

## Digital Feminism in Nigeria: A Study of Top Ten Cases on Twitter of Arewa Women on #Metoo Movement

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### Abstract:

*This study explores the digital feminism landscape in Nigeria, focusing on the #MeToo movement and its manifestation on Twitter among Arewa women. The research analyzes the top ten cases to understand the impact of digital activism on raising awareness about sexual harassment and assault in the context of conservative cultural and religious values prevalent in the northern region*

**Keywords:** Digital Feminism, #MeToo, Arewa Women, Twitter, and Sexual Violence.

### Introduction

In order to define and create the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes, a variety of sociopolitical groups and philosophies collectively known as feminism have been developed. According to feminism, women are unfairly treated in these countries and that they value the views of males. Fighting against gender stereotypes and enhancing opportunities and outcomes for women in the workplace, in academia, and in interpersonal relationships are some ways to change this.

In Nigeria, feminism was born out of women's desires to elevate their position and get rid of debilitating elements that prevented them from fully exercising their human rights. Because of the patriarchal society that was fostered by the British colonial government, women in Nigeria have historically had to navigate a variety of obstacle.

Women in Nigeria actively engaged in both the public and private spheres before colonization arrived, and they often had independent access to resources. Women were essential to trading among the Yoruba. Falola (2013) asserts that Yoruba women were the key players in long-distance trade, where there were abundant prospects for building money and achieving status. The most accomplished one of them attained the famous chieftaincy title of Iyalode, a position of immense luxury and power.

Women began resolutely opposing colonial principles in 1925 as part of the "Nwaobiala Movement," which culminated in the "Women's War" of 1929, in which 10,000 women took part and dozens of them died in an effort to defend their position of power. However, WIN (Women in Nigeria), an organization that was created in 1983 with a stated objective to develop a "ideologically feminist movement" in the nation, is where the overtly feminist movement in Nigeria has its origins. The Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) was established in 2008 to take the position of WIN. Organizations with strong feminist stances are already forming, including Stand to End Rape, Afri-Dev Info, The Nigerian Women's Trust Fund, Coloured Africa, and As Equals Africa (Zeitschrift Luxemburg, 2018).

In a same way, before colonization, women had desirable positions in Igboland. Using the political status-bearing jobs as an example, Okonjo (1976) maintained that males did not exclusively hold these positions. She asserted that the roles of the Omu, the female king, and the Obi, the male monarch, were parallel and complimentary, with each administering the affairs of his or her sex. The colonial officials altered this situation by putting the Obi on a monthly pay and recognizing him, undermining the female monarch's authority and securing her position of power. The British implementation of specific restrictions and regulations that hindered Igbo women's enjoyment of their social, economic, and political rights led to the Igbo women's insurrection or protest, also known as the Aba Women's Riots, in 1929.

As a form of political and intellectual engagement, the African feminist movement as a whole maintains that women may fight male supremacy via the use of creative expression through plays, poetry, art, and literature. This perspective is an outright refutation of Eurocentric and Masculinity conceptions of Intellectual Work. In this sense, the cultural arts have a big influence on the modern feminism in Nigeria. Some of the significant figures in the development of Nigerian feminism include artists

like Peju Alatise, Nike Ogundaike Davies, and Otobong Nkanga who employ performance art, sculpture, textile design, and other media to address concerns with tradition, polygamy, and the oppression of women.

However, contrary to how they are frequently portrayed in modern literature, Nigerian women were neither helpless nor subservient. For instance, a notable woman previously served as Queen in the traditional northern Nigeria, where Islam's influence had made women's voices disappear. Zazzau, a Hausa city in Northern Nigeria, was ruled by Queen Amina without challenge. She led campaigns shortly after becoming a ruler and was renowned for her military prowess and ability to expand empires. The Nupe and Kwararafa states were absorbed by Amina's conquest of the entire region between Zazzau and the Niger and Benue rivers. A woman named Ebele Ejaunu is said to have founded the Igala kingdom, which is located in northern Nigeria.

In recent years, feminism in Nigeria has gathered substantial pace, and the role of digital media in this movement has been vital. Nigerian feminists have been advocating for women's rights, bringing attention to gender inequity, and inspiring women to take action via digital media platforms.

