Chapter 6
Utilisation of Social Media for Child Abuse Prevention in Nigeria

Desmond Onyemechi Okocha

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5070-280X
Bingham University, Nigeria

Sienne Ozioma Okpor
Bingham University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of social media on child abuse prevention in Nigeria. The objectives were to discover the level of cognizance social media has created on the issue of child abuse, child abuse prevention, and if social media is really a tool in preventing child abuse in Nigeria. The study was anchored on technology determinism theory. Using the purposive sampling technique, 30 discussants were selected for focus group discussion on the subject matter. The study found that social media alone is not effective enough in preventing child abuse in Nigeria. Research findings further revealed that although the information given about child abuse on social media platforms are believable and acceptable, there has been no significant influence of social media on child abuse prevention in Nigeria. To this end, the researcher recommended that there should be public enlightenment programs that reach the grassroots to create public awareness on child abuse prevention, its effects on children, and the legal consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Globally it is estimated that up to 1 billion children, ages 2-17 years old, have experienced different forms of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse over the last year (Hillis, Mercy, Amobi, and Kress, 2016). In 1979, the United Nations declared the year as the 'international year of the child' and went ahead to develop a list of children's rights. Among the rights as articulated by the United Nations are that every

child is entitled to the rights to be loved and understood, to be provided with adequate food and healthcare, free education, play, and an identity, however many people are not aware or rather nothing is done to offenders that is why child abuse is still very rampant in most countries of the world including Nigeria.

In Nigeria today, many children are being used to beg for alms, exposing them to harmful and inhuman circumstances at incredibly early ages. The Child Right Acts of 2003 was made to end the menace but sadly, it has not been effectively enforced by our legal system. The lapses are clearly observable by the number of children that are seen on the streets hawking items and being exposed to dangers of all kinds and to assume that they are responsible for themselves at that tender and vulnerable age calls for serious concerns. With the number of children on the streets begging or hawking instead of going to school, one still wonders if these children are the ones, we call leaders of tomorrow. It is obvious that Parents/guardians and relatives of these children most times are not aware of the legal implications of their actions, Section 30 (3) of the Child's Right Act provides that a person who contradicts the provisions of Subsection (1) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of ten years. Parents/guardians of such children have disrespected the law and yet the legal system has failed to enforce the required punishment to end this menace.

The effects of child abuse may include increased fear, guilt, self-blame, distrust of adults or difficulty in forming relationships with others, mental health disorders, learning disorders, drug, and alcohol abuse, etc. Despite the attention and the interest, it has won from the media, the hassle nonetheless has remained a largely forgotten area wherein proper steps that may be taken to fight it hasn't been agreed upon (Carballo, 1995).

Anuoluwapo (2018) expressed that the world of Information and Communication Technology is yet to experience something more phenomenal than social media. She added that social media has indeed become a trend in media study such that many researchers have turned towards researching and assessing its influence and impact on society. This is so as several decades saw the dominance of the traditional media in society especially in exercising the responsibility of information, education, and entertainment. But with the turn of events in the new century, the evolution of technology and the ubiquitous power of the information and communication technology (ICT) has converged the world so much so that Marshall McLuhan's global village philosophy is no longer a mere expression but a startling reality. (Ikpe & Olise, 2010) have observed that "social media are new communication technologies which are used as means of information dissemination to diverse audiences without time crunch, space or distance". With social media, one can easily send or receive information to or from anyone and at any time regardless of geographical location.

In recent times there has been lots of social media campaigns directed towards child abuse, these campaigns are to increase the public knowledge of child's rights and child's abuse, to influence people's attitudes towards children positively, and to change behaviors that contribute to the problems of child abuse in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Child abuse has become one of the social epidemics disturbing the global society in Nigeria. UNICEF reported in 2015 that six out of ten children in Nigeria have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse before the age of eighteen with half experiencing physical violence. Despite all of the provisions of extant legal guidelines, many Nigerian children are still subjected to various forms of child abuse

even while with parents and guardians. Social media platforms especially Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have been in the forefront of the efforts to combat this social malaise. Thus, this study sets out to evaluate the influence of these social media campaigns at preventing child abuse.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.   To evaluate the influence of social media on child abuse prevention
2.   To find out the level of awareness created by social media on the issue of child abuse.
3.   To determine the level of awareness created by social media on the issue of child abuse prevention in Nigeria

