

## INFLUENCE OF THE #UNITE2ENDFGM CAMPAIGN ON PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN AKURE, ONDO STATE

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### Abstract

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This study examined the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation (FGM) in Akure, Ondo State. The study was anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 422 respondents (who were Facebook and WhatsApp subscribers) selected through availability sampling. A structured questionnaire served as the research instrument, while data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. Findings revealed a high level of exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on both Facebook and WhatsApp, with WhatsApp recording slightly higher engagement. Results further showed that the campaign significantly increased respondents' awareness of the health risks, legal consequences, and harmful effects of FGM. In addition, exposure to the campaign positively influenced respondents' attitudes, leading to stronger opposition to FGM and increased willingness to discourage its practice. However, the study identified key challenges affecting campaign effectiveness, including cultural beliefs, misinformation, inconsistent posting, and limited internet access. The study concludes that the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp plays a significant role in enhancing awareness and promoting negative attitudes toward FGM among residents of Akure. It recommends sustained and coordinated messaging on both platforms, improved content consistency, and strengthened efforts to counter misinformation in order to enhance campaign effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Female Genital Mutilation, Facebook, WhatsApp, UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign, Awareness, Attitudes.

## Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The practice is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and remains prevalent in several parts of Africa, the Middle East, and some Asian communities. In Nigeria, FGM has historically been practiced among various ethnic groups as a cultural ritual believed to preserve chastity, enhance marriageability, and ensure social acceptance within communities (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2022). In parts of southwestern Nigeria, it was traditionally regarded as a rite of passage into womanhood, sometimes marked with communal celebrations and reinforced through cultural sayings. For instance, among the Yoruba, a proverb suggests that a child does not die in the hands of a professional circumciser, reflecting historical trust in traditional practitioners. However, contemporary medical evidence has challenged these beliefs due to the serious health risks associated with the practice (Okeke, Anyaehie, & Ezenyeaku, 2012).

Medical studies show that FGM can result in severe physical and psychological consequences, including excessive bleeding, infections, complications during childbirth, and long-term reproductive health problems (WHO, 2023). The procedure is often carried out using unsterilized instruments and without anesthesia, exposing victims to extreme pain, trauma, and risk of infection (UNICEF, 2022). Due to these health consequences and its violation of human rights, FGM has been widely condemned by international organizations. Following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, global efforts intensified to eliminate the practice, which was recognized as a form of gender-based violence and a violation of women's and girls' rights (Berer, 2015). Consequently, organizations such as WHO, UNICEF, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have implemented advocacy campaigns, policy interventions, and community-based sensitization programmes aimed at its eradication (UNICEF, 2022). In Nigeria, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 criminalizes FGM and prescribes penalties for offenders (National Population Commission [NPC] & ICF, 2019). Despite these legal and institutional interventions, evidence suggests that FGM still persists in some communities, often practiced secretly due to cultural pressure and social norms.

In recent years, social media has become a major platform for public health communication and advocacy. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp are increasingly used by activists, health organizations, and civil society groups to disseminate information and engage the public on harmful traditional practices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A notable example is the UNITE2END FGM social media campaign, which leverages digital storytelling, hashtags, videos, and advocacy content to raise awareness and mobilize public support against FGM. These platforms provide opportunities for interactive communication, allowing users to share experiences, challenge cultural norms, and participate in discussions that promote behavioural and attitudinal change. This interactive nature strengthens public engagement in health promotion and human rights advocacy (Korda & Itani, 2013).

