

UTILIZING CONTEMPORARY MEDIA TO CURB RAPE ISSUES IN NIGERIA

Cyril Onyemaechi Oleh⁶
Department of Mass Communication
Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria

<https://doi.org/10.53982/gtj.2024.0101.04-j>

Abstract

Rape is a form of sexual violence against the male or female gender. Reports abound on the issue of rape in Nigeria. Some factors such as uncensored exposure to content on the internet such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, have been identified as helping to sustain the culture of rape in society. Nevertheless, this paper argues that despite posing a series of social challenges such as being veritable platforms for exposure to pornography and other anti-social behaviours, contemporary media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok, still present viable platforms for reducing issues of rape in Nigeria. The penetrative influence of contemporary media among citizens makes it a possible platform for advocacy campaigns against rape. Using secondary sources of data, the paper seeks to determine how the identified platforms can conversely be used to achieve the goal of reducing incidences of rape in Nigeria. Employing the Agenda Setting Theory, the paper suggests how contemporary media can be leveraged to reduce rape issues while providing victims of rape the needed succor. The paper concludes that efforts to reduce rape issues in Nigeria must be intentional and approached through a well-fashioned contemporary media strategy.

Keywords: Contemporary Media, Sexual Violence, Rape Issues, Nigeria, Misconceptions, Media Strategy.

⁶ Cyril Onyemaechi Oleh (PhD) is a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Veritas University, Abuja Nigeria. Oleh has many years of teaching and work experience in local and international institutions. His research interest is in contemporary media dynamics and national security. Dr. Oleh has published in reputable journals and books

Introduction

On 11 June 2020, state governors in Nigeria met in Abuja for a crucial meeting to discuss rape issues. This followed rampant cases of rape issues across Nigeria. Rape is a gender-based violence against women and men, but more pronounced against the female gender. Rape as a form of sexual violence has received attention from many quarters, such as governments, civil societies, religious groups, and international organizations. Many scholars argue that rape is a violation of human rights. Such scholars include (Aimakhu, 2017, Baxi, 2000, Dsah, 2021, Kayleigh et al 2022, Bovill et al 2022, Strizzi et al 2021). However, others conceive it as a public health problem (Nkiruka et al, 2018, McQueen et al, 2021). Previous literature has condemned sexual violence in its totality arguing that rape dehumanizes the victims and is capable of killing victims physically and emotionally, (Lopez-Sanchez et al, 2019, Kalra, et al 2013, Dash, 2021).

Although rape victims are mainly teenagers or adult females; rape victims and offenders cut across different age demography. In May 2021, a six-year-old baby was reportedly raped to death in Kaduna state, an unfortunate testimony that rape issues are not restrictive as every age group is prone to falling victim to rape issues. Rape, however, is not peculiar to Nigeria. For example, in Avigone France, a case of a man drugging his wife and inviting his friends to take turns in raping her was reported by the Guardian Newspaper in July 2024. Mr. Pelicot had invited his friends to rape his wife for at least 100 times over ten years. Studies have shown that rapes occur either because of the psychological behaviour of those involved or in some cases, because of the myths and misconceptions which surround rape cases.

According to Damania and Singh, (2022), “rape myths are

stereotypical beliefs that [tend to] excuse the rapist and hold the victims responsible for rape, leading to secondary victimization.” Secondary victimization occurs when a victim is made to suffer the effect of rape and an attendant physical or psychological trauma after she has been raped. Sometimes, secondary victimization occurs when a victim is forced not to report her assailant or when the victim is further victimized by stigmatization, name-calling, or subjected to family or public ridicule. Rape is an issue of concern in Nigeria, particularly among parents, government, civil society groups, international organizations and religious bodies. Tolu-Kolawole (2020) citing a United Nations report on rape issues in Nigeria, states that over eleven thousand (11, 200) rape cases occurred in Nigeria in the previous year, 2020.

Contemporary media has been fingered as contributing to cases of rape in Nigeria. This is because, on contemporary media platforms such as TikTok, Youtube, Facebook, the Internet, and others, pornography is easily accessible both by the young and the old since the Internet is largely uncensored. Pornography is the act of exhibiting nude and inappropriate pictures on media platforms. According to (Divya et al 2021), “Pornography has become globally available on the internet and its availability has encouraged both sexual health education and the projection of inappropriate sexual behaviours.”

According to (Ferguson et al, 2009, Divya, 2021, Pandey et al, 2017), there is a correlation between pornography and rape. Most homes do not censor what their children access on contemporary media platforms. As a result, children find themselves exposed to a sea of pornography on the internet. In some cases, approved advertisements that are shown on television or other contemporary media platforms contain obvious or

subdued sex motifs. Manufacturers and sales outlets who deal in alcohol, sex-enhancing drugs, and aphrodisiacs also wittingly and unwittingly encourage unguarded sexual misconduct. As suggested by a TAP Initiative report of January 2023, contemporary media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, can equally be used to address the pervading issues of rape, as well as the myths and misconceptions that seem to fuel rape issues in Nigeria. Many researchers have condemned rape in their works. Lopez-Sanchez et al, (2019), Kalra, et al (2013), and Dash, (2021), have described rapists very derisively using words such as “insane,” “inhuman,” and “psychopaths”. They opine that people who indulge in rape acts are dangerous to society and should be kept in isolation even after they serve out their recommended sanctions.

