

Innovations

Social Media Promotion of Citizens' Awareness and Knowledge of the Provisions of Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in Nigeria

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Abstract

Alarming increase in cases of gender based violence gave rise to the enactment of the VAPP Act in Nigeria in 2015. However, neither its execution nor effects have been felt even in areas where it has been domesticated. The main aim of this study was to know how social media has been used to create awareness and promote citizens' knowledge of the provisions of the VAPP Act. The study was anchored on the tenets of the agenda setting theory and social responsibility theory of the press. Survey method was used while 360 adult residents who are above 18 years participated in the survey. This study was carried out in South-East geo-political Zone in Nigeria where the VAPP Act has been domesticated. Only Face book and Twitter, excluding other social media platforms, were found to have been used to spread information on the VAPP Act, according to the study. It also shows that although social media raised awareness of the VAPP act's existence, it did not promote citizens' knowledge of its contents. The study's findings as a whole indicate that users of social media are rarely exposed to communications that inform them of the VAPP Act's existence and its provisions. This study suggests that a well-planned, proactive public education campaign on all social media platforms will go a long way toward raising individuals' awareness of and encouraging their knowledge of the VAPP Act's provisions.

Key words: social media, VAPP Act, citizens, awareness, knowledge, gender-based laws, gender-based violence, human right, Nigeria, etc.

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the countries battling the global uprising of human brutality. On a daily basis, the media are filled with different reports of violence ranging from abuse, molestations, intimidation, acid bath, wife battery, sexual harassment, rape to death, killings and maiming of people by a girl friend, a spouse, an ex-lover, ritualists or other mentally deranged members of the society (Eze-Anaba, 2006). Reports from United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) gender-based violence sub-sector Nigeria situational update in July 2019 revealed 74% reported incidents of intimate and/ or former partner violence in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States where 85% of the survivors were adults and 18% children. A breakdown of the update shows that 31% of the reported incidents were physical

assault, 27% denial of resources, 17% emotional and psychological abuse and 25% sexual violence. (GBVIMS, June, 2019).

Nigeria was put in 10th place on The Thomas Reuters Foundation Annual Pool's list of the most dangerous nations for women in 2018. Similar statistics were found in reports by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on gender-based violence in Nigeria, which showed that three out of ten Nigerian women agreed to know someone who had been raped in the past and that the majority of rape victims are minors and young women between the ages of 1 and 15 and 16 and 25 (Okon, 2021). According to Okolo and Okolo, (2018), incidences of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, and rape of minors have increased noticeably, particularly in Northern Nigeria

Despite the existence of legislations and international interventions, the incidences of domestic violence keep rising in Nigeria (Onyemalukwe, 2018). Analysis of the ripple effect of covid-19 lockdown and post Covid-19 pandemic on sexual and gender based violence revealed that women and girls suffered more abuses during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown especially within their domestic homes. Studies indicated an increase of 97% in reports of gender-based violence in Nigeria as number of cases rose from 60 in March to 238 in April, 2020 (Young and Aref-Adib, 2020).

The alarming statistics of violence in Nigeria gave rise to the enactment of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act. VAPP Act is designed to “*eliminate violence in both public and private life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders; and for related matters*”. The different sections of the act covers acts of violence in forms of rape, battery, coercion, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, ejection from homes, economic abuse, forced isolation from family and friends, damage of properties, abandonment without sustenance, intimidation, attack with harmful substance, indecent exposure and any harmful traditional practices.

It clearly spells out the appropriate punishment for the offenders including those who incite, aid, abet and counsel others to commit such acts of violence. More so, the Act explains the expected duties of the court, police, civil societies, health care givers and people when cases of violence arise. It equally provides the procedure for victims to follow while applying for protection order and the power of the high court to hear and grant applications within their jurisdiction. The provisions of the VAPP Act if followed to the latter will not only help victims of sexual and gender-based violence to get the desired justice but will go a long way in preventing future occurrences.