The #MeToo movement, which started in the United States but swiftly spread to other areas of the world, including Nigeria, is one of the most significant instances of how digital media has impacted feminism in Nigeria. Nigerian women have begun sharing their stories of sexual harassment and assault on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter in order to seek justice from the offenders and the government.

The #MeToo campaign, which started in 2017, has had a big influence on Nigeria's digital feminist scene and has become a social trend. Rottenberg (2019) believes that the #MeToo movement has sparked a "global awakening" on the subject of sexual harassment and assault and has been especially successful in enabling victims to come out against their abusers.

The #MeToo movement's expansion in Nigeria has been significantly facilitated by social media, notably Twitter. Twitter has given survivors a venue to tell their tales and connect with others who have experienced similar things, as Okolo (2019) points out, and it has also brought attention to how widespread gender-based violence is in Nigeria.

In particular, Arewa women have been sharing their experiences of sexual harassment and assault on Twitter, despite the conservative cultural and religious values that prevail in the northern part of Nigeria. This study will examine the top ten cases of Arewa women speaking out about sexual violence on Twitter, analyzing the impact of digital feminism in Nigeria. Saidu, H. (2019).

Arewa women, in particular, have faced unique challenges in speaking out about sexual violence, given the conservative cultural and religious values that prevail in northern Nigeria. However, social media has provided a platform for Arewa women to share their experiences and challenge societal norms and expectations Okeke-Ihejirika (2020). Research has shown that women who use social media to speak out about sexual violence can experience a sense of empowerment and agency, even in the face of backlash and criticism (Kohut & Segalowitz, 2019).

Arewa refers to the northern region of Nigeria, where cultural and religious values are more conservative. Despite these values, Arewa women have been speaking out about their experiences of sexual violence on social media platforms, often at great personal risk. This study seeks to explore the ways in which digital feminism has empowered Arewa women to speak out against sexual violence and how this movement is challenging traditional gender roles and power structures in Nigerian society.

By examining these top ten cases, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which social media and digital activism can be used to raise awareness, challenge norms, and bring about change in the fight for women's rights and against sexual violence in Nigeria.

## Literature Review

The #MeToo movement has gained significant traction in Nigeria, particularly on social media platforms such as Twitter, where women have used the hashtag #MeTooNigeria to share their experiences of sexual violence. Arewa women, who come from a conservative cultural and religious background, have been particularly active in the movement, using social media to speak out against sexual violence and harassment. This section will review the literature on digital feminism in Nigeria, with a focus on the role of social media in the #MeToo movement and the experiences of Arewa women.

The use of social media in activism and advocacy has been widely studied in recent years. Research has shown that social media can be an effective tool for raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and bringing about social change (Cheney-Lippold, 2018; Tufekci, 2017). Digital feminism, which refers to the use of digital technologies and social media platforms to advance feminist causes and goals (Khamis et al., 2017), has played a significant role in the #MeToo movement in Nigeria. Studies have shown that social media can provide a platform for women to share their experiences of sexual violence and harassment, and to receive support from others who have had similar experiences (Nakamura, 2018). In Nigeria, the use of social media has been particularly important for women who may not have access to traditional forms of media or who face cultural and social barriers to speaking out about sexual violence (Akanbi, 2019).

Arewa women, in particular, have faced unique challenges in speaking out about sexual violence, given the conservative cultural and religious values that prevail in northern Nigeria. However, social media has provided a platform for Arewa women to share their experiences and challenge societal norms and expectations (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2020). Research has shown that women who use social media to speak out about sexual violence can experience a sense of empowerment and agency, even in the face of backlash and criticism (Kohut & Segalowitz, 2019).

### **Digital Media and Feminism**

Digital media and feminism have become closely intertwined in recent years, with social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook being used as powerful tools for advocacy and activism. This section will review the literature on digital media and feminism, with a focus on the role of social media in the #MeToo movement in Nigeria and the experiences of Arewa women.

Research has shown that social media can be an effective tool for promoting feminist causes and goals (Khamis et al., 2017). Digital feminism, which refers to the use of digital technologies and social media platforms to advance feminist issues, has played a significant role in the #MeToo movement in Nigeria. Studies have shown that social media can provide a platform for women to share their experiences of sexual violence and harassment and to receive support from others who have had similar experiences (Nakamura, 2018).