Some other scholars have equally identified problems associated with rape issues in Nigeria including the culture of silence that has prevailed over the years in rape matters. According to Ojigbo (2021), “the fear of not being believed or even being blamed for being raped is creating a dangerous culture of silence that prevents survivors from seeking justice.” As a result, rape issues are usually either not reported or when reported; offenders are hardly prosecuted to a logical conclusion. Ogbaboye (2015), reports that in a survey on why rape cases are underreported, a victim said, “the man said if I tell my mother or dad, he will kill me. He showed me a knife and I was afraid. I was just seven years old then. He was sleeping with me every day and I was fearful [sic] to talk to anybody. I bled and my sister saw it, but I could not tell her what happened”. Ogbaboye (2015), further states that rape is underreported for the following reasons: social stigma, fear of ostracization from the family and community, fear that police will not prosecute offenders conclusively and that offenders will return with life-threatening actions, fear

of secondary victimization which makes victims suffer more harms than the rape itself, attempting to save family name if the act is perpetrated by a close relation, traumatization of victims, insensitivity and dismissive attitude of the police, difficulty in the successful prosecution of cases of rape.

According to Ariche et al (2023), part of the problem in tackling rape issues is that “many have argued that this is due to the weak legal system, no hope of getting justice and reparation, corruption, inadequate criminal prosecution of rapists, slow judicial system and difficulty in proving rape cases”. When not conclusively prosecuted, victims may further be exposed to secondary victimization and further public ridicule by their predators once they are set free from legal encumbrances. Ogbaboye (2015), agrees with this assertion and says that a victim once revealed that his predator warned her that if she reported him and if he was arrested; once the police released him, he would come back to kill her. And to further sustain the fear in his victim, he showed her a knife. Indeed, rape as a form of sexual violence has become an issue that deserves serious attention by society in order to offer the best strategies to address the menace. This is why this paper discusses the role contemporary media can play in helping to curb rape issues in Nigeria.

Contemporary media: A Brief Clarification.

Contemporary media involves the use of digital technologies for concerted communication among internet-based users. Contemporary media is also known variously as social media, digital media, cyber media, new media, or internet media. With the advent of the internet in the late 1990s, media platforms have shifted from traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television to internet-based media platforms including, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tik-Tok, and Instagram. The January 2012

#OccupyNigeria petrol anti-subsidy removal protest by Nigerians in parts of the country marked a turning point in the use of contemporary media to attract attention to social issues such as rape, bad governance, electoral issues, and other issues of public concern. Before then, traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television) programmes were the primary sources of creating awareness of national issues.

Contemporary media is more pervasive than traditional media since it is internet-based and has far more reach than traditional media. Since the January 2012 #OccupyNigeria, there have been other remarkable campaigns that were predominantly contemporary media driven. For example, buoyed by the successes recorded in January 2012 #OccupyNigeria, citizens embarked on other contemporary media-driven campaigns such as #OpenNASS (2013), aimed at exposing the reported corrupt practices in Nigeria's National Assembly. There was also the October 2020 #EndSARSNow, a campaign against a unit of the police force, and in August 2024, #EndBadGovernanceNow, a campaign against economic and political hardship in Nigeria. These campaigns were driven by contemporary media and were adjudged by the organizers and some Nigerians to have been successful in reach and impact.

Unlike traditional media which are controlled by the government and other relevant stakeholders including relevant regulatory agencies, contemporary media have some major characteristics, namely, it is uncontrolled, it is interactive and never completely passive, it is instantaneous in reach, it can reach a wider audience within a short period since the internet is largely uncensored and penetrative. This paper uses some selected contemporary media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok to drive home the need to employ contemporary media in checking rape issues.

Sexual Violence: Conceptual Overview

Sexual violence of which rape is part of, occurs when a male or female is forced to have sex against his or her wish. Sexual violence occurs when one offers a forced sexual act to a predatory partner. According to (Alkan et al 2021), sexual violence is an “exertion of physical force upon another person from which there is a strong possibility that murder, injury, psychological damage or other negative changes will result”. Similarly, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center report (2010) describes sexual violence as forcing or manipulating someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. The Center for Disease Control describes sexual violence as a sexual act obtained by force, violence, or coercion, or an act directly against a person's sexuality such as rape, irrespective of the relationship with the victim.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Sexual violence is “any sexual act, attempt, to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to (sic) the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work [places].” (WHO 2022). Sexual Violence including rape may also occur against a person who is unable or incapable of reasoning or someone unable to consent or refuse sexual advances. It includes “forced or alcohol/drug-facilitated penetration of the victim...it involves a lack of freely given consent as well as the situation in which the victim is unable to consent or refuse” (Basile et al, 2014, p.11). Basile et al further assert that “sexual violence includes both penetrative and non-penetrative acts as well as non-contact forms. It occurs when a perpetrator commits sexual acts without a victim's consent or when a victim is unable to consent (due to age, illness or

refuses due to physical violence or threat)” (p.1). This means that in this case, sexual activity is obtained by force, intimidation, and coercion. It encompasses sexual crimes like sexual assault, rape, and other sexual abuse. Nevertheless, this study is primarily limited to rape issues.

Conceptualizing Rape

One of the simple definitions of rape is to say that it involves having unlawful carnal knowledge of the victim without his or her willful consent. Rape is a violation of the victim's right of refusal to sexual intercourse. According to (Idoko, Nwobodo & Idoko, 2020), “rape is defined medically as unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will, usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent”. Rape, an offense that has received attention from many writers has also elicited assorted viewpoints from many. Although rape issues abound, many still disagree on the appropriate definition of it. The viewpoints and discussions on rape issues often center on distracting and intangible variables. While some emphasize the role of consent, others consider penetration as the defining key component of rape. But for the purpose of this study, rape is defined as an unlawful sexual act that involves force or coercion; sexual intercourse, typically against the will of a female or a male or with an individual below the acceptable age of reasoning or one who is incapable of providing valid consent.