With the VAPP Law, the lapses in other previous legislations that allow perpetrators of violence to escape punishments and continue to wreck havoc are bridged. Contrary to the old Criminal Code Act, the VAPP Act provides a balanced definition of rape that includes oral and anal intercourse, the use of items and other parts of the body besides the penis, as well as vaginal penetration (Anyaogu and Okpalaobi, 2017), as a result, issues of forcible anal or oral sex are now considered to be rape, which would have been challenging in the past as these situations were neither foreseen nor covered by our previous laws (Lawpavilion, 2016). It also recognizes marital rape as an offence in Section 1(1), (Lii, 2015). The VAPP law is an important legal tool that will go a long way in ensuring safety of women and girls in Nigeria (Okonola, 2021)

The VAPP Act has had a somewhat low uptake six years after it was passed into law, with domestication occurring in just over 50% of the 36 states (WFD, March, 2023). Presently, only 18 states out of the 36 states and the Federal capital territory have fully domesticated the VAPP law. The remaining 17 states especially the Northern states are yet to embrace the law. Legal experts and arbitrators believe that the delay in the adoption of VAPP law in many states is a sign of lip service to the claim that they would stop at nothing in fighting violence as well as a serious setback in the battle against human rights abuse.

The spike in incidence reports of gender based violence despite the number of years the VAPP Act and other related laws have existed in Nigeria is a major motivation for this study. Important questions about how much the public is aware of the Act's existence and its provisions, as well as how much the media has helped to educate the public about the VAPP Act's requirements should be asked. The success of every law's application depends on how well its intended audience is aware of and familiar with its provisions, which is the premise of this study. In addition to political resolve to domesticate such laws, it is crucial to inform and educate the public about such laws.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing cases of human right abuse especially gender-based violence has lead to so many legal reforms and enactment of human right laws in Nigeria such as the 1960 Penal Code Act , the National Policy on Women, Child Rights Act, The Trafficking in Persons(Prohibition, Enforcement and Administration) Act 2003, and state laws like The Infringement of a Widow's and Widower's Fundamental Rights Law No 3 of Enugu State, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Law of Cross River State etc and the 2015 VAPP Act. Challenges remain however in how citizens are adequately informed of the existence and provisions of laws that protect them from all forms of violence. The 2015 VAPP Act is the latest innovative and comprehensive human right law established with the sole aim of providing adequate protection against all forms of violence against persons in Nigeria including the punishment for the offenders. So far, the VAPP act has existed for seven years in Nigeria, yet many persons are inadequately informed or are ignorant of its existence and provisions. This study therefore is set to know how social media have been used to create awareness and promote citizens' knowledge of the provisions of the VAPP Act.

Research Questions

In line with the set objectives of the study, the following questions emanated to give focus and direction to the study.

1. What are the social media platforms that mostly provide information about the provisions of the VAPP Act in South-East Nigeria?
2. To what extent do social media create awareness of the existence and provisions of VAPP Act in South-East Nigeria?
3. What is the level of exposure of social media users to sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act?
4. To what extent do social media promote citizens' knowledge of the provisions of VAPP Act in South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

The role of media in promoting public awareness and knowledge of gender based laws. .

The media could be a real tool for achieving education, mobilization, and sensitization, and by providing knowledge, they can help us see the world from a wider perspective both mentally and economically (Ukpe and Akarika, 2019). The media's power rests in establishing public agendas, supporting local initiatives, bringing issues to the public's attention, and disseminating straightforward information (Tones et al, 1990 cited in Wellings and Macdowall 2000). The citizens tend to benefit from the information made available through the media. They get to know about trends, innovations, ideas, policies, programmes and legislations and other vital information that affects them.

Over the years, mass media campaigns have been largely deployed as a tool for promoting public issues and have significantly contributed in exposing large portion of the public to public messages through the use of the

regular media such as television, radio, and newspaper, and social media (Akarika, et al., 2020 citing Noar, 2006). The media serves as a conduit for educating and informing people about their basic human rights, and they accomplish this by drawing attention to how those rights are written in various constitutions and laws to keep people secure and informed (Ajero, 2018).

With the development of the internet and other social networks, our society is becoming increasingly capable of being continually informed, entertained, and linked to other people at the press of a button (Akarika and Kierain, 2017). Social media platforms have become strong purveyors of human rights activism. It encourages people to fight against injustice and increases freedom of speech and expression (Singhal, 2023). Many activists use social media platforms to publicise human rights issues, monitor and document human rights violations, draw attention to human rights laws as well as communicate human rights messages to elicit public response and change (Phoshoko, 2023). The idea is that as campaign messages on human rights laws are propagated on different social media platforms, people get to know about their human rights, and laws that protect them against abuse of such rights. This way, social media helps in defending and protecting human rights.