Although traditional media and legal frameworks have contributed to increased awareness of the dangers of FGM, the practice persists in some communities. This persistence suggests the need for stronger and more targeted communication strategies. Given the widespread use of smartphones and increasing internet penetration, social media—particularly structured campaigns such as UNITE2END FGM—may play a significant role in influencing public awareness and attitudes toward the practice. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how such specific social media campaigns influence awareness and attitudinal change at the community level. This study therefore evaluates the influence of the UNITE2END FGM social media campaign on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation among residents of Akure, Ondo State, with a view to understanding its contribution to behaviour change communication and advocacy against the practice.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation in Akure, Ondo State.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. determines the extent to which residents of Akure are exposed to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp;
- ii. identify the pattern of exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign across Facebook and WhatsApp among residents of Akure;
- iii. assess the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness of FGM in Akure;
- iv. examine the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on residents' attitudes toward FGM in Akure; and
- v. identifies the challenges affecting the effectiveness of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp in Akure.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Digital Advocacy via Facebook and WhatsApp**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to all procedures involving the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical purposes (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). It is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights and has no medical benefits, often resulting in severe physical and psychological

consequences. The practice is typically carried out on girls between infancy and adolescence by traditional practitioners without medical training (WHO, 2023).

FGM is deeply embedded in cultural traditions across parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, where it is often justified by beliefs relating to chastity, marriageability, social acceptance, and cultural identity (UNICEF, 2022). In Nigeria, prevalence differs across regions and ethnic groups, with some communities still practicing it secretly despite legal prohibitions and sustained advocacy efforts (National Population Commission [NPC] & ICF, 2019). Cultural pressure and fear of social stigma continue to sustain its persistence in certain areas.

The health consequences of FGM are severe and multifaceted. Immediate effects include extreme pain, excessive bleeding, shock, and infections, while long-term consequences include complications during childbirth, infertility, sexual dysfunction, and psychological trauma (Okeke, Anyaehie, & Ezenyeaku, 2012). In response, the Nigerian government enacted the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015, which criminalizes FGM. However, weak enforcement and deep-rooted cultural beliefs have limited its effectiveness, necessitating continuous public enlightenment and advocacy interventions.

In recent years, Facebook and WhatsApp have emerged as dominant digital communication platforms for public health advocacy and behaviour change campaigns. These platforms enable users to create, share, and circulate messages rapidly across personal networks and communities, making them highly effective for grassroots communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike traditional media, Facebook and WhatsApp support interactive communication, allowing users to engage in discussions, share content, and participate in advocacy networks that influence awareness and attitudes (Korda & Itani, 2013).

Within this digital environment, the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign has utilized Facebook and WhatsApp as key channels for disseminating anti-FGM messages. The campaign employs digital storytelling, survivor testimonies, infographics, videos, and hashtag-based advocacy to raise awareness and mobilize public support against FGM. On Facebook, campaign content is widely circulated through posts, pages, and community groups, while WhatsApp facilitates direct sharing within private and community chat groups, enhancing message diffusion at interpersonal levels.

A key advantage of Facebook and WhatsApp is their ability to transcend geographical and socio-economic barriers, allowing advocacy messages to reach diverse population groups, particularly in contexts where smartphone usage is increasing (Statista, 2023). These platforms also encourage civic participation by enabling users to comment, react, forward messages, and contribute to discussions, thereby strengthening collective engagement against harmful traditional practices such as FGM (Loader & Mercea, 2011).

Consequently, Facebook and WhatsApp have become important platforms for the implementation of targeted advocacy campaigns such as #UNITE2ENDFGM, which aim to promote awareness, reshape attitudes, and support the abandonment of FGM in affected communities.

## Empirical Review

Empirical studies on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and digital advocacy have examined its prevalence, socio-cultural drivers, and the role of communication strategies in influencing behavioural change. However, only a limited number of studies have focused specifically on platform-based digital campaigns such as Facebook and WhatsApp interventions in relation to FGM awareness and attitude change.

Okeke, Anyaehie, and Ezenyeaku (2012) investigated the socio-cultural factors sustaining FGM in Nigeria and found that cultural beliefs, social norms, and community pressure significantly contribute to its continuation despite its known health risks. The study concluded that sustained public education is necessary to reduce prevalence. However, it did not examine how exposure to structured digital campaigns on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp influences awareness or attitudes toward the practice.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) conceptualized social media as interactive digital platforms that enable rapid content creation and dissemination. They emphasized its potential for mass communication and engagement in marketing and public communication. However, their work was theoretical and did not evaluate specific advocacy campaigns or platform-based interventions such as Facebook and WhatsApp campaigns targeting harmful cultural practices like FGM.