Beyond the physical harm, rape inflicts great social and emotional trauma, leaving enduring effects that extend far beyond the immediate incident. Reports of rape issues consistently highlight the discriminating helplessness of women and girls to this societal ill. Culture not only contributes to the occurrence of rape but also impedes reporting its

occurrence. This often results in underreporting and limited data for an all-encompassing analysis by scholars. In recent years, increased attention from civil society organizations and the domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP Act) in select states have led to a notable rise in reported cases of rape by victims and their families.

Misconceptions, Conspiracies, and Myths about Rape

Several misconceptions, conspiracies, and myths surround rape issues. According to (Damania and Singh, 2022), “rape myths are stereotypical beliefs that [tend to] excuse the rapist and hold the victim responsible for rape, leading to secondary victimization.” Damania and Singh also opine that the misconceptions, conspiracies, and myths “vary according to cultures.” However, the misconceptions, conspiracies, and myths are skewed against the victim and tend to uphold the masculinity of men who engage in rape acts. According to Tilton (2022), some of the misconceptions, conspiracies, and myths that surround rape issues include: that, handsome men do not rape; that, unattractive women are not raped; that, women only claim that they have been raped if they later regret their sexual interaction or if they are not adequately remunerated by their partners after a consensual sexual escapade. Longsway and Fitzgerald, (1994), add to the list of myths and misconceptions to include, that rape occurs out of passion and not out of desire by the offender to commit a crime; that if the offender was drunk at the time of rape, his actions should not constitute rape; that only promiscuous women are raped; that most women secretly want to be raped. However, Wood (1994) provided clarity on the myths and facts, which are clearly shown in Table I below.

Misconceptions, Myths and Facts About rape

Misconceptions	Facts
Rape is a sexual act that results from sexual urges	Rape is an aggressive act used to dominate another
Rapists are abnormal	Rapists have not been shown to differ from non-rapists in personality, psychology, adjustment, or involvement in interpersonal relationships.
Most rapes occur between strangers.	Eighty percent to 90% of rapes are committed by a person known to the victim (Allgeier, 1987).
Most rapists are African-American men and most victims are Caucasian women	More than three-fourths of all rapes occur within races, not between races. This myth reflects racism.
The way a woman dresses affects the likelihood she will be raped	The majority-up to 90%- of rapes are planned in advance and without knowledge of how the victim will dress (Scully, 1990)
False reports of rapes are frequent.	The majority of rapes are never reported (Koss, Cidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Less than 10% of rape reports are judged false, the same as for other violent crimes
Rape is a universal problem.	The incidence of rape varies across cultures. It is highest in societies with ideologies of
	male dominance and a disregard for nature; it is lowest in cultures that respect women and feminine values Griffin, 1981)

Source: Wood, T. J. (1994). The Influence of Media on Views of Gender. In J. T. Wood (ed) *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture* (pp.231-244). Wadsworth Publishing, (Retrieved, 11, August 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Agenda Setting theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1973 in which they opine that the media set an agenda for the public. They go on to say that an agenda contextually “is an issue which elicits a positive or negative comment from the members of the public.” According to Asemah (2011), agenda-setting is the process of reflecting on the events in our society. McCombs (2007), insists that the power of the media is to set an agenda for a country to focus public attention on a few key public issues is obvious because the public depends largely on the media to acquire reliable information which ultimately influences their lives and behaviour.

It is also factual that the media influences what the public sees as a priority in society by emphasizing such issues and topics in their news content, hence certain topics are said to trend in the media. Such trending issues attract the attention of the government and society and often attract solutions. Examples of using contemporary media to set agendas in Nigeria abound. In January 2012, there was citizen media activism against the President Jonathan administration on the increase in petrol prices. Known as #OccupyNigeria, the campaign forced the administration to rescind its decision to increase the pump price of petrol in Nigeria. In 2013, there was another citizen media campaign called #NotTooYoungToRun, a campaign which was used to force the National Assembly to reduce the age limits for contesting for various political offices in Nigeria.

There was also the October 2020 #EndSARS contemporary media campaign by Nigerian youths in parts of the country against a unit of the Nigeria police force that was reportedly engaging in extortion and maltreatment of the youths. That campaign led to the scrapping of the

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force. In August 2024, there was the #EnfBadGovernance contemporary media campaign that was used to call the attention of the world to economic and political hardships in Nigeria. In all these campaigns, contemporary media was used and they marked a remarkable change in Agenda setting programmes by citizens for the government. This paper, therefore, thinks that using the same contemporary media platforms to call attention to the issues of rape in Nigeria will not be out of place since statistics (enumerated in subsequent sections) show that an increasing number of Nigerians are embracing contemporary media.

Some Incidences of Rape in Nigeria: Rationale and Impacts on Victims

Incidences of rape occur in Nigeria although most of the cases are not reported for various reasons including the culture of silence, cultural barriers, fear of stigmatization, and fear of reprisal attacks from offenders. Onyegbula (2024), reports that a 30-year-old motorcyclist, Michael Olorunfemi was jailed for raping his 17-year-old sister-in-law in the bush in Akure, Ondo state of Nigeria. Akani (2024), says that a rape victim, Ogochukwu Odogwu narrated how she was raped and her private part bruised by her colleague in the highbrow area of Lekki in Lagos state Nigeria on July 26, 2024. Similarly, Opalola (2024), reports that the police arrested a 29-year-old commercial motorcyclist on July 26, 2024, in Ile Ife for allegedly robbing and raping his passenger.