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the tenets of agenda setting theory propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 as well as the social responsibility theory propounded by F. S Siebert, T.B Paterson and W. Schramm in 1956. Agenda setting theory posits that the media 'set the agenda' for public perception of salient issues, funneling audience attention toward certain topics and thereby influencing public perception of important issues. The theory suggests that exposure is not enough; media contents need to be made salient or significant to users before being processed and accepted. This implies that if the media choose to make the issue of gender based violence salient by highlighting and promoting the provisions of legal documents such as the VAPP Act that protect people against violence, they would be contributing to increasing awareness of the Act as well as shaping public opinion and subsequent attitude towards the Act in Nigeria.

Social responsibility theory on the other hand is founded on the premise that freedom carries concomitant obligations and as such, the media while enjoying privilege positions as the fourth estate of the realm has an obligation to be socially responsible to the society by carrying out the essential function of mass communication (Nkanu, Ineji & Okoi, 2020). This theory proposes that the media take it upon themselves to elevate society's standard by providing citizens with the information they need to govern themselves (Hutchins Commission, 1947). In line with this, the mass media owe it as a duty to properly enlighten and educate the members of the society on provisions of government legislations such as the VAPP Act as the society relies heavily on information made available by the mass media to make informed decisions on issues that affect them. Thus, the citizens' awareness and knowledge of laws on gender based violence depends to a large extent on how socially responsible the media are in fulfilling their social obligations.

Methodology

The researcher used survey method and the study was carried out in South-East region of Nigeria. South-East is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria made up of five states namely Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo. The estimated population of these states are 21,955,414 as recorded in Demographic Statistics Bulletin tables (2017). The sample size of the study was 400 determined using Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator with confidence level of 95(%), $P=50$, and confidence interval = 4.9. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the participants. Firstly, purposive sampling technique was used to select five major cities, one from each of the five South-East states as thus; Aba in Abia state, Onitsha in Anambra state, Enugu in Enugu state, Abakiliki in Ebonyi state and Owerri in Imo state. As urban areas, these cities have residents who have access to the social media and are also literate enough to understand the topic under discourse.

Secondly, proportionate sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the cities according to their population. Thus, the 400 sample size was proportionately distributed as follows: Aba- 148, Onitsha – 90, Enugu – 110, Abakiliki- 22, and Owerri- 35. Thirdly, convenience sampling technique was used to select at least three streets within the select cities in the five states in South-East Nigeria. Here, the researcher selected streets that were convenient and easily accessible in each of the select cities and finally, respondents who are up to 18 years old, have access to social media platforms and also understand the topic under discourse were purposively selected to fill the questionnaires.

Results

Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire distributed among respondents, 360 copies were returned giving a return rate of 90%. The results and findings are presented below;

Table 1: Distribution of responses showing social media platforms readily available for use in gathering information about VAPP Act

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	StD
Facebook	261	54	45	-	3.6	3.138
Instagram	99	171	75	1	2.98	2.559
Twitter	101	161	86	12	2.93	2.4899
Whatsapp	180	99	73	8	3.25	2.837
Others	63	162	117	18	2.75	2.334

The Limit of Real Number (LRN) is used as a basis to determine the cut-off point for each scale of measurement. Those responses that have mean scores within the range of the limits set for each scale of measurement are named by those scales of measurement. Here is a run-down of the limits set for real numbers that fall within each scale of measurement.

- For “Strongly Agree” decisions = (4.45 - 3.45) = 4point
- For “Agree” decision = (3.44 – 2.45) = 3point
- For “Disagree” decision = (2.44 – 1.45) = 2 point
- For “Strongly Disagree” decision = (1.44 – 0.45) = 1 point

The result in Table 1, indicate that all the responses had mean scores that fall within the Limit of Real Numbers (LRN) for “Agree” decision (i.e. 3.44 – 2.45). The implication of this is that most of the respondents affirmed that they agree that different social media platforms are readily available for gathering information regarding the VAPP Act. The responses on “face book platform” ranked highest with a mean score of 3.6 and standard deviation of 3.138 as a good number of respondents ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Agree’ to the statement (i.e 261 + 54) which gives a total of 315 (out of 360 respondents). Others include; Whatapp (3.25), Instagram (2.98), Twitter (2.98) and others (2.75).