Similarly, Korda and Itani (2013) examined social media in health promotion and found that campaigns combining educational messages with interactive engagement strategies significantly improve awareness and participation. Their findings demonstrated the effectiveness of digital platforms in behaviour change communication; however, the study did not focus on FGM or examine specific campaign-based interventions such as the #UNITE2ENDFGM initiative on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Evans, Wallace, and Snider (2015) investigated digital health communication campaigns and found that social media increases message reach and audience engagement. However, they noted that behavioural change is more likely when online campaigns are supported by offline interventions. Despite this contribution, the study did not assess platform-specific campaigns addressing FGM or evaluate the influence of Facebook and WhatsApp messaging on audience attitudes.

Berer (2015), in a policy-oriented study of global FGM eradication efforts following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), found that legal frameworks, advocacy initiatives, and community sensitization have contributed to gradual reductions in FGM prevalence. Nevertheless, the study did not incorporate digital communication tools such as Facebook or WhatsApp-based campaigns in its analysis.

Gillespie, Obregon, and El Asawi (2016) examined social mobilization strategies during the Ebola outbreak and found that combining multiple communication channels enhanced public participation and trust in health interventions. However, the study focused on epidemic response communication

and did not explore FGM-related advocacy or digital campaign structures such as hashtag-driven Facebook and WhatsApp initiatives.

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NPC & ICF, 2019) revealed that education, urban residence, and exposure to media significantly influence attitudes toward FGM. However, the survey did not differentiate between traditional media and digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, thereby limiting understanding of how specific online campaigns influence behavioural outcomes.

Loader and Mercea (2011) established that social media facilitates civic engagement, collective identity formation, and participation in social movements. While their findings support the role of digital platforms in activism, the study did not examine their application in targeted health or anti-FGM campaigns delivered through Facebook and WhatsApp.

Similarly, UNICEF (2022) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) emphasized that awareness campaigns and policy enforcement have contributed to declining FGM prevalence globally. However, both reports provide limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of structured social media campaigns such as #UNITE2ENDFGM in influencing awareness and attitudes at the community level.

Statista (2023) reported a continuous increase in global social media usage, particularly through mobile platforms, suggesting expanded opportunities for digital advocacy. However, the report did not evaluate behavioural outcomes or the effectiveness of campaign-specific messaging on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp in relation to FGM.

UNFPA and UNICEF (2020) found that combining digital communication with community-based interventions enhances outreach effectiveness, particularly among young people. However, the study was global in scope and did not provide localized evidence on the influence of specific campaigns such as #UNITE2ENDFGM within Nigerian urban settings like Akure.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that while FGM has been extensively studied in terms of prevalence, cultural determinants, and policy responses, there is a significant gap in empirical evidence regarding the influence of platform-specific digital campaigns—particularly Facebook and WhatsApp-based initiatives such as #UNITE2ENDFGM—on public awareness and attitudes toward FGM at the community level. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining how exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp influences awareness and attitudes toward FGM among residents of Akure, Ondo State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which together provide a strong explanatory framework for understanding how exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp influences public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation (FGM) in Akure, Ondo State.

The Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that while the media may not determine what people think, it significantly influences what people think about by giving prominence and repeated attention to specific issues. In the context of this study, Facebook and WhatsApp serve as key agenda-setting platforms through which the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign highlights FGM as a critical public health and human rights concern. Repeated exposure to campaign content such as posts, videos, infographics, and shared messages in WhatsApp groups increases the salience of FGM among users, thereby shaping how seriously individuals perceive the issue. Prior studies have also established that digital platforms enhance issue visibility and public engagement on health and social concerns (Korda & Itani, 2013; Loader & Mercea, 2011). In this study, Agenda-Setting Theory is used to explain how exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp influences the level of awareness and prioritization of FGM-related issues among residents of Akure.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, developed by Rogers (2003), explains how new ideas, beliefs, or practices spread within a social system over time through communication channels. The theory identifies stages of adoption, including knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. In this study, the messages disseminated through the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp represent an innovation aimed at changing long-standing cultural beliefs that support FGM and promoting its abandonment. Facebook facilitates wide dissemination through posts, shares, and comment interactions, while WhatsApp supports rapid interpersonal diffusion through private chats and group messaging, allowing campaign content to spread organically within communities. Continuous exposure to these messages enables individuals to progress through the stages of awareness, persuasion, and attitude formation toward rejecting FGM.

While the Agenda-Setting Theory explains how Facebook and WhatsApp determine the visibility and prominence of FGM as a social issue, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains how repeated exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign facilitates gradual acceptance of new ideas and encourages positive attitudinal change. Together, both theories provide a comprehensive framework for this study by explaining how structured digital advocacy through Facebook and WhatsApp contributes to increased awareness and improved attitudes toward FGM among residents of Akure, Ondo State.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation (FGM) in Akure, Ondo State. The design is appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data from respondents in order to describe patterns of exposure to the campaign, levels of awareness, and attitudinal responses without manipulating variables. It is particularly suitable for assessing perceptions and behavioural tendencies within a defined population.

The population of the study comprised residents of Akure aged 18 years and above who actively use Facebook and WhatsApp. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), Akure has a population exceeding 500,000, with a substantial proportion of residents engaging regularly with mobile phones and digital communication platforms. This population was considered appropriate for the study because Facebook and WhatsApp are the communication channels through which the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign is disseminated. Consequently, individuals who actively use these platforms are more likely to have the opportunity to encounter campaign messages and are therefore in a better position to provide informed responses regarding their awareness of, and attitudes toward, the campaign.

Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample size of 384 respondents was deemed adequate at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. To account for possible non-response or incomplete questionnaires, 10% was added, resulting in a total sample size of 422 respondents.

A non-probability convenience (availability) sampling technique was adopted for this study. This method was considered appropriate because it is difficult to obtain a comprehensive sampling frame of all Facebook and WhatsApp users in Akure, as access to these platforms is private, decentralized, and continuously changing. Respondents were therefore selected based on their accessibility and confirmed exposure to Facebook and WhatsApp, particularly those encountered in public spaces and those engaged through relevant online groups where the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign content is shared. This ensured that only respondents with relevant exposure to the campaign were included in the study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the study objectives. The instrument consisted of closed-ended items measuring respondents' awareness of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp, frequency of exposure to campaign messages on these platforms, perceived influence of the campaign on awareness of FGM, attitudes toward FGM, and challenges affecting the effectiveness of the campaign. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by two communication scholars and one gender studies expert. Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted among 30 respondents in a neighbouring community outside Akure. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency.

Data collection was carried out through both face-to-face administration and online distribution via Facebook and WhatsApp groups, ensuring adequate reach to respondents actively engaged on the platforms under investigation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical considerations were strictly observed due to the sensitive nature of discussions surrounding FGM.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25) was used to ensure accurate computation and clear presentation of results in tabular form.

## Result And Discussion

### Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 422 questionnaires were administered and retrieved, representing a 100% response rate. Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation in line with the study objectives.

**Table 1: Exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
I frequently see the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook	202	148	40	22	10	4.20	0.89
I frequently see the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on WhatsApp	214	140	38	18	12	4.23	0.88
I receive campaign messages through WhatsApp groups	198	150	42	20	12	4.18	0.92
Facebook is a major source of my exposure to the campaign	190	154	44	22	12	4.15	0.94
I am generally exposed to the campaign on these platforms	206	144	38	20	14	4.19	0.91

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results show high levels of exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on both Facebook and WhatsApp. All mean scores are above 4.00, indicating strong agreement that respondents frequently encounter campaign messages on these platforms, with WhatsApp slightly more dominant.