What was even more grievous in this case was that the arrested offender allegedly “cut off the pubic hair, armpit hair and head hair of the victim and threatened to kill her if she dared to report the ugly incident to anyone”. According to Opaola, this incident took place in August 2024. Some of the reported rape issues are bizarre as both the young, the old, and the

very young are victims of rape. For example, Uchechukwu (2024), says that on September 11, 2024, a palm oil dealer in Calabar, Cross River state, Nsikak Akpan, had canal knowledge of a one-year-old toddler, the child of his tenant in the Biase area of the state. Another case was Barakat Bello, an 18-year-old student who was reportedly raped and killed during a robbery incident in Ibadan, Oyo state on the 1st of June 2020. Similarly, Favour Okechukwu, an 11-year-old girl was reportedly gang-raped in Ejigbo, a suburb of Lagos state, and she later died. Audu (2023), says that on October 24, 2023, four students from Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun state, were raped off-campus by unknown persons who escaped from the scene immediately after the incident.

In 2008, a national survey in Nigeria by the National Population Commission and ICF Macro (2008) showed that about 6.6% of girls in Nigeria experienced sexual violence. While the incidences of adult rape evoke anger among many, the rising incidences of under-aged rape victims in Nigeria are becoming worrisome. Some scholars have written extensively on the rising cases of rape of minors in our society. Among the scholars, (Ohayi, Ezugwu, Chigbu, Arinze-Onyia & Iyoke, 2015), opine that rape of minors constitutes 6.6% of all gynecological emergencies in tertiary health care facilities in Enugu. Similarly, in Jos, North Central region of Nigeria, the prevalence rate of 5.6%; 63.8% of these cases of rape were female children under the age of 16 years (Daru, Osagie, Pam, Mutahir & Silas, 2011). In Minna, North central Nigeria, about 90.1% of female victims of sexual abuse are usually children under the age of 17 years (Abdulkadir, Musa, Umar, Musa, Jimoh & Aliyu, 2011). Considering the culture of silence and secrecy which surround rape issues as we have earlier discussed, it is understandable if all rape issues involving minors are not reported or recorded.

Authors such as (Abdulkadir, Musa, Umar, Musa, Jimoh & Aliyu, 2011; Odidika, 2015; Chinawa et al., 2013) agree with this position when they opined that “one major problem in Nigeria is that sexual violence is grossly underreported even when reported it is reported late and in most cases not reported at all [because] there is this culture of silence noticed among Nigerians, [which] is attributed to fear of secondary victimization, fear of shame, the feeling of guilt and fear of stigmatization to say the least”. Although rape victims are mainly teenagers or adult females; rape issues cut across different age demography. As stated in the earlier sections of this paper, the reported rape incident on the one-year-old baby cited above is a clear indication that any age demography can be a victim of rape acts. But in most cases, child rape is much more shrouded in secrecy and cloaked in the culture of conspiratorial silence by both the society and the families of the victims and offenders, mainly because of the culture of stigmatization that pervades rape issues. Eke, Ofori, Tabansi & Harcourt, (2011), agree that child rape is the least reported case of sexual violence in Nigeria due to the factors we have pointed out earlier in this section. Many more reasons have sustained rape issues in Nigeria.

Legal Frameworks that Protect Victims of Rape in Nigeria

Some major legal frameworks operate in Nigeria, two of which are regionally based. These are the Criminal Code and the Penal Code. The Criminal Code covers the southern Nigeria jurisprudence while the Penal Code is domiciled primarily in Northern Nigeria. The Nigeria Criminal Code defines a rapist as:

“any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of

harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or, in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband”.

This definition is, however, faulty as the emphasis is only on the female gender. The male gender is also periodically a victim of rape. But in most cases, they do not make the headlines. Banyawa (2023), opines that in early 2022, one Mallam Monsori was raped by one Mallam Didi in Adamawa state, North East Nigeria. Onwumere (2016), reports that there are various cases of rape where men were the victims even though most of them chose not to prefer charges against the female rapists for fear of being called weaklings.

The Nigerian Criminal Code quoted by Policy and Legal Advocacy Center adds that “any person who commits the offense of rape is liable to imprisonment for life, with or without caning” (Nigeria Criminal Code Act, 1990 as amended in 2004). Similarly, The Penal Code as cited by Policy and Legal Advocacy Center has a similar definition as the Criminal Code but it goes on to add more specific texts to deal with the age demography. It states that rape occurs “when a man has sexual intercourse with a woman against her will, without her consent, or with incorrectly obtained consent”. The Penal Code goes on to define consent by saying that “Consent can be incorrectly obtained where it is obtained by putting [the victim] in fear of death or hurt or by a person impersonating a married woman's husband in order to have sex.”

The Penal Code further adds that “sex with a girl under 14 years of age or who is of unsound mind is rape, irrespective of whether there is consent.” The inference from this definition is that the age of consent in Northern Nigeria is 14 years; however, that does not automatically translate to mean that every person who is 14 years old is of sound mind. In a more

groundbreaking declaration, the Penal Code expressly states in Section 282 that “sexual intercourse by a man with his wife is not rape [since] a man can not physically abuse his wife (Section 55). Apart from the Criminal Code and the Penal Code, other legal frameworks protect rape victims.

The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 (VAPP), which was referred to earlier in this paper defines rape as when a person intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with any other part of his/her body or anything else without consent, or with incorrectly obtained consent. Although rape issues are still largely treated in secrecy. In recent years, rape issues have received increased attention from civil society organizations in Nigeria. One other factor that has helped to raise awareness on rape issues in Nigeria is that rape issues have been subjugated to local laws by some states in Nigeria through the passage of the Bill on the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP Act).

The Act provides for protection for those who report rape issues as well as victims of rape issues. As a result, there has been an upsurge in reporting rape issues. But despite the boost in awareness created by a change in the reporting pattern, quick dispensation of justice in this regard is still an issue of concern. It appears that one of the major issues that has sustained rape issues in Nigeria is that there is an inadequate legal framework to try offenders and more, inadequate enforcement structures. Ojigbo (2021), says again, “It is unacceptable that survivors of rape and other forms of gender-based violence face such a tortuous ordeal to get justice which only adds to their pain.” This situation can only change through the introduction of adequate legislation and enforcement framework.