All these responses indicate a strong disposition to the use of social media platforms as source of information among respondents. This also means that the different social media platforms can widely be deployed in disseminating information regarding the VAPP Act.

Table 2: Distribution of responses showing social media platforms that often provide information about the VAPP Act

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Twitter	110	30
Whatsapp	40	11
Instagram	15	4
Facebook	189	53
Others	6	2
Total	360	100

The result on social media platforms that often provide information about the VAPP Act reveals that face book ranked highest with 189 (53%); this is followed by twitter which has 110 representing (30 %). Whatsapp and Instagram recorded low number of responses (40 representing 11% and 15 representing 4%). At the bottom of the table, other social media platforms such as Tik-Tok, Ytube, etc grouped under the variable “others” ranked lowest with 6 responses (representing 2%) of the respondents.

The implication of this finding is that face book and twitter are the social media platforms that mostly provide information regarding the VAPP Act. Other platforms such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Ytube, Tik-Tok etc do not often provide information about the VAPP Act.

Table 3: Distribution of responses showing the extent to which social media is used to create awareness of the existence and provisions of the VAPP Act

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D
I am aware of the existence of the VAPP Act in Nigeria.	117	135	63	45	2.9	2.5495
I got to know about the existence of the VAPP Act via social media.	90	81	90	99	2.45	2.20227
Social media creates awareness of what constitutes the provisions of the VAPP Act	45	81	99	135	2.1	1.84390
Social media reports of cases of violence against persons such as rape, murder, child trafficking etc always have follow up information on existence and provisions of laws such as VAPP act that protects citizens against such act.	40	40	20	260	1.611	1.452966

From the result in table 3, two out of the four responses had mean scores that fall within the Limit of Real Numbers (LRN) for “Agree” (i.e. 3.44-2.45). Specifically, the response “I am aware of the existence of the VAPP Act in Nigeria” had mean score of 2.9 with standard deviation of 2.5495 while the response “ I got to know about the VAPP Act via social media” had mean score of 2.45 with standard deviation of 2.20227. This implies that social has been used to create awareness about the VAPP Act as most of the respondents affirm that they are aware of the existence of the VAPP Act and that they got to know about it through social media.

However, the other response such as “Social media creates awareness of what constitutes the provisions of the VAPP Act” had mean score of 2.1 and standard deviation of 1.84390 that falls within Limit of Real Numbers for “Disagree” (i.e 2.44 – 1.45). This indicates that social media has not created much awareness on what constitutes the provisions of the VAPP Act.

Table 4: Distribution of responses showing level of exposure of social media users to sensitization messages on provisions of the VAPP Act.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D
I am aware of an ongoing social media sensitization message creating awareness about the provisions of the VAPP Act in Nigeria.	54	81	90	135	2.15	1.91049
I always hear about the provisions of the VAPP Act in different social media platforms	63	45	135	117	2.15	1.897366
I often get to read about the provisions of the VAPP Act whenever i visit different social media platforms.	0	80	20	260	1.5	1.20185
I have been exposed to sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act from authorized institutions such as NAP TIP, NHRC, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and law enforcement agencies in social media.	0	120	60	180	1.8333	1.527525

The Limit of Real Number (LRN) was also used as a basis to determine the cut-off point for each scale of measurement. The result from table 4 reveals that all the four responses fall within the Limit of Real Number for “Disagree” decision (i.e 2.44 – 1.45). Most of the respondents (responses with 2.15 mean score and standard deviation of 1.91049) are not aware of any ongoing sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act. Responses with mean scores of 2.15 (St.D 1.897366) and 1.5 (St.D 1.20185) respectively, do not hear or read about the provisions of the VAPP Act whenever they visit different social media platforms. Responses with mean score of 1.83 (St.D 1.527525) also disagree to have been exposed to sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act emanating from authorized institutions such as National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Ministry of justice etc, in social media.

This implies that the level of exposure of social media users to sensitization messages on provisions of the VAPP Act in social media is quite low.

