
CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: EXPLORING POST-BIRTH PREGNANCY REVEALS AMONG PEOPLE OF NIGERIAN DESCENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural phenomenon of post-birth pregnancy reveals among individuals of Nigerian descent, focusing on the interplay between traditional practices and digital communication. Through qualitative research based on interviews with ten individuals, the study investigates the reasons, tactics and superstitions that influence this activity, as well as the thematic and locational choices involved in these announcements. The findings highlight how social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become tools for expectant mothers to share pregnancy news while navigating cultural norms. These platforms enable a broader reach, yet challenge and reshape traditional practices, particularly as influencers and celebrities push cultural boundaries. The study also raises concerns about the potential erosion of cultural values surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. This research contributes to the understanding of how digital globalization intersects with local traditions, demonstrating how social media transforms and redefines cultural identity and communication within Nigerian communities. It underscores the evolving dynamics of cultural practices in the digital age and the implications for preserving cultural heritage.

Keywords: Pregnancy reveal, post-birth/delayed reveal, superstitions, social media, Nigeria, cultural beliefs, gender reveal.

Introduction

Historically, pregnancy within certain Nigerian cultures was shrouded in secrecy and superstition, driven by fears of attracting malevolent forces that could harm the mother and unborn child (Deforge, 2021). Publicly revealing a pregnancy was taboo, often confined to close family circles (Nunoo, 2020a). However, with the passage of time, cultural interactions, and especially the rise of social media has progressively challenged these long-held practices, offering a new medium for mothers to share their joy more openly in a post-birth context.

Social media has revolutionized how individuals communicate and share personal milestones, including significant life events like pregnancy. Among Nigerians, there is a notable cultural shift emerging with post-birth pregnancy reveals on social media. This research explores this phenomenon, examining the interplay between traditional beliefs, modern technology, and the motivations behind these delayed announcements. Our study scrutinizes the themes chosen for announcements, decisions on issues including the baby's gender reveal, and the selection of locations and décor reflecting the mother's vision.

Furthermore, it elucidates the underlying motivations behind this trend – ranging from a need to chronicle and honour motherhood, to adhering to social media trend, and to alleviating the hazards associated with traditional superstitions.

By examining how social media facilitates these reveals, this research sheds light on the broader implications of digital communication on cultural practices. In exploring how technology perpetuates and redefines cultural norms surrounding pregnancy announcements within the Nigerian community, the study investigates how these online practices influence and challenge existing superstitions, potentially leading to a gradual alteration of traditional values.

Online Pregnancy reveals were made popular by Demi Moore, a prominent American Actress when in August 1991, while pregnant, had her photo taken by renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz for the cover page of Vanity fair Magazine (Collins, 1991). Since then, other celebrities such as Britney Spears, Miranda Kerr, Beyonce, Christina Aguilera, Kate Hudson, Serena Williams, and many more have had maternity photos of themselves taken and viewed publicly (Epstein, 2021).

This trend has been adopted by expectant mothers of Nigerian descent, but unlike the celebrities who they see on social media and who they seemingly imitate, the Nigerian pregnancies are usually revealed online post-birth (after the birth of the child). This is an intriguing phenomenon, and the quest to find out why, gave birth to the initial research idea.

An exploratory 'pilot' research study on the subject was carried out first including two expectant mothers. After assessing the findings from this, we decided to increase our sample to ten individuals and the focus of the research became "Cultural traditions in the Digital Age: Exploring Post-Birth Pregnancy Reveals among people of Nigerian Descent on Social Media".

Background

While there is no definitive evidence identifying a specific continent or country as the origin of gender reveal on social media, early documentation suggest that the trend gained prominence in the United States. Gaarcia-Navarro (Garcia-Navarro, 2019) traces one of the earliest widely publicised instances to blogger Jenna Karvunidis, whose 2008 viral post featuring a cake filled with pink icing, announced the gender of her unborn child.