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.   What is the influence of social media on child abuse prevention?
2.   What is the level of awareness created by social media on the issue of child abuse?
3.   What the level of awareness created by social media on the issue of child abuse prevention in Nigeria?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research work is anchored on technological determinism theory. Technological Determinism theory believes that media technology affects how people in the society think, feel, and even act. The idea essentially explains that we act the manner we do due to the messages we via the contemporary available technology. The theory was proposed by Marshal McLuhan, a Canadian communication scholar who believed that the new media technologies in communication would soon determine social and cultural changes in the society and end up turning the world into a global village. He believed that the socio-political, economic, and cultural changes are inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology and that the new media would soon have an impact on societal modifications. This study adopts technological determinism theory because it supports the belief that the new media has an influence/impact in our lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Abuse - An Overview

Over the years, the term child abuse has been discussed and defined by many researchers and authors. the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes a child as a young human who is not yet an adult. Child abuse or child maltreatment is the physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child and can occur in a child's

home, or in the organizations, schools, or communities the child interacts with. According to Owolabi (2012), the legally and acceptable definition of a "child" is a minor, a person younger than the age of majority. As cited in (Umobong, 2010), the African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) defines child abuse as "the intentional, unintentional, or well intentional acts which endangers the physical health, emotional, moral and the educational welfare of a child. Child abuse can be seen as any act of omission or commission, physical or psychological mistreatment or neglect of a child by its parents, guardians, caregiver, or other adults that may endanger the child's physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse is also seen as the "physical or emotional mistreatment and neglect of children or the sexual exploitation in circumstances for which the parents can be held responsible through acts of commission or omission" (Doye, 1990).

According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDA, 2006) reported by Gelles (2009) more than 900,000 children in the United States suffer severe injury, some 1,000 to 2,000 children die because of abuse and those who survive often suffer emotional trauma that may take long for the bruises to be healed. The statistics of abused children have continued to increase over the years and yet nothing has been done by the government to end this menace. Child abuse will in the long run affect the economy of the nation as it continues to have long term effects on children.

Types of Child Abuse

The World Health Organization in 2006 identified four types of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can be defined as any deliberate act to harm a child thereby causing injury, pain or trauma to a child by way of physical contact. Physical abuse sometimes involves more than one abuser, and more than one victim. Sometimes, it comes in form of beating, Punching, Kicking, Shaking, Suffocating, Pinching, Biting, Scalding, or burning someone. Physical abuse is sometimes prevalent in homes, schools, and sometimes in public places.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be in from of verbal abuse or consistent criticism, intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to ever be pleased sometimes by parents or guardians. Emotional abuse sometimes involves Blaming, shaming, and manipulating. At an early age, the child's self-confidence and emotional well-being is altered and even diminished resulting to an emotionally abused child. Emotionally abused children sometimes grow to become detached from friends and family.

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse, also called child molestation, is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation and forcefully has sexual intercourse with a child. This is one of the worst forms of child abuse as it most times leaves children depressed and leaves a lifelong emotional scar on them. Some children never get to recover from this act, sometimes they develop serious

fear an even hatred for the gender. Child sexual abuse can occur anywhere sometimes its home, school, church, mosques, relatives house etc. sexual abuse mostly has adverse effects on children, it includes depression, Post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and sometimes high sexual drive.

Neglect

Cambridge English dictionary defines neglect as to not give enough care or attention to people or things that are your responsibility. Neglect in the context of child abuse simply means depriving a child of the basic needs and leaving the welfare of the child for the child. Child neglect is one of the prevalent forms of child abuse and it is very common in Nigeria. Many parents in Nigeria give birth to children and send them to beg or to live with relatives, why give birth these children if you cannot take care of them?

Child Marriage

Child marriage is a formal or informal union between anyone under 18 with an individual. Majority of child marriages in Nigeria are the ones between a girl and man. Child marriage infringes the rights of children and has long term effects for children who're pressured into the act. For girls, in addition to post mental stress disorder (Ptsd), lack of access to education and career opportunities, early pregnancy and childbirth, these young girls are constantly exposed to VVF (Vestico Vaginal Fistula). This lethal sickness has taken, and it is nonetheless still taking the lives of many girls. The report by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) revealed that over 0.4 million women suffer from obstetric Fistula in Nigeria, ranking the country as the highest prevalence of obstetric fistula in the world. This brings us to another question, which is, how well are the Child's Right Acts being enforced. The reality on ground is that our legal system seems to aid this menace called Child Abuse as the wrath of the law seems to only be regarded in books and movies than in its implementation in Nigeria. There are penalties for offenders of the laws in Nigeria, why are these child abuse perpetuators not being dealt with? Why has the government chosen to be quiet? There is a need for the Nigerian Government to indulge the legal system to implement enacted laws as it seems like the only solution to changing the narratives of child abuse in Nigeria.