Table 5: Distribution of responses showing the extent to which social media promote citizens' knowledge of the provisions of the VAPP Act

Variables	SA	A	D	SA	Mean	St.D
I often get online notification messages talking about the provisions of the VAPP from authorized agencies like NAPTIP, NHRC, and ministry of Justice in social media.	40	60	100	160	1.94444	1.699673
I usually receive sensitization messages on VAPP act from official handles, pages and websites of authorized agencies such as NAPTIP, NHRC, ministry of justice etc	100	40	80	140	2.27777	2.108185
I always get information regarding the provisions of the VAPP Act from online news channels	100	20	100	140	2.22222	2.054805
Celebrity pages are often used to talk about the provisions of the VAPP Act	0	120	100	140	1.94444	1.598611
Online influencers usually talk about the provisions of the VAPP Act.	0	140	80	140	2	1.666667
I often receive sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP act from online groups (family/friends) I belong to.	20	60	140	140	1.88888	1.563472
The sensitization messages I receive provide insights and detailed information on the following provisions of the VAPP Act;						
Citizens' rights	81	162	99	18	2.85	2.4392
Criminalized offences	63	162	99	36	2.7	2.31300
Penalty of offenders	36	72	180	72	2.2	1.84390
Authorised personnel that assist victims	18	72	180	90	2.05	1.6733
Legal procedure to follow to obtain justice	36	54	189	81	2.13	1.77482

The Limit of Real Number was also used here as a bench mark for decision making from the result in each of the responses. The result from table 4.1.6 shows that the first six responses fall within the Limit of Real Number (LRN) for “Disagree” decision (i.e. 2.44 – 1.45). This can be traced to the number of responses that disagree to the statements from the result in the table. The mean scores of the responses (1.9, 2.2, 2.2, 1.9, 2, 1.8) indicate that the respondents do not often receive sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act from official handles, pages and websites of authorized agencies such as NAPTIP, NHRC, Ministry of Justice in Social media. It also shows that they do not get such messages from online news channels, celebrity pages, online influencers, or online groups they belong to.

Conversely, responses on insights provided by the sensitization messages received by respondents showed two responses that fall within the Limit of Real Number (LRN) for “Agree” decision (i.e 3.44- 2.45) while the remaining three responses had mean scores that fall within the Limit of Real Number for “Disagree” decision (i.e. 2.44 – 1.45). The responses are;

The sensitization messages I receive provide insight and detailed information on the following provisions of the VAPP Act;

- Citizens’ Rights (mean = 2.85)
- Criminalized offences (mean = 2.7)
- Penalty of offenders (mean = 2.2)
- Authorised personnel that assist victims (mean = 2.05)
- Legal procedure to follow to obtain justice (mean = 2.13)

From these results, it is clear that the sensitization messages received by the respondents provided information on citizens’ rights and criminalized offences as provided by the VAPP Act but did not provide much insight on the provisions of the Act in terms of penalty of offenders, authorised personnel that assist victims and legal procedure to follow to obtain justice. The implication of this result is that the use of social media to promote citizens’ knowledge of the provisions of the VAPP act is quite low.

Discussion and recommendations

Findings from this study indicate that all the social media platforms are available for use as majority of the respondents indicate a strong disposition to the use of social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, whatsapp, instagram, and others as source of information. However, the result from table 2 reveals that face book and twitter are the platforms that mostly provide information regarding the provisions of the VAPP Act. The implication of this finding is that not all social media platforms have been widely deployed in disseminating information regarding the VAPP Act.

The potential of social media in raising public awareness of the provisions of the VAPP Act could be undermined if all accessible social media platforms are not utilized, given the number of people who receive information via various social media platforms. For instance, the Whatsapp platform, which fosters a sense of stronger familial ties and allows users to share information with contacts and groups they know (Aharony and Gazit, 2016), can be used to spread awareness about the terms of the VAPP Act. Utilizing Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok will allow for the upload of videos and photos that raise awareness of the VAPP Act's existence and its requirements.

This is what the findings of Ambrosi, et al. (2018) imply, which showed that awareness raising on websites and portals created awareness on issues of gender violence generally and specifically as well as provided

opportunity for support because factors like web channels, participatory tools, web spaces, and online information based pages were engaged. This also supports the ideas of the agenda setting theory of the press, which holds that the media "set the agenda" for public perception of relevant issues by directing audience attention toward particular topics and so influencing public perception of significant concerns (Uzochukwu et al., 2015). Therefore, aggressive promotion of the VAPP Act across all social media platforms would help raise awareness of the law's provisions to a wide audience.