Over time, the practice spread globally, including to parts of Africa such as Nigeria, where pregnancy has historically been

treated as a sacred and highly guarded experience. Culturally, pregnancy was traditionally enveloped in silence and secrecy, rooted in long-standing beliefs and superstitions that public disclosure could expose the expectant mother or unborn child to spiritual or physical harm (Nunoo, 2020b).

However, the rise of digital technology, particularly social media platforms has gradually reshaped these cultural norms. Among people of Nigerian descent, a cautious yet growing shift is emerging, many now engage in post-birth pregnancy reveals, publicly sharing curated maternity images after childbirth as a way of balancing cultural beliefs with contemporary digital expression (Rääbus, 2017) therefore, although literature on delayed or post-birth pregnancy reveal seems scarce, there is some semblance of documentation in current affairs and contemporary entertainment news.

Some expectant mothers at certain points of their pregnancy would organize a photo shoot where photos of their pregnant selves would be taken and posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to announce their pregnancy.

Renowned American Actress, Demi Moore is believed to have made this practice desirable, (Collins, 1991) while Beyoncé's 2017 maternity photo and announcement of being pregnant with twins was adjudged to have provoked a lot of positive reactions, same photo that if revealed decades earlier would have been considered shocking, (Rääbus, 2017).

Photos are generally used to create both individual and collective memories in the way they capture parts of one's social world and regulate visibility (Nash, 2014). For expectant mothers who engage in the practice of a photo enabled pregnancy reveal, they tend to consciously document their journey and process of becoming mothers.

With pregnant photo reveal, expectant mothers are able to document the physical change that takes place in their body, a process now made easy by presentation culture, a culture enabled by the technological capabilities of social media that allows people present themselves and express their identity using resources such as photos, video, and text on social media (Agus et al., 2021).

In contemporary Nigerian popular culture, expectant mothers carefully plan how to celebrate and remember their pregnancy, often starting with a themed pregnancy photo shoot. The decisions on the theme and decor are usually dependent on the baby's sex, if known. Some mothers incorporate the gender reveal celebration into the photo shoot, with location choices ranging from outdoor to indoor settings. They also select their outfit, makeup, and photographer for the occasion.

The unpredictable outcome of pregnancy is fascinating but also a risky experience and documenting it is not only stressful but also deemed 'too ambitious' for an unknown outcome. The peripartum period is increasingly being associated with strong feelings of pressure relating to sustaining an idealized and unrealistic appearance that may be harmful together with the physical changes that come with being pregnant (Becker et al., 2022).

The prevalence of idealized, self-promotional, and highly curated imagery on social media can pressure women to conform to unrealistic appearance standards, increasing body dissatisfaction through unfavourable appearance comparisons (Becker et al., 2022).

While this may have been proven to be true, it applies differently to different situations. In the case of the online pregnancy reveal, the photos are a reflection of what the expectant mother wants to show, although they are heavily treated and edited, they still are a true representation and reflection of her life at that point in time and to many who engage in this practice, it gives them a sense of satisfaction with the current state of their body.

Social media has been likened to traditional media in the sense that they often focus on appearance. Users of these mediums intentionally select and post photos and videos of themselves in which they look good and or attractive (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Pregnancy photo reveals on social media raise body image concerns, as expectant mothers experience physical changes beyond a growing belly. These changes could include swollen noses, puffy faces, skin discolouration, receding hairlines, and weight gain. However, what they typically post online are edited versions of these images.

Social media's connection to body image is frequently assessed using social comparison theory, which implies that people self-evaluate based on comparisons with similar others (Hogue & Mills, 2019). Therefore, an expectant mother, after viewing photos of another expectant mother on social media may draw strength from that image, knowing that whatever changes she may be experiencing are not unique to just her, thus creating a positive body image and a sense of identity for herself.

The identity portrayed on social media is mostly different from one's real identity, because it is fashioned around what one wants people to see or know about them and what people's expectations are (Agus et al., 2021). During a pregnancy reveal on social media, an expectant mother presents herself as someone on the journey of motherhood, embracing her identity as an expectant mother. At other times, she may post images portraying her roles as a daughter, sister, wife, aunt, or professional. Social media has greatly influenced personal identity, whereas, in the past, expectant Nigerian mothers did not openly share their pregnancies due to cultural norms of privacy around pregnancy.