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However, the use of digital media and social media platforms in feminist activism is not without its challenges. Studies have shown that women who speak out about feminist issues on social media are often subjected to online harassment and abuse, including threats of violence, sexual harassment, (Herring et al., 2018). Arewa women, in particular, may face unique challenges in speaking out about feminist issues given the conservative cultural and religious values that prevail in northern Nigeria.

Digital feminism is a term that describes how technology and social media platforms are used by women to express themselves and fight for gender equality. It has become a powerful tool for women to share their stories and connect with other women who have had similar experiences. A study by Nwokolo and Akin-Aina (2021) examined the use of digital feminism in Nigeria, specifically focusing on the #MeTooArewa movement. The authors found that social media has become a space for women to speak out about their experiences with sexual harassment and abuse, and that these conversations have led to a broader discussion on gender inequality in Nigeria.

### **HashTags and Feminism**

The use of hashtags on social media has become a popular way for individuals and groups to express their opinions and start conversations. Hashtags like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #BlackLivesMatter have all gained traction in recent years, bringing attention to issues of sexual harassment, assault, and racism. The use of hashtags in the #MeTooArewa movement has allowed women in the northern region of Nigeria to connect with each other and share their experiences with a wider audience. According to Nwokolo and Akin-Aina (2021), the hashtag has also been used to mobilize support for survivors and demand justice for perpetrators.

### **Objectives:**

- Examine the top ten cases of Arewa women participating in the #MeToo movement on Twitter.
- Assess the impact of digital feminism on challenging cultural and religious barriers in northern Nigeria.
- Understand the role of social media in amplifying Arewa women's voices and fostering solidarity in the face of sexual violence

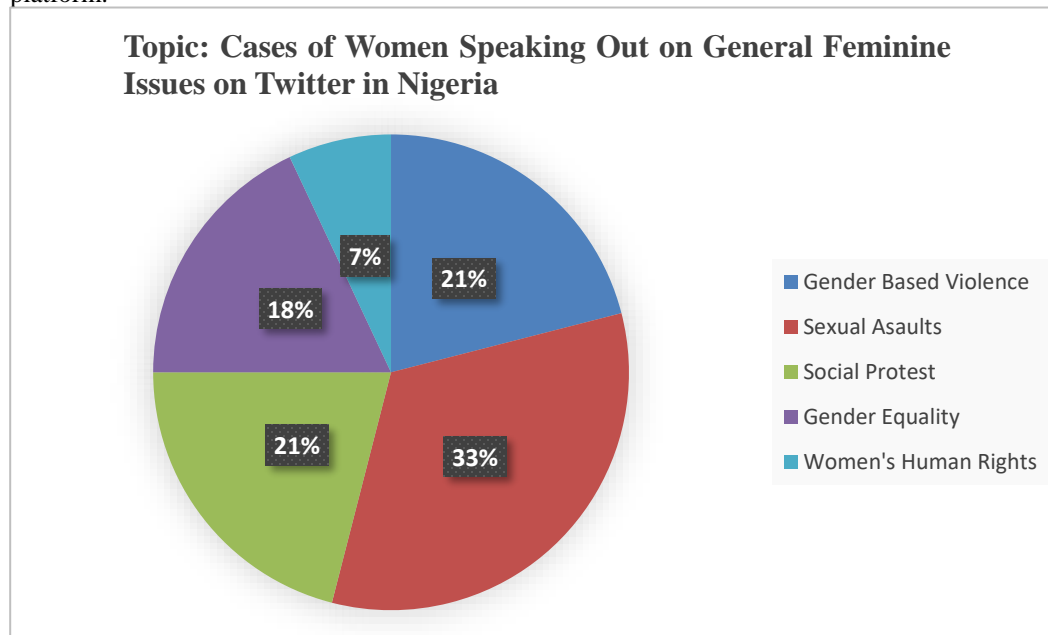
### **Methodology:**

This research employs a qualitative approach, conducting an in-depth analysis of tweets, retweets, and responses related to the #MeToo movement by Arewa women on Twitter. A purposive sampling method was used to select the top ten cases for detailed examination. Content analysis and thematic coding was applied to identify patterns, challenges, and the overall discourse surrounding digital feminism in Arewa.

