
THE SULTAN, SURVIVORS, AND SILENCERS: The #ArewaMeToo Movement in Northern Nigeria's Online Sphere

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Abstract: The #ArewaMeToo movement in Nigeria is a social media-driven campaign against sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The movement has generated controversy and resistance, prompting a closer examination of its emergence, trajectory, impact, and implications. This study, therefore, examines the emergence and trajectory of the movement and how it has used social media platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook to raise awareness about sexual harassment and gender-based violence in northern Nigeria. The movement has attracted significant attention and support, particularly from women who identify themselves as survivors of sexual harassment and who seek to challenge dominant approaches to sexual assault and harassment in the region. Drawing on both secondary and primary sources, this qualitative study provides a comprehensive understanding of the #ArewaMeToo movement and its impact. This research finds the controversial factors that contributed to the Nigerian Sultanate Council's decision to ban the movement, including the influence of Muslim intellectuals and social media influencers. It also reveals the historical context, key actors, and impact of the movement, as well as the effectiveness of online movements in driving social change.

Keywords: Online activism; sexual harassment; social media; Twitter (X); #ArewaMeToo.

Introduction

Growing up in northern Nigeria, one can directly witness the profound impact of Islamic values on the daily lives of Muslims in the region. Islamic ideals have permeated every aspect of life and shaped traditions, cultures, and practices. Children are often socialized into these values from a young age without formal religious instructions or scriptural studies. The blending of culture and religion is so seamless that the distinction between the two is not a common concern.¹

Despite a wide-ranging interpretation of Islamic practices, the blending of culture and religion remains a distinct characteristic of northern Nigeria's geographical context. Nonetheless, some practices can appear odd when adhering to the teachings outlined in the Quran. For instance, although Islam itself does not condone acts of violence or abuse in any way, public discussion around sexual issues is often deemed as taboo due to their emphasis on modesty as a tenet of faith. Consequently, cases of sexual abuse and assault frequently go unreported, as victims and their families opt to conceal such incidents to avoid societal stigma. This phenomenon perpetuates a culture of silence, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished.² However, the rising cases of sexual assault and sexual violence gave birth to the #ArewaMeToo movement. This led the study to research why the movement was outlawed and to what extent the influences of Muslim intellectuals, scholars, and other social media users influenced the decision of the Muslim authority council. This article seeks answers to those questions by studying the #ArewaMeToo movement's background and key actors.

Arewa is the general term used to refer to northern Nigeria which has a majority Muslim population. It is a society where issues related to sex and sexuality are rarely discussed in public. The Muslim Hausa-Fulani are one of the largest ethnic groups and predominant in the area. They are known for their strong social and religious traditions, significantly impacting the community's values and beliefs.³

¹ John N. Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).

² Rosie Collyer, "Nigeria's Sultan of Sokoto Bans #ArewaMeToo Campaign," *RFI*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20191202-nigeria-s-sultan-sokoto-calls-women-s-rights-campaign-ban>.

³ PBS NewsHour, "Ethnicity in Nigeria," *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*, April 5, 2007, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/africa-jan-june07-ethnic_04

The beautiful green fields and hazy skies of Arewa conceal a sinister truth. This truth has been hidden for a lifetime, but that quiet may now be breaking due to social media. With the increasing popularity of social media, online activism has significantly proliferated. This part of activism is employed in various professions to disseminate information that has yet to receive adequate coverage in mainstream media. The use of social media platforms can effectively draw people's attention to these essential issues and in turn promote social change. In northern Nigeria, this is what led to the advent of the #ArewaMeToo movement. Moreover, the primary goal of this kind of activism is to effect policy changes.⁴

This article argues that such movements in the area of study are most often deemed as Western agendas under the influence of foreign agents: it is mostly fear that these movements might cause the long-held traditions and values of how the Muslims in northern Nigeria practice their faith. Likewise, the perception of Western influence might have made some religious leaders and even certain government figures not to endorse the movement. In line with that, the objective of the study is to highlight the background of #ArewaMeToo, how the authorities outlawed the movement, to what extent the perceptions of the Muslim intellectuals and social media influencers shaped the decision of the Muslim authority council under the Sultan of Sokoto (which is a state-recognized largest Muslim body in the country) to outlaw the movement, and how social media has influenced socio-religious life in northern Nigeria.