Domesticating Legal Framework against Rape by States in Nigeria

About 34 states in Nigeria have so far domesticated some of the various international and local protocols stipulated by the United Nations (UN), and the Nigerian Criminal Code to deter intending rape offenders and to protect rape victims in their states. According to Tallen (2022), 34 states and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, have domesticated the various laws against Gender Based Violence and in particular, rape issues. These legal frameworks introduced by the states range from the death penalty as we have in Niger State, life imprisonment and or castration as in Kaduna State, life imprisonment and imposition of fine on the offenders as is practiced in Cross River state, and maintaining sex offenders register as recommended by Nigeria's former Minister for Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen in 2019.

Although these legal policies have been introduced by some states, implementation is still a key issue as most of the pronouncements either have no proper legal backing or are not even followed up by those who should implement them. Political considerations are also part of the reasons for poor or lack of implementation as most state governors appear to be afraid that implementation of the laws against rape may affect their political gains in future elections. However, some states have in recent times shown willingness to implement the domesticated laws against rape in their states. On October 9, 2024, *Conclave* reported that Justice Blessing Egwu of Calabar, Cross River state sentenced 47-year-old Ita Okon to life imprisonment for raping an eight-year-old girl. In 2021, Cross River state domesticated the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law (2015), prescribing life imprisonment and imposition of fines for rape offenders.

Challenges to Addressing Rape Issues in Nigeria

There are several challenges militating against the prosecution of rape cases in Nigeria. Some of these have already been pointed out in the previous section of this paper including inadequate legal framework, culture of silence, secondary stigmatization, and fear of reprisal attacks by perpetrators. In the words of the Director of Amnesty International, Nigeria as quoted by Ojigbo (2021):

...[In Nigeria], women and girls continue to be failed by a system that makes it increasingly difficult for survivors to get justice while allowing perpetrators to get away with gross human rights violations (cited in Ojigbo, 2021).

This is because “concrete actions have not been taken to tackle the rape crisis in Nigeria with the seriousness it deserves (Ojigbo, 2021). Tolulope-Kolawole (2021), reported that the Technical Specialist of the UN Women, Tosin Akibu, said that in the year 2020, at least 11, 200 Nigerian women and children, were raped, including those who were raped to death. A Non-Governmental Organization, Women At Risk International Foundation (WARIF), in a report titled, “Rape Stats In Nigeria,” published in 2024 painted a grim picture when it says that in Nigeria:

One in every four females reported experiencing sexual violence in childhood, with approximately 70% reporting more than one incident of sexual violence. 24.8% of females aged 18 to 24 years experience sexual abuse before age 18 of which 5.0% sought help, with only 3.5% receiving any [help] services.

One of the reasons for the few convictions has been attributed to the death of the victims in some cases. Another reason is the non-arrest of rape offenders in most cases. The case of the group that raped four students of

Tai Solarin University of Education in Ogun state and fled the scene immediately is an example. (Ojagbohunmi, 2020), agrees with this assertion when he observed that the alleged perpetrator of the unfortunate rape issue which reportedly led to the death of a victim, a 22-year-old micro-biology student who was raped in Benin-city on 27th May 2020, could not be prosecuted for lack of evidence since the victim died in the act and could not offer evidence against the offender. In the case of the four students of Tai Solarin University of Education, in Ogun state, the victims were rushed to the hospital but they had no idea who the perpetrators were and how they could be identified and arrested since the offenders escaped the scene of the incident before help could come for the victims.

Another issue that militates against the prosecution of rape offenders is the issue of outdated laws and difficulties in enforcement of existing laws, The Criminal Code which applies in Southern Nigeria and the Penal Code which is applicable in the north are both outdated in content and in definition. Both laws have conflicting definitions of what constitutes rape. While one restricts sexual violence including rape to only having canal knowledge of the victim, it ignores the violent aspect of it; the other law does not take penetration of the victim into account as it settles for the age of the victim. Both laws were enacted before the age of contemporary media platforms and have not been revised to include acts of sexual violence that are generated through contemporary media platforms including *sexting*, a system whereby offenders continually harass their victims by inundating victims with unsolicited lewd messages through contemporary media platforms, However, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act expanded the scope and definition of rape but it is silent on a key variable which is consent. The lack of a clear regulation against the misuse of contemporary

media to showcase lewd pictures and outright pornography is also a challenge to curbing rape issues because citizens are exposed to corruptible influences of pornography on the internet without checks.

According to (Divya et al 2021), pornography has become “globally available and the internet's current existence availability has encouraged not only sexual health education but the projection of inappropriate sexual behaviours”. Pornography is “the portrayal of sexual subject matter exclusively for sexual arousal, which can be presented in various media like video, film, video games, writing, magazines and animations” (Manju et al, 2019 p.45). Ferguson et al, {2009}, Divya, (2021), and Pandey et al (2017), further state that there is a correlation between pornography and sexual violence. Pornography is “the portrayal of sexual subject matter exclusively for sexual arousal, which can be presented in various media like video, film, video games, writing, magazines and animations,” (Manju et al, 2019, p.45). The “effects manifest in many negative social vices like child abuse, rape, violence against women, family breakdown, crime among youth, and sexually transmitted diseases” (Verma, 2012, p.70).

Another issue is the role illicit drugs play in the society. Some sex offenders have confessed that they carried out the act under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol. According to (Nedejiko et al 2021, Horvath et al, 2006), “drugs have been intimately linked with sexual violence and assault. Many drug addicts are rapists because sexual violence especially rape is often triggered by hard drug intake. Most of those involved in sexual violence operate under the influence of hard drugs. Drugs are intentionally taken by the perpetrators of this crime as a way of shunning the emotional effect to becloud their judgment and the fear that should accompany such an act. A drug addict is a potential rapist...” Similar to the consumption of illicit drugs is

that “researchers have reported that up to 50% of survivors and more than 75% of perpetrators had consumed alcohol before an assault. Most of the people involved in sexual violence operate under the influence of alcohol, (Abbey et al, 2016, Horvath et al, 2006).