Child Abuse Cases in Nigeria

Nigerian children continue to suffer in the hands of so-called ward/guardians (Cynthia, 2017) disclosed in her article on child abuse cases that made it to court that Kingsley Philip was caught fingering his neighbors five-year-old daughter in his apartment in Lagos, he was charged too court and he pleaded not guilty. She continued, Magaji Dansele allegedly raped his baby. He drugged his new wife in order to be able to carry out the act while she slept at their apartment in Musawa, Katsina State. Dansale tried to convince his wife that pile was the culprit, but a visit to the hospital proved otherwise, making him the prime suspect in the baby's rape. it is disheartening to note that some of children are molested and sexually assaulted by their parents.

Nelson @kanuelsonmirag on twitter shared that he was abused at five, though he did not understand what was going on. "When I was 4 or 5, our neighbor's daughter who was already more than 30 at that time would bring me inside her room and strip me, she would carry me on top of herself and be pushing me up and down, I didn't know much about what she was doing to me. It continued for years; eventually

told my mom and she beat me up so much, I then kept quiet. and she continued abusing me till we relocated. Those past events affected my emotions, sexual life, and relationships generally, but I thank God things are getting better,". Recently, a horrendous case of child abuse was just uncovered in Kebbi state, a 10-year-old boy was found in a pen with domestic animals and after some interrogation, it was discovered that he had been there for two years and had been surviving on food remnants left by the animals.

In Nigeria today, it is obvious that many children are subjected to sexual assault, the above stories are to mention but a few out of the millions of child abuse cases in Nigeria. There is need now than ever before, to put in place great awareness and effective legal protection for the abused children and also implement policies that ensures that perpetuators of these horrible acts are brought to book. It is strongly believed that the legal system will have a far more reaching effect if proper measures are put in place and the enforcement of appropriate laws.

Social Media as a Tool for Child Abuse Prevention

In recent times, social media has proven to be key for disseminating information and enlightening the public about the importance of preventing child abuse and neglect. Soola (1998) describes social media as communication technologies with impressive array of sophistication, increasing efficiency, reliability, speed, accuracy, cheapness, and portability. He observed that social media provides near limitless possibilities of increasing the quantity and enhancing the quality, speed, and availability of information in a complex but increasingly interdependent world. Social media campaigns have been shown to increase awareness and knowledge of abuse prevention. These campaigns may also have an effect on primary prevention behaviors if the message is reinforced over time (Darkness to Light, 2012; Rheingold, et al, 2007).

Social Media has rapidly grown in importance as a forum for social activism in its different forms in Nigeria. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, and Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Tik Tok have provided new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in contemporary issues and challenges. As of January 2021, Nigeria had approximately 33 million active social media users. It is a tool that has proven to be effective at reaching a global audience and therefore exerts tremendous influence on behavioral changes. this statement is in total alignment with the views of Nwanchor and Nkwuda (2021: 40) that "media of all forms and sizes have primary roles to inform, educate, sensitize and entertain the masses and bring to the knowledge of the public what goes on in all areas of life in the right dosages and proportion".

Many NGOs like StopS-CAN, Feedthekidsng, Hfucharity, YobeMeToo, and hskinitiative in Nigeria today utilize social media campaigns in their vision to protect children from abuse. These NGOs have come up with different means to create awareness of child abuse prevention in Nigeria. the likes of #heretohelppod and WACOL have been hosting online campaigns on twitter though the use of slides, fliers, podcasts and even through twitter spaces.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts the qualitative research approach, this can be defined as a research method that focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication. Data was generated using primary and secondary sources. Using the purposive sampling technique, 30 discussants (identified as discussant 1 to 30) were selected for focus group discussion on the subject matter which held on What-

sApp. Discussions were collated and narratively analyzed while the demographic distribution of the respondents was manually tabulated in a frequency distribution table.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1. Distribution of Discussants by sex. Source field survey,2022

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	14	46.7
Female	16	53.3
Total	30	100

Table 1 indicates that 14 participants representing 46.7% were Male, while 16, representing 53.3% were female.

Table 2. Distribution of Discussants by age. Source field survey,2022

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-25	13	43.3
25-30	15	50
30-35	2	6.7
Total	30	100

Table 2 reveals that people between the ages of 25-30 were more than other age brackets among the discussants, this was followed by the 20-25, the least was 30-35.

