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Social Media Representation as a Determinant of Gender Diversity and Inclusion Among Youths in Ibadan.

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Abstract

Nigerian gender perceptions are deeply influenced by intersecting cultural factors, including religion, tradition, and socio-economic status. The interplay between these local cultural elements and the globalised nature of social media creates a unique environment that merits focused examination. Due to limited research on how social media representation influences gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis, it is crucial to examine how young people in Ibadan interpret and incorporate gendered content in their online engagements. This study examined the influence of social media representations on gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis. Social Identity Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory provided the theoretical framework for this research. An analytical survey research design was adopted, and 283 youths in Ibadan participated. Data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that 95.4% of respondents were aware of the concept of gender diversity. However, only 53.7% agreed that there is an equal employment opportunities in society. Social media representation correlated with gender inclusion ($r = .528$, $p < .01$). The study concluded that awareness of gender diversity and inclusion in Ibadan is increasing, particularly due to exposure to new ideas via social media and educational institutions. However, the extent of this awareness varies by location, education, and cultural orientation. The study recommended that gender-focused organisations and advocacy groups should invest in creating culturally contextual content that appeals to Nigerian youths while remaining inclusive and informative.

Keywords: Gender Diversity, Gender Inclusion, Social Media Representation, Youths

Introduction

Media provides opportunities for people to be informed and educated about the happenings within and outside the context of a particular society (Alawode, et al, 2024). Media includes organs such as radio, television, magazines and newspapers. Recently, there has been a shift from the traditional media of communication to a more sophisticated and technology-based media such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, WhatsApp and Snapchat which have become major channels of

information and serve as channels for social interactions ranging from gender issues to politics, finance and sociocultural matters with wider patronage, especially among youths and people from all social classes including married men and women (Alawode, et al, 2024). As youths increasingly engage with these platforms, understanding how these media portray gender roles and the resulting implications for diversity and inclusion has become critically important.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without any discrimination (Rongphar & Rongpipi, 2024). But, due to factors such as patterns passed down from generation to generation, there is not much revision of traditional gender work roles. The topic of gender is discussed almost everywhere. Current debates in Afghanistan center on whether girls should be allowed to go to school, while in Japan a big issue is making it easier for married women to get jobs. Americans argue over whether more women should be elected to public office (Stearns, 2022).

Even in Africa, the prevailing impression of gender relations is more favourable to the existence of male domination and the relegation of women to the background. This is usually because men occupy leadership positions and are responsible for final decision making, even if it concerns women, youth and children (Amaechi & Amaechi, 2019)

Nigerian gender perceptions are deeply influenced by intersecting cultural factors, including religion, tradition, and socio-economic status. The interplay between these local cultural elements and the globalised nature of social media creates a unique environment that merits focused examination. It is therefore crucial to examine how young people in Ibadan interpret and incorporate gendered content in their online engagements and how this shapes their attitudes toward inclusion and diversity.

In recent years, social media has become a powerful influence on the perceptions and

behaviours of young people, particularly in shaping attitudes toward social issues such as gender diversity and inclusion. Among youths in Ibadan, where traditional and cultural norms around gender roles remain deeply rooted, the role of social media as a determinant of gender-related beliefs and practices has not been thoroughly examined. While social media offers platforms for advocacy, education, and community-building around gender issues, it also has the potential to reinforce stereotypes, spread misinformation, and foster exclusion.

Understanding this relationship is important because it provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders, enabling them to design targeted youth programs that promote critical engagement with media and foster inclusive practices. As digital platforms continue to shape the social and cultural experiences of Nigerian youth, it becomes increasingly important to assess their role in promoting or hindering gender inclusivity. This study therefore examines social media representation as a determinant of gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis.

Specifically, the study examines the level of gender diversity, assesses the level of gender inclusion and determines the relationship between social media representation and gender inclusion among youths in Ibadan.

Literature Review

Concept of Gender Diversity

Gender by definition is different from sex, men and women. When described in a particular non-biological perspective, the meaning is broader (Abbas & Frihanti, 2023). Its meaning

varies across social groups, culture and time because a woman's body does not determines how social division could be shaped when talking about gender stratification.

According to Plan International (2022), diversity acknowledges that each individual is unique. It means recognising, accepting, celebrating and finding strength in individual differences such as gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Gender diversity refers to the extent to which an individual deviates from the norms and standards accepted for people of a particular sex in terms of gender personality, occupation, or articulation (Lalwani & Verma, 2022). It influences the managerial aspirations and management policies of men and women. However, the approach may change depending on whether gender is considered an issue of equity or equality (Bendl et al. 2019). Gender equity is the equal treatment of women and men, according to their respective needs. While gender equity is the equal distribution of resources between genders, based on needs (Galdiero, et al, 2024). Gender diversity contains the inclusion and portrayal of different genders within an organisation to create a balanced and non-discriminatory workforce (Baker et al, 2025).

