivors (Ekeh et al., 2025). Nigerian organizations such as STER and the Mirabel Centre provide legal advice, counseling, and referrals through mobile apps, WhatsApp groups, and websites (Airaoje et al., 2025; Dogbatse, 2024). These digital services allow discreet, timely access to help (Ekong et al., 2024), proving especially useful during crises like COVID-19 lockdowns (Osimen et al., 2024). They effectively bridge critical service gaps in areas lacking infrastructure. Technology has also strengthened reporting mechanisms, offering survivors safer and sometimes anonymous ways to document incidents (Kavishe, 2024; Idonije & Asibor, 2025). Web portals, mobile tools, and digital hotlines facilitate efficient reporting and case tracking (Osaro & Tagbo, 2025). Viral social media exposure of certain cases has compelled responses from law enforcement and government bodies, demonstrating digital activism's influence on legal mobilization and accountability (OLORUNPOMI et al., 2025; OHENHEN, 2025). Digital platforms foster solidarity by connecting survivors, advocates, and allies in safe online communities (Okorie & Olagunju, 2025; Bawa, 2025). Forums, groups, and networks reduce stigma and isolation by validating shared experiences (Akpuokwe et al., 2024). This sense of community strengthens advocacy, enables peer-to-peer support, and builds resilience. More than therapeutic spaces, these networks act as organizing hubs for petitions, protests, and sustained activism against GBV (Nartey, 2024; Edet et al., 2024).

Digital Platforms in Addressing GBV

Ekeaka et al. (2025) emphasized communication's role in GBV prevention, showing

that campaigns like #MeToo and #SayNoToRape influence public awareness. However, their focus was largely on traditional media, leaving digital platforms less explored. Okorie & Olagunju (2025) used social marketing theory to study feminist digital campaigns, finding social media highly effective for spreading feminist ideals. Limitations included a small sample and exclusion of women lacking internet access, raising concerns about generalization. Kumar & Singh (2024) highlighted social media's dual nature—supportive but also enabling harassment. Their broad analysis lacked deeper exploration of these opposing dynamics. Kavishe (2024), studying Tanzanian students, showed digital platforms increase GBV risks by promoting anonymity and extending aggression (Edet et al., 2024). Yet, the study focused more on risks than opportunities for counteraction. Ekeh et al. (2025) proposed AI-driven predictive systems to detect GBV patterns, providing a proactive approach. While promising, this model faces ethical and cultural challenges regarding data use.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative review approach, drawing primarily on existing scholarly work, policy documents, NGO reports, and digital advocacy resources that examine the role of digital platforms in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. A systematic process was followed to identify and select relevant sources published within the last five years. Academic databases including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and JSTOR were searched using keywords such as *“gender-based violence,” “digital platforms,” “social media campaigns,” “digital platforms on gender-based violence,” “GBV,”* and *“women’s rights in Nigeria.”* The review placed particular emphasis on literature that highlights both the positive impacts of digital technologies—such as awareness creation, reporting, survivor support, and solidarity—as well as their negative consequences, including online harassment and cyberbullying. Each selected work was examined critically to identify recurring themes, major findings, and research gaps.

This methodology was deliberately chosen to provide a broad yet focused perspective on how digital platforms are being leveraged to combat GBV. It not only explores success stories but also assesses how these same platforms may unintentionally fuel violence by providing anonymity to abusers or exposing survivors to harmful content. By comparing a range of scholarly viewpoints and practical interventions, the review builds a nuanced understanding of how these technologies operate within the Nigerian context, while also drawing lessons from global practices where relevant. Ultimately, this approach creates a comprehensive foundation for evaluating the opportunities and limitations of digital interventions in the fight against GBV.

Results

The review highlights several key findings that demonstrate the critical role of technology—particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML)—in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. These technologies have enabled the creation of digital systems capable of predicting risks, detecting patterns of abuse, and supporting proactive interventions. For example, machine learning models are being applied to analyze data trends and identify early warning signals, paving the way for faster responses to GBV cases.