Some Nigerian cultures hold very strong superstitious beliefs against revealing pregnancies. A belief that stems from their conviction of the existence of evil. These beliefs of impending danger to the unborn foetus and the expectant mother gave birth to rules for an expectant mother, prohibiting her from engaging in certain activities.

For example, a pregnant girl was not allowed to tell people outside her home that she was pregnant for fear that evil will befall her and the unborn child. When the pregnancy became visible, she was also not to allow people touch her bump so evil does not get passed on to the unborn child. (Nunoo, 2020c)

Safety pins are used to fasten together clothing or pieces of fabric, but some pregnant women in certain Nigerian societies,

use safety pins on their clothes or under garments as a form of protection of the foetus from evil spirits and ensuring a safe delivery for the expectant mother (Owonikoko et al., 2017).

Studies have found that food taboos and myths also exist and are upheld in some Nigerian communities. Snail meat for example, though a rich source of protein and minerals necessary for growth and development, is prohibited for expectant mothers in Anambra state (Eastern part of Nigeria), due to the belief that if consumed, the baby will be sluggish and salivate excessively like the snail (Isidienu & Chiejina, 2022).

Young expectant mothers who reside within this culture, but who also operate within the social media space and want to reveal their pregnancy as they see it being done in the West, have adopted the method of delayed reveal or post-birth reveal on social media.

Method

This study employed qualitative methods, drawing on rich, real-life accounts from ten expectant mothers of Nigerian descent who had engaged in pregnancy photography and social media sharing.¹ A purposive sampling strategy guided participant selection based on predefined eligibility criteria.

Participants

Ten women participated in the study, each meeting the inclusion criteria established to ensure alignment with the research objectives.

All participants were:

1. Female: All ten individuals identified as female.
2. Of Nigerian descent: All participants were Nigerian by origin. Seven resided in Nigeria at the time of the study, while three had lived outside the country for three to six years; one in Tanzania, the other in Canada, and the third in the United States.
3. Of childbearing age: Participants ranged from 26 to 40 years old.
4. Pregnant and had organised a pregnancy photoshoot: All participants had been pregnant and had taken part in a pregnancy photoshoot. Three had previously experienced miscarriages; for these women, the pregnancy examined in this study was their second pregnancy resulting in their first live birth. Among the remaining seven, five revealed their first pregnancy and two revealed their second pregnancy.
5. Had posted pregnancy photographs on social media: All participants had shared their pregnancy photos on at least one platform. Facebook and Instagram were the most frequently used sites.

Material

After identifying and selecting eligible participants, each individual received a letter of introduction outlining the purpose of the study, along with a consent form. These documents ensured that participants were fully informed and voluntarily agreed to take part.

1. This article, "Cultural Traditions in the Digital Age: Exploring Post-Birth Pregnancy Reveals among People of Nigerian Descent on social media", is adapted from the author's MA thesis submitted to the University of Nicosia in 2024.

Procedure

Given the sensitive nature of pregnancy disclosure and cultural taboos surrounding the topic, several prospective participants declined participation. Of the ten who consented, five were acquaintances of the researcher, while the remaining five were recruited through referrals from family and friends.

Upon receiving signed consent forms, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for each participant, taking into account their professional commitments and differing time zones.

Interviews are particularly effective for obtaining detailed personal accounts and allow for meaningful follow-up questions (Baxter et al., 2015), Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted via WhatsApp video calls over a two-month period from March to May. The average duration of the interviews was 90 minutes, with each interview lasted between 15 to 30 minutes.