**Table 2: Frequency of Exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp**

Platform	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Total	Percentage (%)
Facebook	186	164	72	422	44.1
WhatsApp	210	148	64	422	49.8
Both Platforms	168	172	82	422	39.8

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings indicate that WhatsApp (49.8%) records slightly higher frequent exposure compared to Facebook (44.1%). This suggests that interpersonal sharing and group messaging make WhatsApp a more dominant channel for campaign dissemination.

**Table 3: Influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign on Awareness of FGM**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
The campaign increased my awareness of FGM dangers	210	140	36	22	14	4.20	0.90
It improved my understanding of FGM health risks	196	150	40	24	12	4.17	0.92
It educated me on legal consequences of FGM	188	152	42	26	14	4.12	0.94
It made FGM more discussed in my community	180	158	44	28	12	4.09	0.96
Overall, it increases awareness of FGM	204	144	38	22	14	4.18	0.91

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results indicate that the UNITE2END FGM campaign has a strong positive influence on public awareness of FGM. All mean scores exceed 4.00, showing that respondents agree the campaign improves knowledge of health risks, legal consequences, and general awareness.

**Table 4: Influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign on Attitudes Toward FGM**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
The campaign changed my attitude against FGM	198	150	40	20	14	4.15	0.93
I strongly oppose FGM due to the campaign	190	154	44	22	12	4.13	0.94
It influenced my perception of FGM as harmful	202	140	38	26	16	4.14	0.92
I discourage others from supporting FGM	186	156	42	24	14	4.10	0.95
The campaign promotes positive attitudes against FGM	200	146	40	22	14	4.16	0.91

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings show that the UNITE2END FGM campaign has a significant positive influence on attitudes toward FGM. Respondents indicated strong opposition to FGM after exposure to campaign messages, suggesting effective attitudinal change.

**Table 5: Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
I do not frequently see campaign messages on Facebook and WhatsApp	176	158	46	28	14	4.05	0.97
Limited internet access reduces exposure	170	162	44	28	18	4.03	0.99
Cultural beliefs affect acceptance of the campaign	190	150	40	26	16	4.12	0.93
Misinformation reduces effectiveness	182	156	42	28	14	4.08	0.95
Inconsistent posting weakens impact	178	160	44	26	14	4.07	0.96

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results indicate that despite strong campaign influence, several challenges limit effectiveness, including cultural resistance, misinformation, inconsistent posting, and limited internet access. However, all mean values above 4.00 indicate respondents strongly recognize these barriers.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence on the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation (FGM) among residents of Akure, Ondo State. The discussion is presented in line with the research objectives and is interpreted alongside relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical literature.

**Exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM Campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp**

The study found a high level of exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on both Facebook and WhatsApp, with WhatsApp recording slightly higher frequency of exposure. This suggests that interpersonal and group-based communication structures on WhatsApp significantly enhance the circulation of advocacy messages. This finding supports Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who argue that social media platforms facilitate rapid dissemination of information through user interaction and sharing mechanisms.

It also aligns with Loader and Mercea (2011), who emphasized that network-based platforms such as WhatsApp strengthen civic engagement through peer-to-peer communication. From the perspective of Agenda-Setting Theory, the frequent exposure to campaign messages on these platforms increases the salience of FGM as a public issue among residents, thereby shaping what people think about in relation to harmful traditional practices.

**Influence of the Campaign on Awareness of FGM**

The results indicate that the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign significantly increased respondents' awareness of the health risks, legal implications, and general dangers associated with FGM. This finding is consistent with Korda and Itani (2013), who observed that social media health campaigns

improve knowledge and awareness when educational content is consistently disseminated and shared interactively.