The findings emanating from the study further revealed that social media have been used to create awareness about the VAPP Act as most of the respondents affirm that they are aware of the existence of the existence of the VAPP Act and that they got to know about it through social media. This lends credence to the use of social media as a veritable tool to campaign and speak against violence and sexual harassment in Nigeria (Arikwewuyo et al., 2017) and corroborates the findings of Stabile et al (2020), that social media has a transformative force in social movements capable of impacting on the influence and interplay of actors in advocacy network. The result of the findings of Stabile et al indicate that social media campaigns on twitter are one of the strategies adopted by organizations in fighting against gender-based violence while the result of this present study steps up to prove that social media is not just a vehicle for campaigning against acts of violence, but also a veritable tool of awareness creation on the existence of laws such as the VAPP Act which protects citizens against all forms of violence.

However, there seems to be discrepancy between citizens' awareness of the existence of the VAPP Act and their knowledge of what constitutes its provisions. While social media platforms have increased mass awareness of the VPP Act, it has not promoted knowledge of its provisions. The implication of this finding is that social media have not been effectively utilized to promote citizens' knowledge of the provisions of the VAPP Act in Nigeria. Thus, validating the fact that the mass media (electronic and print) have not been effectively employed for the promotion of human rights in Nigeria (Asameh et al., 2013) . The media can become a tool for promotion of human rights in Africa through the process of attracting peoples' attention to human rights and informing them of those rights in order to keep them safe (Ajere, 2018).

Many people are ignorant of the provisions of the VAPP law and protections/ punishment it provides to both survivors and perpetrators of GBV (Uniga and Yakubu, 2021). The result of the findings also showed that the sensitization messages received by the respondents provided information on citizens' rights and criminalized offences as provided by the VAPP Act but did not provide insights on the provisions of the Act in terms of penalty of offenders, authorised personnel that assist victims and legal procedure to follow to obtain justice. This proves that the media have not fully carried out its social responsibility of properly enlightening and educating the members of the society on provisions of the VAPP Act.

Access to the mass media is an expression of peoples' fundamental human rights; however, media responsibility is paramount for the survival of this right. Without information, people will not know their rights. Thus, their ability to respond to laws and policies that protects them against all forms of human rights abuse can be limited by ignorance. As part of its social responsibility, all social media platforms should be used to provide adequate information on what constitutes the provisions of the VAPP Act.

Finally, the study indicates that among social media users, there is low exposure to social media sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act. Majority of the respondents affirm that do not often receive sensitization messages on the provisions of the VAPP Act from official handles, pages and websites of authorized agencies such as NAPTIP, NHRC, Ministry of Justice in social media. They also disagree to receiving such messages from online news channels, celebrity pages, online influencers, or online groups they belong to. Therefore, government, NGOs, and authorized agencies such as NAPTIP, NHRC, Ministry of justice, police etc should as a matter of urgency, increase citizens exposure to sensitization messages on the VAPP Act by publicising it on their official handles, pages and websites. Such messages should also be disseminated through online news channels, celebrity pages, online influencers, and online groups.

The sensitization messages regarding the VAPP Act should focus on promoting knowledge of the provisions of the act and the protections cum punishment it provides to both victims and perpetrators of violence. From such information, people should be able to know what their rights are, the criminalized offences, penalty of offenders, authorized personnel that assist victims and legal process to follow to obtain justice. As suggested by Uniga and Yakubu , where citizens are sensitized and made aware of the law, they can have a voice and easily speak out against rights abuses; also perpetrators will not persist in their brazen impunity with acts of gender based violence.

Conclusion

Relying on the findings of this study, it is clear that social media have not been extensively utilized in publicising information regarding the existence and provisions of the VAPP Act. This is as a result of not adopting all the various social media platforms available to the citizens to use in gathering information. Using only facebook and twitter platforms to disseminate information regarding the VAPP Act, is not enough considering the advantages inherent in other platforms such as whatsapp, instagram, youtube, tik-tok, etc. According to the study's findings, most people are simply aware that these regulations exist; they have no idea what the VAPP Act's specifications are. This knowledge gap exists because citizens have not been exposed to sensitization messages on provisions of the Act emanating from official websites, handles and pages of authorized institutions or online news channels, celebrity pages or groups they belong to. It is therefore important to aggressively utilize all social media platforms to publicise the provisions of the VAPP Act.

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