This study follows a qualitative and descriptive research to understand and explore the answers to the proposed research questions. Muslim social media users from northern Nigeria were selected for this study, and the sample included genders and ages. Six influencers were selected. The participants were interviewed through Twitter (now X) Direct Messages. The cultural and socioeconomic aspects of the #ArewaMeToo movement were discussed in open-ended semi-structured interviews. Being part of the trend and utilizing digital ethnography as a participant observer, the researcher was

05#:~:text=Muslim%20Hausa%20and%20Fulani%20are,unified%20the%20groups%20over%20time.

⁴ Sasha Dookhoo, "How Millennials Engage in Social Media Activism: A Uses and Gratifications Approach" (MA thesis, University of Central Florida, Florida, 2015).

equipped with adequate knowledge to analyze the movement's background and actors as well as the controversies surrounding it.

Interview results and #ArewaMeToo trending posts both provided supplementary data. The information from social media helped the researcher understand the perceptions of the people engaged in the trend. In addition, sentiment analysis was used to identify and extract emotions and opinions through the written texts and social media posts, analyzing the language and attitude. The content analysis was used to examine secondary data and social media interview questions. Nonetheless, one weakness is that social media data may be distorted since people often express themselves differently online, and the use of unstructured discourse analysis methods of analyzing the data might also be biased. Therefore, to curtail the bias, interviewees were selected across: the supporters of the movement, the opponents, and those who did not take a side. By researching their different perspectives from a different angle, the researcher was able to imply objectivity in the study.

Online movements like #ArewaMeToo have received attention for their ability to raise awareness and mobilize action on social and political issues. However, there has yet to be much research on the #ArewaMeToo movement. Much research has not been done on how it has changed, how Muslim social media users in Nigeria view it, or why Muslim authorities outlaw it. Most research articles focused on how social movements inspire people to act, and few discussed how social movements affect the general population. Therefore, this research contributes to investigating and documenting the influence of social media platforms in shaping and challenging sexual abuse and harassment in Nigeria, focusing on the northern region where the current generation neglect good cultural norms and values and interprets Islamic teachings based on a thwarted tradition. To properly comprehend the issues at stake, the study is based on the existing literature on online activism, especially literature dealing with the global #MeToo. Hence, this study fills the gaps in the literature by delving into the background of #ArewaMeToo.

#MeToo and Female Activism on Social Media

The #MeToo movement inspired the #ArewaMeToo, which deems it necessary to highlight the global MeToo in this study. Although Tarana Burke initially created the "Me Too" movement in

2006 to raise awareness about sexual assault against women of color, the movement gained more attention in 2017 after an American former film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual assault. Then Alyssa Milano coined the hashtag “#MeToo” on October 15, 2017, to draw attention to the widespread issue. She asked her Twitter followers whether they had been victims of harassment or assault and invited them to use the hashtag “#MeToo” in response to her tweet. The tweet went viral, and over twelve million people used the #MeToo hashtag.⁵ The actress’s behavior boosted the #MeToo movement’s appeal among the victims and inspired the survivors to post their accounts on social media. Instantaneously, the movement went global.

The #MeToo movement sparked incisive and political debates about the interplay of power and sex.⁶ The movement demonstrated that sexual harassment is more about male domination and power than female sexual attraction.⁷ Since October 2017, 85 nations’ citizens have joined the initiative.⁸ It should be noted that many academics expressed concern about the #MeToo movement’s effects on the general public. However, they countered that the campaign had intensified sexism and pitted women against men.⁹ According to Burstein and Linton, social movements can act revolutionarily and change society by swaying a sizable portion of the populace.¹⁰

⁵ Deborah Tuerkheimer, “Beyond #MeToo,” *New York University Law Review* 94, no. 5 (2019), 1146-1208. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3366126>.

⁶ Meg-John Barker, Rosalind Gill, and Laura Harvey, “Mediated Intimacy: Sex Advice in Media Culture,” *Sexualities* 21, no. 8 (2018), 1337-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460718781342>; Rosalind Gill, “We Need to Talk about Consent,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 3, no. 9 (2016), 111-28.