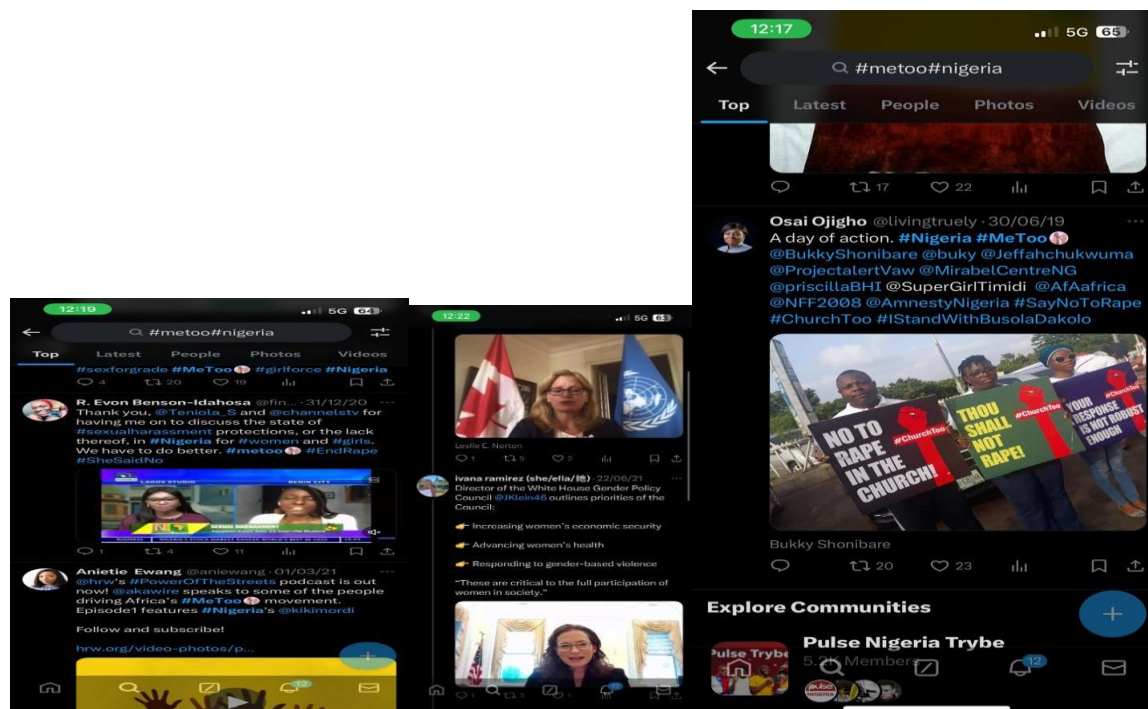
## Analysis

Twitter has opened up global communication to a much wider audience. Groups that throughout history whom have had problems to make themselves heard, have, with the internet, been given a new, inexpensive and effective remedy. Many groups in many different societies have been given a voice that was non-existent (Harp and Tremayne, 2016).

The following chart shows the distribution of Women whom have voiced their opinions on different feminine issues on Twitter platform.