Concept of Gender Inclusion

Gender inclusion refers to the systemic integration of gender considerations within policies, practices, and structures to promote equitable opportunities for individuals of all gender identities. This concept encompasses not only participation but also the impact of these policies on diverse gender identities. Key indicators of gender inclusion can be grouped into several critical areas, including economic participation, education, health, political representation, and social norms.

According to United Nation Development Programme (2024), Gender inclusivity goes beyond just diversity. It is about creating an environment where people of all genders feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents. The concept of gender inclusiveness connotes the absence of bias as it affects the culturally and socially constructed roles involving both men and women in society. More so gender as a social construct is learned, and gender role play and judgment are also learned via socialisation that existed before they were born (Onyebuchi-Igbokwe et al, 2024).

Concept of Social Media Representations

Social media is the new form of media that involves interactive participation (Bello & Irele, 2025). Media is divided into two. The broadcast and the interactive. The rise of digital and mobile technologies made interaction on a large scale easier for people than before. The new age media was born where interactivity was placed at the centre of new media functions. One individual could now speak to many people, and instant feedback was a possibility (Bello & Irele, 2025). Social media reviews have become an integral part of the digital landscape, significantly influencing consumer behaviour, brand reputation, and marketing strategies. These reviews, shared by users on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and specialised review sites, provide firsthand accounts of experiences with products or services.

Customer reviews on social media significantly impact brand credibility and consumer trust, making them a crucial factor in

digital marketing strategies. Responding to customer reviews on social media strengthens relationships between brands and consumers, improving long-term engagement (Solomon, 2012). However, the realm of social media reviews is not without challenges. The prevalence of fake reviews and paid endorsements has raised concerns about authenticity. Some businesses attempt to manipulate public perception by posting fabricated positive reviews or incentivising influencers to promote their products without proper disclosure. Conversely, competitors might post false negative reviews to tarnish a brand's image.

The spread of misinformation and fake news has led to concerns about the reliability of digital information. Young people are becoming more critical of the content they consume, seeking verification from credible sources before accepting news as truth. Accuracy, objectivity, and interactive nature of social media content determine how users perceive it credibility (Okafor, 2022). The increasing awareness of fact-checking and media literacy campaigns has influenced the way youths interact with political and social narratives online.

Theoretical Review

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s (Gupta, 2022). SIT explores how individuals derive part of their identity from their membership in social groups. According to the theory, people categorise themselves and others into various groups, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-political beliefs. This group-based self-concept affects their perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes towards both in-group members (those who share the same social identity) and out-group members (those who do not).

When applied to gender diversity and inclusion, Social Identity Theory offers valuable insights into how youths in Ibadan interact with gender representation on social media and how their social identities as gendered beings influence their perceptions of gender inclusivity. A key tenet of Social Identity Theory is the concept of social comparison, which explains how individuals compare themselves with others in their social groups. In the context of gender identity, youths on social media may compare their gender expression or experiences with those of others to evaluate their own social standing or personal identity (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

In the context of social media, youths are exposed to a wide variety of gender-related content, which may reinforce or challenge existing social identities. For youths in Ibadan, who live in a context where traditional gender roles still play a prominent role in societal structures, social media represents an arena for negotiating and reshaping these roles. Social Identity Theory helps explain how young people in Ibadan may internalise or resist gender diversity messages, based on their group affiliations and the psychological processes involved in identifying with specific gender norms.

Studies indicate that youths who actively follow queer influencers are more likely to report inclusive attitudes towards gender diversity (Okafor & Charles, 2022) However, the impact of social media is not universally positive. Negative portrayals or backlash against gender diversity can lead to internalised homophobia and exclusion from social groups. The significance is that social media serves as a mirror reflecting both positive and negative societal attitudes towards gender diversity.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), formulated by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s (Walia, 2025),

shifts the focus from the media as a passive influence to the active role of the audience in selecting and using media. This theory suggests that people actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs, such as entertainment, information, and social interaction.

In the context of gender diversity and inclusion, Uses and Gratifications Theory offers valuable insights into how social media users engage with content related to gender representation, and how these platforms are used to fulfill various needs, such as self-expression, social connection, and identity validation.