Interview questions focused on the following themes:

1. Experiences with pregnancy reveal(s) on social media
2. How the reveal was conducted
3. Motivations for sharing pregnancy photos
4. Timing of the reveal, including reasons for delayed or post-birth posting
5. Cultural beliefs, superstitions, and limitations influencing pregnancy disclosure
6. The role of social media in enabling or shaping the reveal

All interviews were conducted in English² and were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

The data for this study were examined using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), a method that values the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic resource and embraces flexible, organic, and iterative coding. In RTA, themes are not simply discovered in the data but are actively generated through a process of interpretation, reflection, and meaning-making (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Given these characteristics, Reflexive Thematic Analysis is well suited for analysing the rich, experience-based responses gathered through the semi-structured interviews conducted for this research.

Prior to the interviews, preliminary themes were developed to guide the discussion and ensure alignment with the research objectives. These themes served as broad analytic anchors, while still allowing new insights to emerge inductively from the data. For clarity in reporting, each participant was assigned a numerical identifier (Participant 1–10) corresponding to the order in which they were interviewed. Within the analysis, relevant theories are referenced to illuminate specific patterns or ideas, not as primary theoretical frameworks, but as supporting perspectives that highlight the complex interplay between technology, social norms, identity, and family. These theoretical references help demonstrate how expectant mothers of Nigerian descent navigate cultural values and contemporary digital practices when documenting, announcing, and celebrating pregnancy on social media.

2. English is Nigeria's official language, despite the country's linguistic diversity of over 520 languages (Ndimele, 2015).

Examining the process of announcing pregnancies, fear of harm as highlighted by participant 7,

I didn't put it before the child was born, it was after the child was born that I did. That's just my reason, for fear of being hunted or any special attention while I'm pregnant, so I just kept it till my child was out,

stood out as a major reason for a delayed announcement.

Social media's influence in the online reveal is also highlighted with participant 6 noting:

Social media has made everyone want to do things they never imagined they will do. I am a fan of Tik Tok, I like going on Tik Tok and while on Tik Tok, I have seen a lot of challenges, a lot of videos, gender reveal, pregnancy reveals... I already had it in mind, that this is what I am going to do.

This confirms the influence of social media on individual behaviour, particularly in the context of sharing first-hand experiences and milestones. They observe posts, videos, and challenges shared by others, and subsequently model their own behaviour based on what they see, confirming that individuals learn through observation and imitation (Akpan & Kennedy, 2020).

Symbolic interaction occurs during the online announcements as symbols such as photos and captions are used to communicate within the social network and meaning is also created through social interactions and interpretation of these symbols (Johns et al., 2014) within their cultural context, reflecting the significance placed on social interactions and the importance of sharing life events within one's social circle.

Concerns of private vs sharing are taken into consideration. On whether to share or not, Participant 1 and Participant 4 have contrasting views.

Participant 1:

You know we are Africans and the world is wicked, can be wicked... so for me, I needed to hide that, you know it's not good to let the cat out of the bag, so I needed to just hide, to keep it to myself, I did the shoot during the pregnancy but I revealed it after I delivered successfully.

Participant 4:

If I will have a third child, that is what I will love to do. If I will have the opportunity to post from day one until the child is eventually born, I will do that. Because I want to see how I am transforming daily and how the child is growing.

The contrast between those who keep their pregnancy private and those who share it publicly reveals how individuals set boundaries for sharing private information. Smith and Brunner suggests that revealing private information can make someone feel vulnerable, leading to a desire to control access to it (Smith & Brunner, 2017).

Gender expectation and revelation play a significant role in the online pregnancy announcements. Expectant mothers must decide whether to know the unborn child's gender and whether to reveal it during the announcement. Participants 6 and 7 had different approaches to revealing the gender on social media: Participant 7 shares:

I was expecting a baby boy as revealed from my ultra scan, so when we went shopping, I got some clothes that had particular write ups. While participant 6 is quoted as saying:

So, when I was ready to know the gender, I asked them to write it, put it in an envelope and seal it, I don't want to know it myself, I just want to take it home.

Starr Christine and Zurbriggen Eileen speak to the anticipation and revelation of the gender of the baby, as individuals develop schemas or mental frameworks for understanding and organizing information about gender (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2016). They noted that schemas influence how individuals perceive themselves and others in terms of gender roles, behaviour and expectations.