⁷ Sarah Jaffe, “The Collective Power of #MeToo,” *Dissent* 65, no. 2 (2018), 80-87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2018.0031>.

⁸ Barker, Gill, and Harvey, “Mediated Intimacy.”

⁹ Jonas R. Kunst et al., “Sexism, Rape Myths and Feminist Identification Explain Gender Differences in Attitudes toward the #metoo Social Media Campaign in Two Countries,” *Media Psychology* 22, no. 5 (2019), 818-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2018.1532300>.

¹⁰ P. Burstein and A. Linton, “The Impact of Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Social Movement Organizations on Public Policy: Some Recent Evidence and Theoretical Concerns,” *Social Forces* 81, no. 2 (2002), 380-408. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2003.0004>.

In recent years, scholars have been drawn to using social media and the internet for political and social involvement.¹¹ Some studies show that the #MeToo movement increases awareness and solidarity. For example, when Tarana Burke coined the phrase “Me Too” in 2006 to discuss sexual assault, she also wanted to encourage solidarity. “People with similar experiences may connect and discuss them on the hashtag.”¹² Similarly, debates focus on the possibility of real-world activism emerging from online activism,¹³ and some even argue that Facebook profiles have been ignored when it comes to political participation.¹⁴ While numerous studies point to various ways how social media may affect collective action,¹⁵ few studies have specifically sought to understand how women behave when participating in protests.¹⁶

Interestingly, social media has shown to be an effective instrument for making women’s rights and interests known to the general public. Women’s unprecedented usage of social media is a crucial step in raising awareness of inequality, the gender pay gap, and other topics in the media.¹⁷ Many young women, especially those with limited finances, participate in protests online since it is convenient

¹¹ Julia Schuster, “Invisible Feminists? Social Media and Young Women’s Political Participation,” *Political Science* 65, no. 1 (2013), 8-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032318713486474>.

¹² Hauwa Shaffii Nuhu, “What Happens When We Protest: #MeToo in Northern Nigeria,” *African Argument*, March 11, 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2020/03/arewametoo-what-happens-when-we-protest-against-sexual-violence/>.

¹³ Sonia Livingstone, Magdalena Bober, and Ellen J. Helsper, “Active Participation or Just More Information?” *Information, Communication & Society* 8, no. 3 (2005), 287-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180500259103>.

¹⁴ Henrik Serup Christensen, “Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?” *First Monday* 16, no. 2-7 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336>; Schuster, “Invisible Feminists?” 8-24.

¹⁵ Garima Saxena et al., “Slacktivism or Activism: Investigating the Influence of Social Media Engagement on Individual Willingness to Resist and Report Sexual Harassment,” *European Economic Letters* 13, no. 3 (2023), 359-369. <https://doi.org/10.52783/eel.v13i3.261>.

¹⁶ Leticia Bode, “Closing the Gap: Gender Parity in Political Engagement on Social Media,” *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 4 (2017), 587-603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1202302>.

¹⁷ Meti Virat et al., “Social Media for Political Mobilization in India: A Study,” *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism* 5, no. 9 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000275>.

and inexpensive. In addition, this option gives them the freedom to decide how much of their identity will be revealed.¹⁸

Furthermore, the literature on female internet activism points to the Feminist Fourth Wave, a wave of feminist forces attempting to focus efforts on turning online social movements into real-world change. Social media will be heavily utilized as a significant change agent in this new wave.¹⁹ As a result, women organize themselves and take a stand against abuse and gender discrimination online by creating a support network to exchange testimonies and stories and by planning campaigns, social activities, and rallies. In contrast to earlier decades, the internet and social media provide a far more comprehensive information distribution capability, where people might receive information and discuss their thoughts.²⁰ While women are more likely to utilize social media for relationship maintenance and appear to be able to handle political conflicts and exposure, past research on females' behavior toward political involvement shows that women engage in less overtly political activities on the platform.²¹

Historical Spotlight of #MeToo Movement

Throughout history, numerous social movements have significantly altered the societies in which they occurred. Indeed, many social movements have also failed. These movements have a wide range of philosophies: some have been revolutionary in their goals, some have pushed for systemic improvements, and others have been conservative in their outlook and have fought against social change.