Utilizing Contemporary media to curb Rape Issues in Nigeria: A Focus on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok

This paper has identified that there is a correlation between rape and pornography on the internet. To address the issue of rape squarely, there is a need for a contemporary media communication strategy that will use some contemporary media platforms to educate citizens on the dangers of rape. This paper focuses on the use of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok platforms to reach out to citizens on the dangers of rape and how to report incidences of rape. These platforms have been selected because of their ubiquitous and pervasive nature among Nigerians. According to the *Thrive Media Africa* report (2024), the four platforms are the social media platforms that Nigerians are using the most in 2024. According to the report, “with over 95.1% of internet users aged 16-34 years, WhatsApp remains the leading social media platform in Nigeria with a user base of 8.8 million.” The report also ranks Facebook as the second most popular platform with a user base of 36 million representing a penetrating rate of 76.7%. Instagram ranks third with 59.1%, and TikTok with 54.7% in that descending order. The increasing availability of the Internet and the growing number of smartphone owners have contributed to the growing rise of contemporary media users in Nigeria.

Contemporary media platforms have become one of the fastest agents of socialization that are easily used to reach a wider Nigerian audience. *Thrive Media Africa* (2024), also reports that in 2017, 18 million

Nigerians were on contemporary media platforms but it increased in 2022 to 34 million with a projection of 90 million Nigerians expected to be on contemporary media platforms by 2025. This paper recommends a media strategy that will involve stakeholders and government agencies leveraging these platforms to connect with their target audience. This strategy should involve regularly using these platforms to send out bulk messages through network providers to the target audience.

As has already been established, rape is a gender-based issue that can be tackled with intentional strategic communication using contemporary media. This is because rape is also a behavioral change as established by VicHealth (2005) in Raab and Rocha (2011, P. 76), “Legal and to a certain extent policy/institutional change, on their own, have proven insufficient to reduce violence against women and girls (VAW). Many forms of VAW continue to be widely perceived as private, relatively unimportant matters, or a normal part of life”. Continuing, (Raab and Rocha, 2011), further describe rape campaign communication as “the process by which public events, print materials, audiovisual media, the internet, and other channels are used to inform, influence or mobilize target audiences, with the ultimate aim of achieving the campaign goal. Effective campaign communication is multi-pronged. Combining different techniques and tools enhances the chance that when the audience notices the campaign message, it remembers it and takes the action needed to attain the campaign goal.” (Raab and Rocha, 2011). Some scholars have tried to argue that because “strategic communication is result-oriented, evidence-based, “client”-centered, participatory, benefit-oriented, multi-channel, high quality and cost-effective (O’Sullivan et al, 2003 in Raab and Rocha, 2011), therefore “effective communication strategies are multi-pronged, targeting different audiences

and audience segments through different mediums, channels, at different venues.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering the ubiquitous nature of contemporary media, it will be useful in containing the ills associated with sexual violence in general and rape in particular. But in doing this, some strategies must be mapped out, namely, to first identify the problems associated with rape issues, to analyze the issues identified, and to take a look at the environment and the people involved including the perpetrators and the victims. There are no templates for designing a workable contemporary media communication strategy on rape issues. However, there are key elements that will help in formulating an effective template that will be useful in the campaign such as identifying the goal of your campaign, and the difficulties and barriers that have sustained the culture of silence around rape issues, Again, Raab and Rocha (2011), opine that “the norm in advocacy campaigns as primary and secondary target audiences need to be reached differently and will likely take different types of action.”

Another key point that must help in formulating a contemporary media strategy towards curbing rape issues is that campaign messages should be tailored towards the target audience. In communication, we say that the medium is the message. The message and the messenger are important in contemporary media campaigns against rape issues. Considering how people some contemporary media tools are among the youths, such tools can be used for creating awareness of rape issues. Short content can be created and pushed out on contemporary media channels like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Nigerian youths enjoy watching skits a lot. Advocacy messages on how to curb rape issues will resonate with them

on Instagram and Tik Tok platforms.

However, WhatsApp remains on top of the contemporary media platforms that Nigerians make use of, and it can be used by government and advocacy groups to reach out to citizens pointing out the dangers and sanctions inherent in rape acts. Psychologists and medical doctors can also be hired by state governments to make appearances on Facebook regularly to give advocacy talks targeted at the youth. Jingles can also be prepared by the National Orientation Agency and the Ministries of Information and Youths development for distribution on the identified contemporary media platforms. With an army of youths (aged 16 -34), on the four suggested contemporary media platforms (according to the statistics on contemporary media enumerated above), the reach will be enormous and impactful. To create avenues for victims of rape to report cases of rape, a short messaging service (SMS) code should be created and publicized for use by victims, their families, or good citizens who have cases of rape to report to relevant authorities. Students in secondary and tertiary institutions of learning can also be made to employ dedicated contemporary media platforms in their schools for victims of rape to send in messages anonymously to report rape issues.

The Ministry of Youths and Development, as well as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should also include in their work plans, programmes for educating the youths on the evils associated with rape. Victims should be encouraged to report the cases promptly. Helplines in the form of toll-free numbers so that victims of rape can easily report their ordeals, will also help to curb rape issues. This paper also recommends the establishment of a Victim's Compensation plan by the government for rape offenders. Victim Compensation should be in the form of direct financial

restitution to a victim of rape by an offender. The financial restitution or forfeiture of assets by offenders will serve as a deterrent to would-be rape offenders.