The uses and gratifications theory is essential for exploring why youths in Ibadan gravitate toward specific social media content relating to gender diversity. The theory posits that individuals actively seek media for particular gratifications, such as entertainment, information, personal identity, and social interaction.

Social media has become a central space for youths to explore and express their gender identities, and UGT helps explain how individuals use these platforms to engage with content that aligns with or challenges their perceptions of gender. By understanding the gratifications users derive from these interactions, we can better understand the impact of social media on shaping attitudes toward gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan.

Empirical Review

Existing literature has examined the relationship between social media, gender inclusion and representation across different contexts. However, limited attention has been given to the role of youth-centered social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram in shaping gender perceptions among youths in Ibadan. Existing studies also focus mainly on women and girls, with little consideration for young men and gender-diverse individuals. Furthermore, there is insufficient research on the actual effectiveness of social media campaigns in promoting real behavioural change and inclusivity among youths. Inconsistencies also exist regarding how algorithms and echo chambers influence gender perceptions within the socio-cultural context of Ibadan. Therefore, there is a need for further research to examine social media representation as a determinant of gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis.

Alawode et al (2024), assessed the level of social media impact on gender equality issues as well as finding out which gender feels more oppressed in their relationship due to gender equality advocacy. The study adopted Technology Determinism Theory to explain the influence of social media on gender advocacy messages. Survey research method was used and a structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The sample size was 400, which was drawn out from 9 local government areas in three South-west Nigeria states. Findings revealed that social media platforms play an essential role in strengthening gender equality advocacy. These platforms disseminate critical information about gender equality to a large audience, with a special focus on the younger generation. While social media has been effective in promoting gender equality, it has also been related to an increased risk of marriage breakdown. The study further recommended that gender advocacy should be made balanced and take into account the opinions of all genders.

In addition, Bello and Irele examined the influence of social media on the knowledge, attitude, and practice of gender equality among residents of Oyo State. The study utilised Technological Determinism Theory and adopted an analytical survey research design. The instrument of data collection was a self-designed questionnaire. The findings revealed that residents of Oyo State became highly knowledgeable about gender equality through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn,

meaning that they are familiar with all the necessary factors related to gender equality. Findings further highlighted that Residents of Oyo State have affirmative attitudes towards gender equality. Based on the findings, the research concluded that social media remains a platform that can go a long way to promote gender equality in Nigeria and the world at large. It recommended that the Government, Non-governmental organisations, and international NGOs should tap into the opportunities by utising social media, actionable programmes, and policies to promote equality between genders.

Ollor (2025) examined social media influence on representations of gender equality among users in South-South, Nigeria. The main objective was to determine how social media influences the perceptions of gender equality among users in South-South, Nigeria. The study adopted the social constructionism theory and adopted a survey method. The population of the study comprised 18,619,019 residents of Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Delta States, with a sample size of 385. The multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used to identify respondents who were issued the questionnaire copies. Findings of the study revealed that social media has a significant influence on perceptions of gender equality through the amplification of voices on gender representations; advocacy and activism; awareness creation and education; positive gender representation and role models. The study concluded that despite the influence of social media, there are still representations of gender stereotypes, perceptions of masculinity and femininity roles, discrimination and gender inequalities faced by women and gender minorities in South-South, Nigeria. The study recommended that the government and non-government agencies should organise campaigns aimed to create awareness on the importance of gender representation and gender equality in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study used quantitative cross-sectional analytical survey research design. This research design is the most appropriate for this research because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a large population at a single point in time and examine the relationship between social media representation and gender inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis. The population of this study comprised of 3,658,500 residents of Ibadan metropolis. Using the Taro Yamane formula (1967), a sample size of 400 was derived. The instrument of data collection for the study was questionnaire. After utilising a proportional technique to establish the number of the respondents, simple random sampling technique was used to pick respondents. 400 questionnaire were distributed, of which 324 were retrieved. However, 283 copies were properly completed and found valid for analysis, representing a response rate of 70.8%. The remaining questionnaires were excluded due to non-return, incomplete responses, and improper filling by some respondents.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table1: Level of gender diversity among youths in Ibadan

Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. D
I am aware of the concept of gender diversity.	1	12	153	115	3.36	.582
Youths in Ibadan express a	4	25	194	56	3.08	.584

variety of gender roles.						
I feel comfortable expressing my gender identity publicly in Ibadan.	2	16	136	125	3.38	.628
I have observed non-traditional gender roles among my peers	5	7	55	174	2.83	.687
Gender roles among youths in Ibadan are flexible.	8	70	164	38	2.17	.845
My family influences the way I express my gender.	19	94	115	52	3.30	.630
Social expectations influence how male and female youths express themselves	4	14	156	105	2.84	.841
I know someone who openly challenges traditional gender roles.	18	71	129	61	2.65	.776