The scope of social movements has also changed. For instance, while some movements have primarily focused on worldwide issues, others have only addressed local issues.²² A societal movement, the #MeToo movement, for instance, was exclusive and direct, making it the most challenging movement for a patriarchal society.²³ Women

¹⁸ Schuster, "Invisible Feminists?" 8-24.

¹⁹ Manju Rani, "Social Media Activism: Its Impact on Real Life," *ResearchGate*, March 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331438569_social_media_activism_its_impact_on_real_life.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bode, "Closing the Gap," 587-603.

²² Virat et al., "Social Media."

²³ Rani, "Social Media Activism."

are forcibly subjected to a feminine discourse created ironically by patriarchal/chauvinistic powers, regardless of their social rank, class, religion, creed, or geographic divide. However, this movement radically contested this discourse and the issue of the autonomy of female bodies.²⁴

It is harassment that is the most prevalent and enduring problem with which women must deal. According to Webster's World Dictionary, harassment is "to annoy or bother (someone) continuously or repeatedly."²⁵ Many forms of harassment, including verbal, textual, physical, and sexual have occurred. The #MeToo movement initially focused on cases of sexual harassment, but as it grew more inclusive, cases of other forms of harassment joined it. Because there is no specific gender or sexual orientation in the #MeToo movement, it has become a global phenomenon. The culture is visibly changing, and for the first time, the world has been warned that these women's nascent movements should not be disregarded. Moreover, people began to pay attention.

Social Media and Online Activism

The global communication system has grown in complexity, participation, and density. People now have easier access to information and more public speaking possibilities, improving their capacity for taking collective action.²⁶ The technologies and expanded freedoms can assist in loosely coordinating the public's demand for change. Traditional organizational means used for the mobilization and dissemination of information through social centers like colleges, coffee shops, group gatherings, and independent news sources are now replaced with the development of the internet in the 1990s, which signaled a turning point in global communication. The number

²⁴ Ibid. See also Merlyna Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 4 (2013), 636-657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.769386>.

²⁵ Melissa Mordi, "The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo, the Hashtag against Sexual Abuse in North Nigeria," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2019, <https://guardian.ng/features/gender-politics/the-amazons-behind-arewametoo-the-hashtag-against-sexual-abuse-in-north-nigeria/>; Jaffe, "The Collective Power," 80-87.

²⁶ Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011), 28-41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379>.

of people using networks has increased from low millions to low billions.²⁷

Social media has shown to be an excellent platform for information sharing and the most fantastic means to convey one's opinion. This also allows like-minded people to gather and share opposing viewpoints.²⁸ It has become an essential tool in organizing and implementing global social movements. Both political and social activists have significantly benefited from social media. Activists and influencers develop simple, consistent, and compelling messages through online and offline mobilization.²⁹

Online activism covers pro measures to attain common goals and reactive actions against specific controls and the authorities implementing them, which makes it a politically driven movement using the internet. However, there are costs and risks associated with participating in such activities. Online activism is like traditional offline activism practices. A collective good at stake will benefit everyone, including those who do not engage in the acting behavior. Therefore, collective action is required because one person cannot achieve the goal alone.³⁰ In this regard, social media is present in various real-world and online contexts today, making it impossible to imagine a future without it.³¹

With the use of social media, #ArewaMeToo illustrates initiated online activism, which proliferated to the extent that it moved offline. The movement was formed to help victims of sexual harassment and assault in the northern part of Nigeria by trying to help survivors get justice and encouraging them to speak out. It has also highlighted the need for stricter laws and rules to deal with this crime. Given the high prevalence of sexual abuse in northern Nigeria, it is critical to identify

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bart Cammaerts, "Social Media and Activism," in *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, edited by Robin Mansell and Peng Hwa Ang (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118767771.wbiedcs083>.

²⁹ Melissa, "The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo." See also Saxena et al., "Slacktivism or Activism," 359-369.

³⁰ Melissa, "The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo."

³¹ Prasaadi Dangolla, "Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority, Written by Gary R. Bunt," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 3 (2019), 430-32. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00803009>.

and address the issue of sexual harassment and assault in the community.