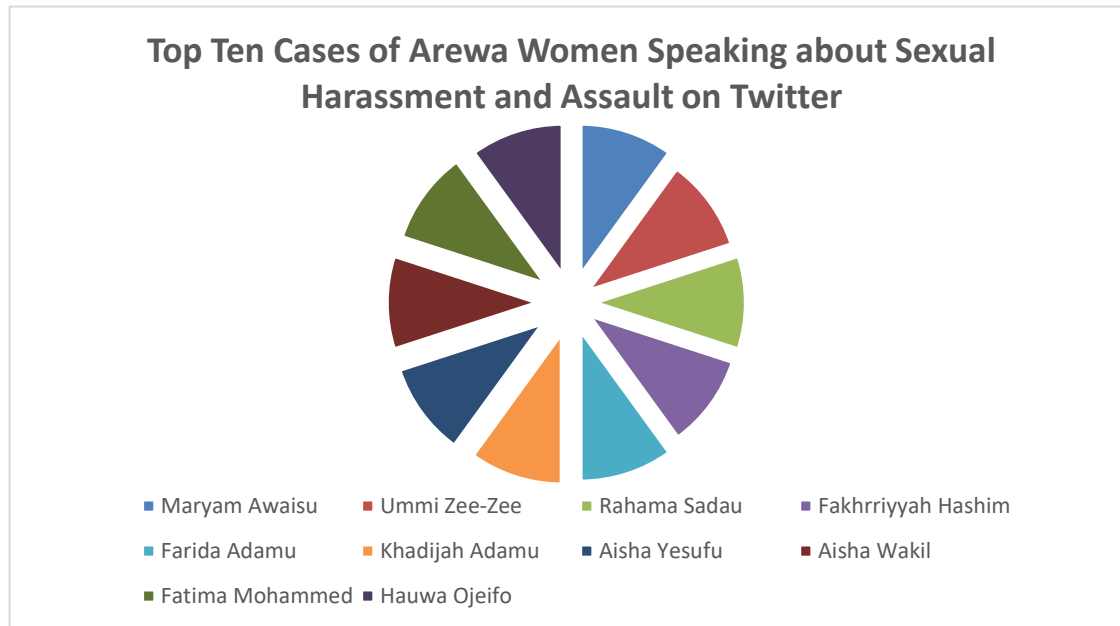


The chart above shows that 7% of women who use twitter popularly speak on issues concerning Women's Human Rights while 21% of these women use Twitter to popularly speak on issues of Gender Based Violence. Meanwhile, 33% of women who use twitter popularly speak on issues concerning Sexual Assaults and 21% of these women who use twitter for Social Protests. Lastly, 18% of these women who use twitter popularly speak on issues of Gender Equality in Nigeria and beyond.

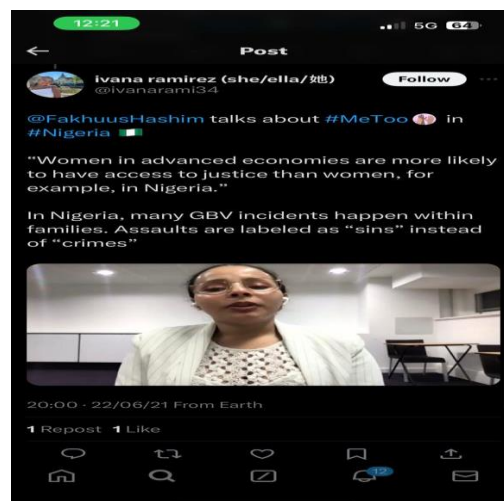


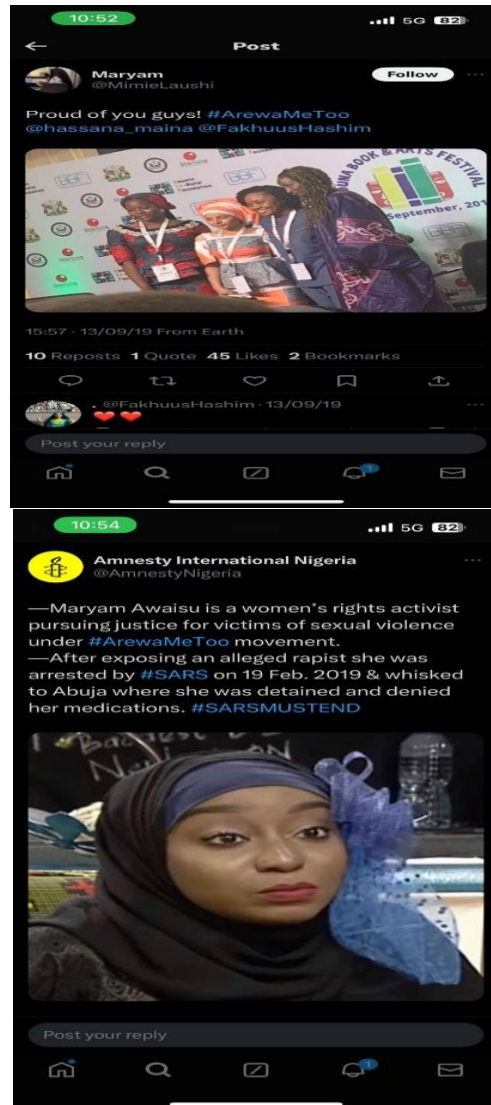
Moreover, it is well known that sexual harassment and assault against women which is the major thrust of this argument have been part of the social structure of most civilizations. Even though within many societies women have come a long way in opening up to these cases, there are still many who struggle to speak. These harassment and assaults that women face on a daily basis are not confined to one single geographical area but are transnational issues that concern women in every corner of the world. Women are not only confined by identifying themselves only by their gender. Women are fighting sexual abuse on many fronts including on grounds of their race, sexuality, physical abilities, amongst others. Thus, there are engagements, formally known as Intersectional Feminism, being thrown around a lot by women especially the feminist activists on Twitter.