Source: Survey, 2026

Table 1 reveals level of gender diversity among youths in Ibadan. The highest mean scores were recorded for awareness-related items: "I am aware of the concept of gender diversity" (M = 3.36, SD = .582) and "I feel comfortable expressing my gender identity publicly in Ibadan" (M = 3.38, SD = .628). These scores indicate that theoretical knowledge about gender diversity is well-established among the sample, suggesting that educational initiatives, media exposure, and social discourse have successfully raised awareness about diverse gender identities.

However, the data reveals a concerning gap between awareness and practical application. Items measuring actual diversity in practice show significantly lower means: "Gender roles among youths in Ibadan are flexible" (M = 2.71, SD = .845) and "I know someone who openly challenges traditional gender roles" (M = 2.64, SD = .776). These lower scores suggest that while youths understand gender diversity conceptually, the actual expression and acceptance of diverse gender roles remain limited in practice.

The influence of social structures is evident in the moderate to high scores for "My family influences the way I express my gender" (M = 3.30, SD = .630) and "Social expectations influence how male and female youths express themselves" (M = 2.84, SD = .841). These findings highlight the persistent role of traditional social institutions in shaping gender expression, even among a generation that demonstrates high awareness of gender diversity concepts.

The item "I have observed non-traditional gender roles among my peers" (M = 2.83, SD = .687) suggests that while some diversity exists, it is not widespread or highly visible. This indicates that gender diversity may be more theoretical than practical in the everyday experiences of Ibadan youths. The overall

assessment revealed a high awareness level of gender diversity in Ibadan

Table 2: Level of gender inclusion among youths in Ibadan

Statement	SD	D	A	**SA**	**Mean**	**Std.D**
Male and female youths have equal access to education in Ibadan	4	40	159	77	3.10	.683
Leadership opportunities are equally available to both male and female youths	20	100	115	45	2.66	.831
I have witnessed gender-based discrimination among youths in Ibadan.	9	81	146	43	2.80	.732
Cultural beliefs in Ibadan promote gender inclusion.	9	80	149	40	2.79	.732
My school or workplace is inclusive toward both genders.	2	26	176	73	3.16	.603
Gender-related issues are openly discussed in my peer group.	4	40	178	58	3.04	.638
My opinions are valued regardless of my gender.	10	33	155	83	3.11	.739
I have participated in programs or events that promote gender inclusion.	12	72	135	60	2.87	.794
Gender inclusion is improving among youths in Ibadan.	2	38	188	48	3.02	.584
Both genders have equal employment opportunities	19	111	103	48	2.64	.842

Source: Survey, 2026

The gender inclusion assessment in Table 2 reveals a complex landscape of progress and persistent

challenges. The highest scoring items relate to institutional and interpersonal inclusion: "My school or workplace is inclusive toward both genders" (M = 3.16, SD = .603), "My opinions are valued regardless of my gender" (M = 3.11, SD = .739), and "Male and female youths have equal access to education in Ibadan" (M = 3.10, SD = .683). These scores suggest that formal educational institutions and immediate social circles have made significant strides in promoting gender inclusion.

However, structural and systemic inclusion challenges persist, as evidenced by lower scores on economic and leadership opportunities: "Both genders have equal employment opportunities" (M = 2.64, SD = .842) and "Leadership opportunities are equally available to both male and female youths" (M = 2.66, SD = .831). These findings reflect broader societal patterns where educational inclusion has progressed more rapidly than economic and political inclusion.

The moderate scores on cultural inclusion items reveal ongoing challenges: "Cultural beliefs in Ibadan promote gender inclusion" (M = 2.79, SD = .721) and "I have witnessed gender-based discrimination among youths in Ibadan" (M = 2.80, SD = .732). These scores indicate that while overt discrimination may not be widespread, cultural beliefs and practices continue to present barriers to full gender inclusion.

Encouragingly, the data shows positive trends in social discourse and participatory inclusion: "Gender-related issues are openly discussed in my peer group" (M = 3.04, SD = .638) and "Gender inclusion is improving among youths in Ibadan" (M = 3.02, SD = .584). These findings suggest that young people are actively engaging with gender inclusion topics and perceive positive changes in their social environment.