Social media platforms can effectively draw attention to these essential issues and promote social change. This is what inspired the hashtag #ArewaMeToo. Additionally, this is consistent with what Islam promotes. Islam calls the believers to fight for justice and a more equal and fair society. Surprisingly, in the case of the #ArewaMeToo movement, Nigeria's Muslim council authorities did not support. Instead, the supreme leader of Nigeria's Islamic council outlawed the #ArewaMeToo movement's activities. It was stated, "Until further notice, the #ArewaMeToo movement and all connected actions are currently banned in Sokoto State."³²

Social and Political Framework of #ArewaMeToo

The #ArewaMeToo campaign is a grassroots project with a social framework that uses social media to primarily spread awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria. The hashtag #ArewaMeToo is used on social media by survivors of sexual harassment and assault to share their stories and foster a sense of solidarity among other survivors. Also, the hashtag #ArewaMeToo helps localize the global movement and support survivors. Given the fact that it is predominantly led by and composed of women bringing attention to the problem and calling for change, the movement is also perceived as a feminist one. The movement aims to challenge cultural and societal practices that support sexual harassment and assault, besides promoting legislative reforms and societal transformation.

#ArewaMeToo is a civil society movement not connected to any political party or authority in terms of its political framework. Instead of gaining political power, the campaign wants to raise awareness about sexual harassment and assault and bring about change. The movement also aims to pressure the government and other institutions to act and enact laws and regulations to deal with the problem. Furthermore, it also seeks to change societal and cultural practices that uphold sexual harassment and assault to foster a more accepting society of survivors.³³

³² Collyer, "Nigeria's Sultan of Sokoto."

³³ Melissa, "The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo." See also Jaffe, "The Collective Power of #MeToo."

However, over time, its political foundation was established in Nigeria's broader fight for women's rights and gender equality. The #ArewaMeToo movement has expanded into the #NorthNormal movement, which utilizes the hashtag on social media to draw attention to problems impacting people in Northern Nigeria, like poverty, insecurity, and a lack of access to necessities. People can discuss these issues, share their experiences, and offer solutions using the hashtag as a forum.³⁴ The attempts to bring about social change in northern Nigeria that were started by #ArewaMeToo are still being carried on by #NorthNormal.

In the same vein, social media plays a crucial role in the spread of various movements. It operates as an interdependent grassroots community of individuals, organizations, and sites whose relevance and authority are established through interaction. Social media allows people to express their views and voice their grievances. It has demonstrated a positive impact on Nigerians' lives. Statistics show that there are more users every year. Nigeria provided millions of active users of social media in 2019. This could be viewed as a societal aspect that affects the nation's politics.³⁵

To buttress its social role, Rani asserted that social media is vastly superior to traditional media because the information that breaks on social media spreads in seconds. Besides, there are many social media channels, like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, through which information can quickly become trending. Although a small percentage of social media users express their interest in a cause online compared to offline, social media interaction is the first step toward social engagement.³⁶

The #ArewaMeToo movement relies on social media to spread stories, raise awareness, and push for change. Twitter and Facebook have helped spread the movement and have made the victims' voices heard. Twitter, one of Nigeria's most widely used social media platforms, promotes causes and rallies to support them. The #ArewaMeToo movement has influenced public discourse and sparked social and political change in Nigeria through online movement. Thus, online movements may quickly and affordably

³⁴ Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper, "Active Participation." See also Bode, "Closing the Gap."

³⁵ Adrianna Simwa, "Statistics of Social Media Users in Nigeria," *Legit*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.legit.ng/1169202-statistics-social-media-users-nigeria.html>.

³⁶ Rani, "Social Media Activism."

reach a large audience. It gives a platform to many voices, especially those who might have yet to receive traditional advocacy, and that buttresses the impact of online movements.