References

- Abdulkadir, I., Musa, H. H., Umar, L. W., Musa, S., Jimoh, W. A. & Aliyu, N. M. (2011). Child sexual abuse in Minna, Niger State Nigeria. *Niger Med J*. 52, 79-82.
- Aimakhu, C.O. (2017). The Public Health Burden of Sexual Violence: Its Effects, Management and Prevention. *Journal of Reproduction and Sex u a l H e a l t h* , 1 (1) , 4 7 - 5 2 . <https://jrsh.org.ng/index.php/home/article/view/12>.
- Alkan, O. and Tekmanli, H.H. (2021). Determination of the Factors Affecting Sexual Violence against Women in Turkey: A Population-based Analysis. *BMC Women's Health*, 21(188).
- Ariche, Chrisantus, Nneka Amalu, Douglas Ndu and Yusuf Abdullahi. (2023). Prevalence of Sexual Violence Against Women in Nigeria: The Red Flags and The Way Forward. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research* 2023, 20 (4): 103-122 www.universalacademicservices.org Open Access article retrieved on October 12, 2024 from <http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses-nc-nd/4.0/>
- Audu, Victoria (2023). "More Than What You Wear". The Republic Newspaper, 23, October 2023. Retrieved on October 23, 2024 from <http://www.therepublic.com.ng/>
- Chinawa, J. M. et al. (2013). Prevalence and pattern of sexual abuse among children attending Ebonyi State University Teaching Hospital, Abakiliki, Ebonyi State. *Niger J Paed.*, 40, 227-231.
- Chrisafis, Angelique (2024). "Woman tells trial of a husband who invited men to rape her: I was sacrificed on the altar of vices." The Guardian Newspaper, September 6, 2024. Retrieved on 12, September 2024 from www.theguardian.com/
- Conclave (2024). "Court Sentences Man to Life Jail for Raping Eight-Year-Old Girl." Published on 9, October 2024. Retrieved on October 25, 2024, from www.conclave.org.ng/
- Daru, P. H., Osagie, E. O., Pam, I. C., Mutihir, J. T. & Silas, O. A. (2011). Analysis of cases of rape as seen at the Jos University Teaching Hospital, Jos, North Central Nigeria. *Niger J Clin Pract.*, 14, 47-51.

- Dash, P. P. (2021). Feminism and its Discontents: Punishing Sexual Violence in India, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(1).
- Divya,V., Yasir Arafat, S.M.,Sujita, K.K.,Madhini,S.,Sayeda, R.H., Ali, D.P. and Russell,K. (2021). Pornography and Sexual Violence against Women in India: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*. 3(3).
- Eke, Ofori, Tabansi and Harcourt (2021). "Nigeria: Failure to tackle rape crisis emboldens perpetrators and silences survivors." Amnesty International report (November 17, 2021). Retrieved on 16, August 2024 from www.amnesty.org/2021/11/17/.
- Etiese, P. (2018). Legal Perspectives on the Offence of Rape in Nigeria: The Criminal and Penal Codes vis-à-vis the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015. Retrieved on 16, September 2024 from <https://www.academia.edu/>
- Ezugwu, E. C., Ohayi, S. R., Iyoke, A. C. and Nnaji, H. C. (2015). Characteristics of Perpetrators of Rape of the Girl Child in a Low Resource Setting in Enugu South East Nigeria, Nigeria. *Ann Med Health Sci Res.*, 7, 180-184.
- Ezugwu, E. C., Ohayi, S. R., Iyoke, A. C. and Nnaji, H. C. (2017). Characteristics of Perpetrators of Rape of the Girl Child in a Low Resource Setting in Enugu South East Nigeria, Nigeria. *Ann Med Health Sci Res.*, 7, 180-184.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria Criminal Code Act (1990) Available at <http://www.nigeria-law.org/Criminal Code Act-Part V>.
- Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, A. H. & Hamby, S. L. (2014). The Lifetime Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Assessed in Late Adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 55 (329), 329-33.
- Global Voice (2020). Nigeria declares 'state of emergency' on rape and sexual assault. Retrieved on September 12 , 2024 from <https://globalvoices.org/2020/07/03/nigeria-declares-state-of-emergency-on-rape-and-sexual-assault/>
- Hornik, R. C. and Naugle, D. A. (2014). Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of Mass Media Interventions for Child Survival in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. *Journal of Health Communication*, 19(sup1), 190–215.
- Hornik, R. and Wakefield, M.A., Loken, B., (2010). Use of Mass Media Campaigns to Change Health Behaviour. *The Lancet*, 376:1261-2171.
- Idoko. C. A., Nwobodo, E. & Idoko, C. I. (2020). Trends in rape cases in a Nigerian state. *Afri Health Sci.*, 20(2), 668-675. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v20i2.17>.