Table 3. Distribution of Discussants by occupation. Source field survey,2022

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employed	23	76.7
Self-employed	4	13.3
Students	2	6.7
Unemployed	1	3.3
Total	**30**	**100**

Table 3 shows that 23 of the discussants, representing 76.7% were employed,4 participants representing 13.3% were self-employed, 2 participants representing 6.7% were students, while 1 person representing 3.3 percent was unemployed.

Q1: Level of Awareness of Social Media

All the discussants agree that they are aware of social media, and they use social media platforms every day. Discussant 14 affirmed by saying "I definitely know what social media is, I'm not sure anyone born in this age doesn't". social media has become a very important part of our lives. According to Anuoluwapo (2017), it is important to note that through the use of social media, people are kept up dated on issues or events taking place anywhere in Nigeria. This is particularly possible because these social websites are interactively accessible with mobile phones. The use of WhatsApp and Facebook on phones for instance, makes this easier, as one can send either images or snapped shots alongside information on the most current event or issues as the case may be, on minute interval.

Q2: Commonly Used Social Media Platforms

Common examples of social media platforms identified by the discussants are Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Tiktok.

Q3: Awareness of Child Abuse

All the discussants affirm that they familiar with child abuse as it is a reoccurring phenomenon in almost every locality. This is agreed through the different ways by which the discussants responded to the question. All of the discussants simply answered by saying "yes"

Q4: Child Abuse Experiences

Discussants shared personal child abuse experiences. discussant 15 stated:

"I was just 5 when I was raped by my uncle, he was my dad's worker and he lived with us. I had just gotten back from school. I was in the living room, he asked me to take off my school uniform then he zipped down and asked me to have oral sex with him, I did for a while then he told me to lie down, and he started raping me, I was in pains and screaming but no one really heard me, he threatened to kill me if I told anyone. After that day, I became withdrawn and really stopped talking to people including my family members, it has always been so for me. Till this day, my parents wonder how I suddenly became a quiet person. Somedays I wonder where Uncle Hassan is.''

Discussant 3 added that:

"my mum died while giving birth to me, so I never really knew her, and I grew up cursing myself every slightest chance I got because I blamed myself for her death. Things got though for my dad, so I had to go stay with a relative. I suffered; you know the whole wicked stepmother character we see portrayed in Nigerian movies? I had that exact experience, and it wasn't a funny one. I couldn't even call my dad because there were no phones then. The truth is many Nigerian children are going through hell, at least regardless of my experiences, I had a place to sleep, many of these children don't which makes it easier for them to be abused".

Q5: Frequency of Child Abuse Messages on Social Media

Majority of the discussants affirm that they come across child abuse cases very often. Discussant 25 agrees by saying "very often". This appears to be the common answer among the discussants as others simply said: 'often'. Discussant 18 disclosed that '' you can hardly go a month without seeing a child abuse case, on at Facebook and even twitter. Discussant 4 agrees to seeing child abuse cases very often by saying "Child Abuse is the most common form of abuse in Nigeria, it is so common that it has been normalized in our society and every time I go on Facebook, I see something related to abuse, either rape, child abuse, molestation, it is a pity that children are subjected to this inhumane treatment."

Q6: Use of Social Media on Promotion of Child Abuse Experiences

From the discussion, it is believed that social media promotes child abuse cases in Nigerian discussant 13 clearly stated that:

I believe that social media plays a huge role in promotion of child abuse cases in Nigeria. in recent times, social media has helped expose child abusers in Nigeria. the case 14-year-old Karen-Happuch Aondodoo, a student of Premier Academy in Lugbe, who was allegedly raped in her school and died few days later on 22 June 2021 as a result of complications has been on the lips of Nigerians on social media. Nigerian's allover took to Twitter and Facebook with the hash tag #justiceforKaren demanding that proper investigation be carried out and the abuser made to face the wrath of the law.

Nigerians on social media have been on the forefront in fighting and ensuring that child abuse cases are not suppressed.

Q7: Impact of Social Media on Child Abuse Prevention in Nigeria

Majority of the discussants believed that the social media has not influenced child abuse prevention. One of the discussants, discussant 11 said:

"It hasn't particularly helped prevention it has just brought to the limelight child abuse cases and has helped showcase the level of evil that child abusers perpetuate therefore appealing the emotions of the public. To an extent it has helped create awareness and disillusioned the perpetrators from thinking they can go Scott free"

Discussant 24 added that:

"It is said that social media is an effective tool for whistleblowing hence it has helped publicize child abuse cases, but it has not really brought about any revolution or really prevented child abuse from occurring in Nigeria. There are thousands of child abuse cases that are being promoted on social media yet, we still find more and more every day."