Similarly, Evans, Wallace, and Snider (2015) found that digital campaigns expand the reach of health messages and improve public understanding of health-related issues. In relation to Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003), the campaign functions as an innovation that spreads knowledge about the abandonment of FGM through repeated exposure, allowing individuals to progress from awareness to informed understanding.

### **Influence of the Campaign on Attitudes Toward FGM**

Findings further revealed that exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign positively influenced respondents' attitudes, leading to stronger opposition to FGM and increased willingness to discourage others from supporting the practice. This indicates that the campaign is not only informational but also persuasive in shaping behavioural orientation.

This result is consistent with UNICEF (2022), which reports that sustained advocacy and awareness campaigns contribute to attitudinal change against harmful traditional practices. It also supports WHO (2023), which emphasizes that behavioural change communication is essential in eliminating FGM.

From a theoretical standpoint, Agenda-Setting Theory explains how repeated emphasis on FGM as a harmful practice influences public prioritization and emotional response, while Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains how new anti-FGM norms are gradually adopted within the social system through exposure and interpersonal reinforcement on Facebook and WhatsApp.

### **Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of the Campaign**

The study identified several challenges affecting the effectiveness of the campaign, including cultural beliefs, misinformation, inconsistent posting, and limited internet access. These findings are consistent with Okeke, Anyaehie, and Ezenyeaku (2012), who noted that deeply rooted cultural norms remain a major barrier to FGM eradication in Nigeria.

The persistence of misinformation also aligns with Korda and Itani (2013), who observed that digital platforms, while effective, can also facilitate the spread of conflicting or inaccurate information that weakens health campaigns. Furthermore, limited internet access reflects structural inequalities highlighted by Statista (2023), which notes disparities in digital connectivity across developing regions.

These challenges suggest that while social media campaigns are influential, their effectiveness depends on complementary offline engagement and consistent content dissemination, reinforcing the argument by Evans et al. (2015) that digital health communication works best when combined with community-based interventions.

## **Conclusion And Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation (FGM) in Akure, Ondo State. Findings from the study reveal that residents of Akure are highly exposed to the campaign, with WhatsApp and Facebook serving as the major platforms for message dissemination. The study further established that exposure to the campaign significantly increases public awareness of the health risks, legal implications, and harmful consequences of FGM.

In addition, the campaign was found to have a positive influence on residents' attitudes, as most respondents indicated stronger opposition to FGM and a willingness to discourage its practice after exposure to campaign messages. However, despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as cultural beliefs, misinformation, inconsistent posting of campaign content, and limited internet access were identified as factors limiting the full effectiveness of the campaign.

Anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory, the study concludes that the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign successfully enhances the visibility of FGM as a critical social issue and facilitates gradual attitudinal change among residents through continuous exposure and interpersonal sharing on social media platforms.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study on the influence of the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp on public awareness and attitudes toward female genital mutilation in Akure, Ondo State, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since the study found high exposure to the #UNITE2ENDFGM campaign on Facebook and WhatsApp, campaign coordinators should intensify structured and consistent dissemination of advocacy messages on these two platforms. Regular posting of short videos, infographics, and survivor testimonies will help sustain visibility and reinforce awareness of the dangers of FGM.
2. Given that WhatsApp and Facebook were identified as the primary channels of exposure, campaign managers should optimize the use of WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages by encouraging message sharing, reposting, and peer-to-peer dissemination to increase the reach and circulation of anti-FGM content.
3. In line with the positive influence of the campaign on public attitudes, advocacy organizations should enhance persuasive content strategies on Facebook and WhatsApp, including storytelling, emotional messaging, and testimonies that further strengthen opposition to female genital mutilation.

4. To address the challenge of misinformation and cultural resistance identified in the study, fact-based content should be consistently circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp, while credible voices such as health professionals, community influencers, and verified campaign accounts should be used to counter false narratives about FGM.

5. Considering the challenge of inconsistent campaign exposure, campaign administrators should develop a coordinated posting schedule across Facebook and WhatsApp to ensure continuous engagement, rather than irregular or sporadic messaging that weakens campaign impact.

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