- Ikechebelu, J. I., Udigwe, G. O., Ezechukwu, C. C., Ndinechi, A. G. & Joe Ikechebelu, N. N. (2008). Sexual abuse among juvenile female street hawkers in Anambra State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 12, 111-119.
- Lomgsway, K.A and Fitzgerald, L. F (1994). "Rape myths: In Review, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18 (2); 133-164.
- Lopez-Sanchez, M.J, Belson-Martinez, J.A and Hervas-Oliver, J.L. (2019). A Review of Economic Consequences and Cost of Male Violence against Women, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. 26(3), 424-434.
- McQueen, K., Murphy-Oikonen, J., Miller, A., et al (2021). Sexual assault: Women's voices on the health impacts of not being believed by police. *BMC Women's Health*, 21(217).
- Mrunali, H. Damania, Ram Manohar Singh (2022). "An explorative qualitative Analysis of Rape Myths in India." *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy*/vol. 22 Issue 3, p.989-1016. Published on August 23m 2022. [www.https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/](https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/) .
- National Population Commission (NRC) and ICF Macro (2008). Nigeria Demographic Health Survey. Retrieved on October 15, 2024 from: www.measuredhs.com/pubs/
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) (2010). What is Sexual Violence? Factsheet, Retrieved on October 20, 2024, from www.resources@nsvrc.orgwww.nsvrc.org/
- Ogbaboye, Grace Tomi (2015). "What is Rapr? In Low Reporting of Rape Cases in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects." *Criminal Law Free Advice*. Retrieved on October 17, 2024, from www.criminallawfreeadvice.com/
- Odidika, U. (2015). A survey into the prevalence and pattern of rape in a Nigerian Tertiary Institution. *International Journal of Innovative Science Research*, 13, 349-353.
- Odimegwu, Onwumere. (2016). "Rape of men under-reported sexual abuse." *ThisDay Newspaper*, August 19, 2016. Retrieved on 12, September 2024 from www.thisday.ng.org/
- Odu, B. (2014). "Prevalence of Violent Sexual Assault on South West Nigerian Girls." *European Scientific Journal*, 471-472, March 2014 (10). (7).
- Ohayi, R. S., Ezugwu, E. C., Chigbu, C. O., Arinze-Onyia, S. U. & Iyoke, C. A. (2015). Prevalence and pattern of rape among girls and women attending Enugu State University Teaching Hospital, southeast Nigeria. *Int J Gynecol Obstet.*, 130, 10-13.
- Ojagbohunmi, S. T. (2020). An In-Depth Report on Rape and the Nigerian

- Justice System for the Consent Workshop. Centre for Knowledge. Retrieved on 30 August 2024 from www.centreforknowledge.com
- Olasunkunmi, Akani. (2024). "I was raped, my private part bruised by my colleague, 36-year old mother of 2 cries out." Vanguard Newspaper, August 18, 2024. Retrieved on 21 August 2024 from www.vanguardng.com/
- Ojigbo, Ossai. (2021). Nigeria: Failure to Tackle Crisis Emboldens Perpetrators and Silence Survivors, Amnesty International Nigeria, Retrieved on October 22, 2024 from www.amnesty.org/
- Onyegbula, Esther. (2024). "Court Jails Father of Four for Raping wife's 17 year's sister". Vanguard Newspaper, August 18, 2024. Retrieved on 21, August 2024 from www.vanguardng.com/
- Ojigbo, O. (2021). Nigeria: Failure to Tackle Crisis Emboldens Perpetrators and Silence Survivors, Amnesty International Nigeria.
- Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre: Nigerian Criminal Code – Criminal Code Act, 1916. CAP C 38. LFN 2004. www.lawsofnigeriapiaacng.org/ (Retrieved on 11 September 2024).
- Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre: Nigerian Penal Code Act LFN 2004. www.lawsofnigeriapiaacng.org/ (Retrieved on 11 September 2024).
- Raab, M. and Rocha, J. (2011). Campaigns to end Violence against Women and Girls. United Nations Entity for Gender Equity and Empowerment. P.76.
- Saduwo, Banyawa. (2023). "Fear of Stigma silences male rape victims." Human Angle Media, March 1, 2023. www.humananglemedia.com/ (Retrieved on 16 August 2024).
- Shaibu, Hussein. (2004). "FG prohibits money rituals, other vices in Nollywood." The Info Power website of May 22, 2024. Retrieved on August 11, 2024, from www.infopowerng.com/
- Tallen, Pauline (2022). "Gender-Based Violence:34 States Domesticate Nigeria's VAPP Act.". Premium Times. Published 12, June 2022. Retrieved on October 23, 2024, from www.premiumtimes.org.ng/
- Thrive Media Africa (2024). "Which Social Media Platforms Are Nigerians Using the Most in 2024".? Published on 20, August 2024. Retrieved on October 22, 2024 from www.thrivemediainafrica.com/
- Tilton, Emily. (2022). Rape Myths, catastrophe, and Credibility." Cambridge University Press: March 28, 2022. Retrieved on 6, August 2024 from www.cambridge.org/
- Tolu-Kolawole, Deborah. (2021). "11,200 Nigerian Women, Children Raped in 2020", The Punch Newspaper, November 23, 2021. Retrieved on September 27, 2024, from www.punch.org.ng/

- Uchechukwu, Ikechukwu (2024). "Businessman, 50, rapes 1-year-old baby in Cross River." Vanguard Newspaper, September 11, 2024, Retrieved on 9, September 2024 from www.vanguardng.com/
- UNICEF (2018). Gender Responsive Communication for Development: Guidance, Tools and Resources. UNICEF ROSA Gender Section, South Asia.
- Usdin, S., Scheepers, E., Goldstein, S. & Japhet, G. (2005) 'Achieving Social Change on Gender-Based Violence: A Report on the Impact Evaluation on Soul City's Fourth Series'. Social Science and Medicine 61, 2434-2445.
- Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015. (Law enacted by the Nigeria National Assembly in 2015. In NAPTIP – www.NAPTIP.ng.org/ (Retrieved on 13, August 2024)
- Women At Risk International Foundation (WARIF). Rape Stats in Nigeria (2024). Retrieved on September 27, 2024, from www.warifng.org
- Wood, T. J. (1994). The Influence of Media on Views of Gender. In J. T. Wood (ed) Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture (pp.231-244). Wadsworth Publishing.
- World Health Organization. (2022). The World Report on Violence and Health 2002. Retrieved on October 18, 2024, from: www.https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/
- Yemisi, Opalola, (2024). "Osun: Police arrest motorcyclist for allegedly robbing, raping passenger." Vanguard Newspaper, August 21, 2024, from www.vanguardng.com/