In contrast, some critics maintain that online activism requires more physical presence and real action. Face-to-face encounters and confrontations with powerholders can help bring permanent change and hold people and institutions accountable. Certainly, internet anonymity makes hate speech and other abuse easier, which can hurt vulnerable communities. Nonetheless, an activity that either begins online and spreads to the offline world or is only restricted to social media has emerged in the twenty-first century. Slacktivism (lazy activism), clicktivism (click activism), armchair activism, and keyboard activism are some of the terms that have evolved to cast doubt on the value of digital activism, frequently considering it to be inferior to “real” (physical) activism.³⁷

Responses to the #ArewaMeToo Movement

On February 3, 2019, Khadijah Adamu, a 24-year-old pharmacist in Kano in northern Nigeria, told her Twitter followers about experiencing horrific abuse from her ex-boyfriend. She maintained that he nearly killed her. Fakhriyyah Hashim, an entrepreneur and development worker, met her with empathy and created the hashtag #ArewaMetoo. Hashim took notice of Adamu's post and responded with empathy, adding the hashtag #ArewaMeToo to the end of her reply tweet. Hashim, the leader of the #ArewaMeToo movement, stated, “We do not talk about sex because we have this impression that we are a morally upright culture.”

Soon after, young men and women from the north began using the hashtag on Twitter to share their experiences of being raped or abused.³⁸ This resulted in the creation #ArewaMeToo movement, which aligned with the global #MeToo movement that urges sexual assault victims to speak out. Using the hashtag, Fakhriyyah Hashim

³⁷ Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012). See also Lim, “Many Clicks,” 636-657.

³⁸ Abbianca Makoni, “Northern Nigeria's MeToo Movement Is Blowing up, and It All Started from a Simple, Tragic Tweet,” *Independent*, April 7, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/metoo-arewa-nigeria-sokoto-gender-sexual-assault-social-media-a8858706.html>.

responded with a solidarity.³⁹ It gained popularity in less than a month as young men and women shared their stories. A few months later, local chapters were established in the cities of Kano, Maiduguri, Niger, Sokoto, and Zamfara, and the movement began to take on a life of its own. With a staff of attorneys, public relations specialists, and radio hosts, the campaign would only gain momentum.

The movement has since moved from social media to the streets. Numerous protests have taken place in eight northern states. Most of these demonstrations were intended to persuade states to enact the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP), which criminalizes all types of violence against people, broadens the definition of sexual assault, and establishes appropriate penalties for each offense. After almost two years, the #ArewaMeToo movement has grown into a multifaceted movement that uses social media, nonviolent rallies, and outreach initiatives to parents and schools in rural areas to oppose sexual violence throughout northern Nigeria.⁴⁰

Figure 1

A peaceful demonstration of #ArewaMeToo in Kano State, Nigeria



The photo shows a peaceful demonstration in Kano, Nigeria, when the #ArewaMeToo movement moved offline. The individuals in the photo hold signs with messages written in Hausa and English. “Raping is a crime, not a mistake; We want the VAPP bill to be put into effect” was written on the signs in Hausa.

From the respondents, the Muslim Sultanate Council of Sokoto decided to ban the #ArewaMeToo movement probably out of fear of foreign agents. Also, the movement might cause northern society’s

³⁹ Melissa, “The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo.”

⁴⁰ Bode, “Closing the Gap.”; Melissa, “The Amazons behind #ArewaMeToo.”; Nuhu, “What Happens When We Protest.”

long-held moral traditions and values because of outside influences. The perceived influence of Western nations is partially to blame for the unwillingness of Sokoto's religious leaders and specific government figures to endorse #ArewaMeToo and other comparable women's rights campaigns. As a result, it is thought that under the influence of foreign agents, some hidden agendas that are completely and utterly at odds with how the Muslims in that region view and practice their Islamic traditions may be ingrained into the minds of the Muslims in the area. One of the movement's performers was even detained for being a lesbian, supporting the notion that the LGBTQ community is unacceptable in the area.⁴¹

Findings further suggest that the moral support or publicity given to the activists in the #ArewaMeToo movement by the British Council, the EU, the UN, and the US embassy also convinced the Muslim authorities' fear of foreign agents. Accordingly, some religious leaders have accused the movement of fostering immorality and obscenity, thus promoting Western values while destroying traditional norms and values. As a result, they vehemently advocated for its banning. This opposition emphasizes the conflict between traditional values and the urge for social change, a frequent difficulty social movements worldwide face.