The item "I have participated in programs or events that promote gender inclusion" (M = 2.87, SD = .794) indicates moderate engagement with formal inclusion initiatives, suggesting room for increased programming and participation. The overall assessment on the level of gender inclusion among youths in Ibadan can be characterised as moderate with positive trajectory.

Table3: Relationship between Social Media Representation and Gender Inclusion among Ibadan youths

Correlations			
		SMR	Gender Inclusion
SMR	Pearson Correlation	1	.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	218	280
Gender Inclusion	Pearson Correlation	.528**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	280	281
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed).			

Source: Survey, 2026

Table 3 reveals a statistically significant strong positive relationship between Social Media Representation (SMR) and Gender Inclusion ($r = .528$, $p < .01$). This finding is particularly noteworthy because it demonstrates that social media representation has a much stronger influence on inclusive behaviours and attitudes than on general diversity awareness.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined social media representation as a determinant of gender diversity and inclusion among youths in Ibadan Metropolis and the findings revealed a positive relationship between the three variables.

The analysis reveals a high level of awareness of gender diversity among youths in Ibadan (Mean = 3.36), with many respondents indicating comfort in expressing their gender identity (Mean = 3.38). However, responses related to the flexibility of gender roles and the influence of societal expectations scored lower (Means ≈ 2.7–2.8), suggesting that while youths are aware of diverse gender identities, societal norms still limit open expression and acceptance. These findings mirror the work of previous scholars who identified a gap between gender diversity awareness and practice among Nigerian youths (Oluwafunmilayo & Okoroafor, 2019). Similarly, UN Women highlighted that urban youths show progressive views on gender but remain bound by traditional expectations and community values (UN Women, 2022).

Additionally, the findings indicate a generally positive perception of gender inclusion among youths, particularly within educational and institutional settings, as shown by a high mean score (3.16) regarding inclusivity in schools and workplaces. However, there is noticeably less confidence in equal access to leadership roles (Mean = 2.66) and employment opportunities (Mean = 2.64), highlighting persistent structural inequalities. Peer-level discussions on gender issues are moderately active (Mean = 3.04), suggesting some openness but also room for deeper engagement. These results suggest that gender inclusion is gradually improving among youths in Ibadan, though not uniformly across all areas. This supports the work of Aina & Quavemi (2021), who emphasised that despite gains in educational access for women and girls in Southwest Nigeria, economic and political spaces remain unequal. It also aligns with the KPMG (2021), report which observed that while Nigerian institutions have made strides in promoting inclusive policies in schools, implementation in professional environments remains slow.

The null hypothesis which states that there will be no significant relationship between Social Media Representation and Gender Inclusion was rejected. The study showed that positive and frequent exposure to inclusive gender representation on social media significantly impacted respondents' attitudes and willingness to support inclusive environments. Youths who followed inclusive content creators or advocacy pages were more likely to express inclusive behaviours, such as defending marginalised identities or supporting gender-equal policies. This corroborates with a research on how young Africans are shaping global online culture 2023. According to the study, in the 2023 presidential elections, youth participation surged due to social media mobilisation. Candidates like Peter Obi attracted a young electorate, shifting the narrative around political engagement. Platforms like Twitter played a pivotal role, where "four people tweeting" catalysed a movement that challenged long-established political structures, showing how digital tools can empower underrepresented demographics (Wired, 2023).

Conclusion

The research concludes that awareness of

gender diversity and inclusion in Ibadan is increasing, particularly due to exposure to new ideas via social media and educational institutions. However, the extent of this awareness varies by location, education, and cultural orientation. Many youths acknowledge diversity but are constrained by sociocultural and religious frameworks that inhibit inclusive action.

Furthermore, it concludes that social media is a powerful tool for spreading awareness about gender issues. Platforms that are visually driven and algorithmically tailored (like TikTok and Instagram) play a significant role in shaping the perspectives of young people on gender inclusion and diversity by exposing them to different inclusive contents.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings in the study:

Media literacy should be incorporated into school curricula and youth development programs. This will equip young people to critically analyse, interpret and question gender-related media content and avoid internalising harmful stereotypes.

Gender-focused organisations and advocacy groups should invest in creating culturally contextual content that appeals to Nigerian youths while remaining inclusive and informative. Local influencers and youth ambassadors can help to amplify such messages authentically.

Lastly, social media campaigns should be encouraged at the grassroots level, supported by public-private partnerships, to normalise inclusive behaviours and challenge existing stigmas. These campaigns can take the form of skits, challenges, short documentaries, or testimonial-style videos that promote acceptance and allyship.

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