Table 2 below summarizes the central contributions of selected authors:

Table 2: Key Focus of Different Authors on GBV

Author	Key Focus
Ekeaka et al., 2025	Importance of communication strategies (e.g., campaigns like #SayNoToRape) in GBV prevention and intervention
Okorie & Olagunji, 2025	Influence of digital feminism and social media activism in addressing violence against women
Kumar & Singh, 2024	Dual nature of social media in amplifying and addressing GBV
Kavishe, 2024	Impact of digital technology in worsening online GBV among female students
Ekeh et al., 2025	Role of data analytics and ML in predicting GBV trends and informing policy

Alongside AI-driven tools, statistical methods have been widely used to analyze the scope, prevalence, and effects of GBV on women's lives. These findings help shape policies and targeted interventions. Overall, digital technologies are proving indispensable not only for advocacy but also for developing practical, data-driven solutions that strengthen the fight against GBV in Nigeria

At the same time, the review emphasizes the dual nature of digital platforms. Table 3 shows how different studies have examined both the strengths and shortcomings of these technologies:

Table 3: Key Focus and Limitations

Author	Key Focus	Limitations	Amp	Addr
Ekeaka et al., 2025	Communication strategies in prevention & intervention	Limited to media campaigns (#SayNoToRape, #MeToo); less focus on wider digital platforms	✗	✓
Okorie & Olagunji, 2025	Social media & digital feminism	Small dataset; limited participation; excluded women without internet access	✗	✓
Kumar & Singh, 2024	Dual role of social media	Broad scope limited deeper analysis of positive/negative aspects	✓	✓
Kavishe, 2024	Online GBV students	among Focused only on awareness among students, not broader interventions	✓	✗
Ekeh et al., 2025	AI & ML in Prevention	GBV Constrained by ethical concerns and cultural boundaries	✗	✓

Key: "Amp" = amplification of GBV; "Addr" = addressing GBV.

These findings reinforce that while platforms such as Twitter and Facebook amplify advocacy, solidarity, and awareness, they can also facilitate cyber abuse, trolling, and harassment. Campaigns like #MeToo and #SayNoToRape highlight the potential of digital

spaces to reshape public discourse, but issues of access, ethics, and inequality continue to limit their effectiveness. AI and ML innovations add new possibilities for proactive prevention, though they must be applied with sensitivity to Nigeria's cultural and ethical realities.

Discussion

The results confirm that digital platforms play a complex and multi-dimensional role in addressing GBV in Nigeria. On the one hand, they provide spaces for advocacy, education, survivor solidarity, and public mobilization. Social media campaigns have not only raised awareness but also pressured government institutions and law enforcement agencies to take action. Survivors have found safe online communities where they can share experiences, access legal advice, and seek psychological support. On the other hand, these same platforms can be weaponized to perpetuate violence. Online harassment, doxxing, trolling, and cyberbullying are increasingly common, particularly against women who publicly speak out about GBV. The anonymity and reach of digital technologies embolden perpetrators, making it difficult for survivors to escape retraumatization. Additionally, the digital divide in Nigeria especially between urban and rural areas—means that many women still cannot access these tools, limiting the inclusivity of online interventions. The growing use of artificial intelligence and machine learning offers new opportunities. AI systems can detect abusive language, monitor harmful online behavior, and even predict high-risk situations for quicker interventions. These innovations can support both law enforcement and advocacy organizations. However, the discussion highlights the need for ethical safeguards to avoid reinforcing bias or violating cultural sensitivities. The review reveals a central paradox: digital platforms can be both a solution and a problem in combating GBV. Their effectiveness depends heavily on how they are managed, regulated, and made accessible to marginalized groups.

Recommendations

The findings of this review show that while digital platforms hold great promise in combating gender-based violence (GBV), their effectiveness depends on deliberate, coordinated, and inclusive action. To maximize their positive impact, the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, and technology companies must work in close partnership to ensure that these platforms are used safely, ethically, and effectively.

- First, there is a need for stronger regulatory frameworks and clear policies that promote digital safety while protecting the rights of users, particularly women who are disproportionately affected by online abuse. Such policies should address harassment, cyberbullying, and the misuse of anonymity online, ensuring that survivors feel secure when seeking support or sharing their experiences.
- Second, digital literacy programs should be expanded to empower women and girls with the knowledge and skills to navigate online spaces responsibly. This includes training on recognizing abusive behavior, reporting mechanisms, safeguarding personal information, and accessing online support services. By strengthening digital confidence and awareness, women are better positioned to use these tools for advocacy, solidarity, and personal protection.
- Third, investment in artificial intelligence and data-driven tools should be prioritized to enhance GBV prevention and response. Culturally sensitive AI models tailored to the Nigerian context can be designed to monitor harmful content, detect threats early, and

provide real-time alerts to relevant authorities or support organizations. At the same time, these technologies must be transparent, ethical, and accountable to avoid reinforcing existing gender biases or infringing on user rights.

- Finally, bridging the digital divide remains essential. Access to affordable internet services and digital technologies must be expanded to rural and underserved communities where women are often excluded from online advocacy and protection mechanisms. By making digital platforms more inclusive, interventions will not only become more equitable but also more impactful in addressing GBV

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