**Here are the Top Ten Cases of Arewa Women Speaking out about Sexual Harassment and Assault on Twitter:**



The chart above shows that Maryam Awaisu, a human rights activist, was arrested and detained for organizing a peaceful protest against sexual violence in northern Nigeria. She shared her experience on Twitter which sparked a nationwide conversation about the suppression of women's voices in Arewa. Also, Ummi Zee-Zee is a popular Hausa actress who revealed on Twitter that she had been sexually assaulted by a producer. Her bravery in speaking out encouraged other women in the entertainment industry to come forward with their own stories of abuse.





Another popular case is that of Rahama Sadau, another Hausa actress, who was criticized and threatened with arrest for hugging a male colleague in a music video. She shared her experience on Twitter, sparking a conversation about the double standards faced by women in the entertainment industry. Moreover, Fakhriyyah Hashi is a journalist who was sexually harassed by a police officer while covering a protest in Abuja. She shared her experience on Twitter, sparking a conversation about the abuse of power by law enforcement officials.

Furthermore, Farida Adamu is a writer and editor who shared her experience of being sexually harassed by a male colleague. Her story resonated with many women in Arewa who had faced similar experiences in the workplace and Khadijah Adamu is a university student who shared her experience of being sexually harassed by a male lecturer. Her story sparked a conversation about the prevalence of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities. Aisha Yesufu is a human rights activist who has been vocal about issues of gender-based violence in Nigeria. She shared her own experience of being sexually assaulted as a teenager, using her platform to raise awareness and advocate for change and Aisha Wakil is another human rights activist who has been involved in negotiations with Boko Haram to secure the release of kidnapped schoolgirls. She shared her experience of being sexually assaulted by a Boko Haram commander, using her platform to highlight the plight of women and girls who have been kidnapped by the group. Also, Fatima Mohammed a former student of Bayero University, Kano, had in 2019 accused her lecturer, Professor Monsuru Lasun Emiola, of sexually harassing her. Her story went viral on Twitter, leading to an investigation by the university and the dismissal of the professor.



### Conclusion

35 percent of women worldwide are victims of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner or another person, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In Nigeria, one in four females under the age of eighteen are victims of sexual assault; of those, only 38% report the incident to someone, and only 5% seek assistance. There are a lot of factors, not only in Nigeria, that contribute to the low percentage of women who report and seek assistance for sexual assault.

Nevertheless, the hashtag's official adoption in Nigeria in February 2019, two years after Alyssa Milano first used it, was a predictable development for northern Nigeria, where the #MeToo movement broke beyond national boundaries and deeply impacted communities with inflexible attitudes around sex and sexuality. But due to a number of reasons, including the region's high literacy rate and the expectation of femininity as a reserve, the north of Nigeria was not the area of the country expected to adopt the hashtag.

82 percent of the victims of abuse were under the age of fifteen when they were molested, with some victims having been abused since they were as young as three years old, according to an analysis of 1,218 tweets on the #ArewaMeToo Twitter stream. Sixty-eight percent of the assaults described were either carried out in safe places like private residences, places of worship, or by family members. This investigation supports Hardy's 2014 study, which found that victims of sexual assault frequently knew their assailants, who were typically trusted individuals.

It is therefore implied that Twitter has opened up global communication to a much wider audience. Groups that throughout history whom have had problems to make themselves heard, have, with the internet, been given a new, inexpensive and effective remedy. Many groups in many different societies have been given a voice that was non-existent. This is evident in the top ten cases analysed for this study where the likes of Maryam Awaisu, Umami Zee-Zee, Rahama Sadau and a host of others have used Twitter to voice out on issues of Sexual Harassment and Assault.

### Scope for Further Research:

Further research could explore the long-term societal impacts of Arewa women's digital activism, examining changes in cultural attitudes toward sexual harassment. Additionally, comparative studies with women from different regions of Nigeria or other conservative societies could provide a broader understanding of the intersectionality of digital feminism and cultural contexts. Investigation into policy implications for online safety and the development of supportive digital spaces for women in conservative societies is another avenue for future exploration.

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