Women's rights advocate and survivor of sexual abuse Sadiya Taheer claimed that police officers mistreated her during a protest hours after Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, Nigeria's most influential Islamic cleric—holding the epithet of “*Sarkin Musulmai*” in Hausa language, meaning the royal leader of the Muslims in less formal parlance—enforced the ban. She discussed the incident and what resulted in her arrest with a reporter: “Two of my colleagues were taken away by the police, and I was beaten up,” Taheer told a reporter of *RFI* news, adding, “Now I am the subject of a smear campaign that claims I am a lesbian even though I am not.”⁴²

However, the movement's actors see the ban as motivated by traditional and orthodox views on sexual harassment and assault in northern Nigeria. They claim that imposing the law against women and girl child abuse will directly or indirectly bring dire repercussions to the council's members because the issue is prevalent in the area, and perhaps one of their family members may be a victim of such a

⁴¹ Collyer, “Nigeria's Sultan of Sokoto.”

⁴² *Ibid.*

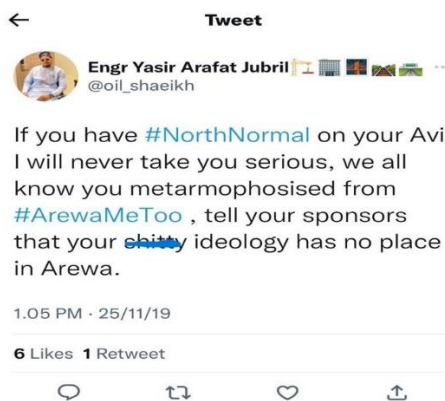
law. “It could be that our leaders feel threatened by this foreign influence,” says Taheer, and she continues, “There are sexual abusers at all levels of society, so perhaps they are worried that enacting the law would result in them or their family members being prosecuted.”⁴³

On the other hand, 25% of the respondents on social media support the movement quietly while believing that the movement is going against the area’s long-standing social standards and thinking discussions of sexual harassment are unsuitable for public conversation. The actors should have involved the local community religious leaders in voicing their dissents more effectively. However, the idea of taking the campaign into a public space is seen as unethical.

An interlocutor opined that some of the influencers on social media, mainly Twitter users, believe that the movement was influenced by Western ideas, promoting feminism, gender equality, and LGBTQ rights. The reactions and the backlashes from these influencers have likely also influenced the council’s decision to forbid the movement. The view shared by some popular influencers is a vivid example in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

A disapproval response from a Twitter influencer regarding the #ArewaMeToo movement



This response from a Twitter user can be seen showing strong disapproval of the #ArewaMeToo movement and its supporters. He

⁴³ Ibid.

declared that Arewa is incompatible with the movement's "shitty" ideology.

These findings indicate that the Muslim Sultanate Council of Sokoto's decision to forbid the #ArewaMeToo movement will likely be complicated and impacted by several factors, including political, social, and cultural issues. This traditional and religious organization in northern Nigeria in 2018 allegedly stated a ban on the #ArewaMeToo movement.⁴⁴ According to media reports, the council voiced concern that the movement might encourage "immoral acts" and "promiscuity" among women. The council's decision was probably influenced by its orthodox views on sexual harassment and assault as well as gender issues. It is common knowledge that such issues are not for public discourse in the region. Similarly, many northern Nigerian users of social media see the movement's discussions of topics like sexual harassment and similar problems as being unsuitable for public conversation.

The obtained data also imply that some individuals believe the movement to be influenced by Western ideas, such as feminism, gender equality, and LGBTQ rights. It may have influenced the council's choice to outlaw the movement. This is in line with the council's concern that the movement would cause the socio-religious norms and values of the region. In contrast, one of the movement's leaders argued that this outside influence might have threatened the council and the council may have been driven by worries about the potential prosecution of individuals or family members for sexual abuse. This demonstrates the necessity for additional study to comprehend the specific factors that led to the council's decision to outlaw the movement and to consider the viewpoints of many stakeholders.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Rosie Collyer, "Sokoto Sultanate council forbids #ArewaMeToo movement," *Premium Times Nigeria*, October 18, 2018.

⁴⁵ Collyer, "Nigeria's Sultan of Sokoto."