Again, Discussant 13 stated:

"I believe social media has its role to play which is the constant publicity of these child abuse cases, but the truth is that it has not really prevented it from happening. And a lot of these children still continue to suffer in silence."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper has found out certain facts about the subject matter of study. The work was set to find out the influence of social media on child abuse prevention.

For the first objective, the outcome of the discussion indicated that social media has created awareness on child abuse in Nigeria. Significantly, social media has been essential to the growth of society's awareness of child abuse and neglect. The case of 14-year-old Karen-Happuch Aondodoo, the secondary school student that was raped and died afterwards is one among the several cases discussed. This is in agreement with Silverman and Wilson (2002), they believed the explosion in media interest in child offences has also helped to fuel a moral panic. It can therefore be said that social media has undoubtedly played a key role in raising awareness of child abuse.

The second objective was to find out the level of awareness social media has created on child abuse prevention and the study showed that the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok and Blogs have been at the forefront of promoting child abuse cases. it was discovered that there have been different campaigns against child abuse on different social media platforms at different times. As earlier asserted under literature review in this study, Social Media has rapidly grown in importance as a forum for social activism in its different forms in Nigeria. Social media has become a primary communication medium in the developed world over the past decade. Due to increased globalization, facilitated by the widespread use of the internet and social media, this medium allows for the widespread and fast dissemination of ideas and can also serve as a means to change norms about child abuse.

The third objective which was to determine if social media is really a tool in preventing child abuse in Nigeria. From the data obtained, the influence of social media on child abuse prevention has been factually established. The study found out that social media alone is not effective enough in preventing child abuse In Nigeria. It is believed that social media has its role to play which is the constant publicity of these child abuse cases as it helps to inform and sensitize people on its implication on both the abuser and the child. "At best, the media are effective at building citizen awareness of an issue, but more complex attitudinal or behavioral change requires more direct forms of citizen contact and intervention". (O'Keefe & Reed, 1990: 215)

The paper proves that the information given about child abuse on social media are believable and acceptable, however, for several reasons, the effectiveness of these campaigns remains contentious rough. Burrows (1988: 16) reveals that "a media campaign can be effective, but it means nothing unless the campaign is integrated into an overall approach dealing with the various aspects." He adds that, "whatever happens at the mass level must be complemented and supported at a grassroots level for any long-term behavioral change to occur," (Julie Urquhart cited in Wood, 1994: 18).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. There should be public enlightenment programs that reaches the grassroot to create awareness on child abuse and its legal implications for offenders.
2. Fights against child abuse should be taken down to the family level where parents and guardians are found. By this, it means that discussions on child abuse should take place in churches, women groups, marketplaces, and other social gatherings.
3. The Nigeria government should Make available childcare homes and services or empower already existing organizations to cater for the welfare of child abuse victims and also children that lack parental care.
4. The Nigerian government should ensure through appropriate authorities that the child rights laws are enacted.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become quite pervasive in our everyday lives and has also been proven to have an influence on our lives. This study therefore sought to examine if the level of awareness created by social media on the issue of child abuse has helped in its prevention. While the results are not necessarily generalizable because of the limited sample size, the findings offer significant insight into the role of social media in child abuse prevention in Nigeria and would be a trigger for further studies into the phenomenon. The results showed that although there are numerous discussions and campaigns against child abuse on social media, it is not effective enough in the prevention of child abuse in Nigeria.

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ADDITIONAL READING

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse: Or child maltreatment is the physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver.

Child Marriage: Is a formal or informal union between anyone under 18 with an individual. Majority of child marriages in Nigeria are the ones between a girl and man.

Cyberbullying: Is bullying which uses e-technology as a means of victimizing others". It is the usage of internet media or mobile technologies like email, chat rooms, and discussion groups on the internet, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras, web pages, text messages, with the intention of harming other persons.

Neglect: In the context of child abuse simply means depriving a child of the basic needs and leaving the welfare of the child for the child.

Physical Abuse: Can be defined as any deliberate act to harm a child thereby causing injury, pain, or trauma to a child by way of physical contact.

Prevention: The act of stopping something from happening or of stopping someone from doing something.

Social Media: Are interactive technologies and digital channels that allow people to create and share information, ideas, hobbies, and other kinds of expression via virtual communities and networks.

Utilisation: The act of making practical and effective use of something.