Figure 3

An accusatory response from another Twitter influencer



The Twitter influencer responds to a tweet by Aisha Yesufu, one of the #ArewaMeToo actors, inquiring in an accusatory tone on the claim that they support the LGBTQ agenda behind the movement.

Nigeria's #ArewaMeToo movement is a social media initiative with the primary objective of raising public awareness of the problem of sexual assault, especially in the northern part of the country. Several individuals, including civil servants, journalists, activists, influencers, and attorneys, were responsible for launching the movement. Most of them were Muslims who were considered liberal by northern Nigerian society. The survey also examined the opinions of Muslim intellectuals and influencers on the movement, indicating some disagreement regarding the feasibility of online trends. It also discovered that concerns about the external influence of foreign agents or Western values, as well as the traditional norms and values of the region regarding the public discourse about sexual harassment and abuse, may have affected the Sultanate's decision to forbid the movement.

#ArewaMeToo was a significant moment for young women in northern Nigeria. It was like the global #MeToo campaign aimed to combat sexual violence. The movement received support on social media as it provided a safe harbor for individuals to share their stories without traditional censorship. However, the warning from the Sultanate against using the #ArewaMeToo hashtag may impact the future of the movement in Nigeria, even though it is still being determined how much influence it will have. Some people are worried

that this could discourage victims of sexual violence from speaking out.

The Sultanate has clarified that their statement was not meant to silence discussions about sexual violence but to discourage using a hashtag that some people find offensive. It is still being determined how this will affect the movement in the future. However, the #ArewaMeToo movement has already demonstrated its determination and resilience to fight against sexual violence and gender inequality. Not only such issues, but the movement has also metamorphosed into campaigning against societal problems in the region for a lasting change at all levels of society. A popular #NorthNormal, as seen in figure two above, is another subject that can be studied as a subtle part in this research.

Conclusion

Nigeria's #ArewaMeToo movement is a social media initiative that later moved offline with the primary objective of drawing attention to instances of sexual assault and harassment, especially against Muslim women, in northern Nigeria. The global #MeToo movement gave the movement momentum, and it has been busy on social media sites since 2019. Several individuals, including civil servants, journalists, activists, influencers, and attorneys, were responsible for launching the movement. Most of them were Muslims who were considered liberals by northern Nigerian society. The study also examined the opinions of Muslim intellectuals and influencers on the movement, indicating some disagreement regarding the feasibility of online trends. It also discovered that concerns about the external influence of foreign agents or Western values, as well as the traditional norms and values of the region regarding the public discourse about sexual harassment and abuse, may have affected the Sultanate's decision to forbid the movement.

The movement has given women a forum to discuss their encounters with sexual assault and intimidation and has drawn attention to the problem of gender-based violence in northern Nigeria. However, the movement has faced backlash and opposition from some quarters, especially those who believe that it challenges traditional norms and values. This opposition came due to other external factors like the notion that movements of this type are most deemed Western agendas under the influence of foreign agents.

Findings further suggest that there is a fear that this movement might threaten the long-held traditions and values of how the Muslims in northern Nigeria practice their faith.

It is essential to understand that there are various opinions and points of view regarding the #ArewaMeToo movement and that these can be influenced by cultural, religious, and social factors. We can better grasp the diversity of viewpoints on the subject and form a more nuanced understanding of the situation through a better and deeper understanding of the perspectives of the Muslim authority council, Muslim intellectuals, and social media users. We can develop strategies for tackling these crucial problems in a way that respects cultural and religious values while advancing human rights and gender equality by understanding various points of view on the subject and how the Muslims of the region comprehend it.

This study highlights the vital role of social media in tackling sexual assault in northern Nigeria, specifically its capacity to raise awareness and drive social change. Additionally, it underscores the importance of understanding the Muslim leadership's perspective on the #ArewaMeToo movement, their decision to ban it, and the views of Muslim social media users. These findings offer valuable insights for future research, which could further explore the complex dynamics between social media activism, religious authority, and gender-based violence in northern Nigeria. By examining these intersections, we can deepen our understanding of the complex factors that shape social change and develop effective strategies to address sexual assault and gender-based violence in the region.

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