Creative expressions and personalised pregnancy experiences foster self-determination, as expectant mothers exercise autonomy and align choices with personal values rather than external norms. Including partners in photoshoots strengthens bonds, satisfying the self-determination theory's core needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (d'Ailly & Blokhuis, 2018).

The overall usage of photos for the pregnancy announcement on social media was sharing, documentation and preservation of memory and social media has been increasingly used to record and share personal experiences (Özdeş & Karaman, 2023).

Selection of themes

Themes for the photoshoot often reveal or hide the baby's gender, with colours like blue or green indicating male and pink or purple indicating female. Neutral colours like yellow, nude, red, and black suit both genders. Themes convey symbolism, family dynamics, gender neutrality, simplicity, expression, and personal style.

Simplicity, expression, and personal style are reflected in concise statements like this from participant 10:

I already knew I wanted something simple for the photoshoot, so I decided to use what we already have for the photo shoot,
and participant 8:

I kind of like matched it with my personality, I'm a very simple person, I don't like very complicated things, so I did a very simple shoot with my family and our first child.

The preference for simplicity, personal expression, and matching one's personal style in the context of a family photoshoot is portrayed in the notion of self – concept, which measures how one sees oneself (Rehman, 2019).

A total of 6 out of 10 participants leaned towards the side of gender neutrality for the pregnancy photo shoot. While one may assume that this may have been due in part to the fact that they may not have known the gender of the child they were expecting, their responses, as illustrated below, proves otherwise.

I knew I was having twins, boy and girl but that knowledge did not determine the theme for the shoot. If I had worn something blue, their instincts would have told them, she is wearing blue, maybe it's a boy, ah, she is wearing pink, look at the back ground, it's a girl, so I went for something nude – (neutral).

Adopting a gender-neutral theme for photoshoots and baby showers reflects a conscious effort to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Choosing neutral colours and avoiding gender-specific themes, disrupts typical colour and gender associations and recognizes that traditional cues like blue for boys and pink for girls reinforce binary gender stereotypes.

Conversely, some like participant 2 knew the gender of the unborn child and expressed it in the gender reveal theme:

I knew I was going to have a baby girl; I always wanted a flamingo.

This expression touches on symbolic interactions where individuals get meaning from symbols and allocate significance to objects, events, and behaviours through social interactions and communication (Johns, Chen, & Terlip, 2014). With the choice of the flamingo theme for the baby shower reflecting the assignment of meaning to the event.

Considerations are made for practicality and comfort in the choice of the clothing. While surprise and privacy are prominent in the themes, as 6 out of 10 participants used neutral themes for their photo shoots, anyone viewing the photo without personally knowing the expectant mother or the baby's gender only knew she was expecting a baby.

Reactions to posts on social media

After deciding on the theme and the photoshoot is complete, the next step is posting the photo/s on social media. This section focuses on the reactions and responses to the posts.

Online social media provides massive open-ended platforms for users of a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and beliefs to interact and debate, facilitating countless discussions across a myriad of subjects. With numerous unique voices being lent to the ever-growing information stream, it is essential to consider how the types of conversations that result from a social media post represent the post itself. (Flamino et al., 2021)

With anticipation and expectation, excitement and surprise, the desire for social validation and support, a sense of fulfilment and gratitude, joy and celebration, an expectant mother shares her pregnancy reveal photos on social media. She eagerly awaits the reactions, knowing that online interest, attention, and engagement would follow. However, the uncertainty of what others might say and how their comments will affect her, lingers in the mind of participant 9:

I wanted to have boys, I talked about it a lot on my status, everybody except me wanted me to have a girl, all my friends knew I wanted a boy, so when they found out that I had a girl, they were all so happy.

This revelation garnered positive responses, leading to happiness and excitement among friends, enhancing the interaction's perceived value for both the 'revealer' and their friends.

For participant 1, reactions to her posting her pregnancy photo online continued to garner reactions for over one year giving her great joy

It gave me unspeakable joy, I cannot even explain how I felt that period, till my baby was one year old,

while comments for participant 10 showed the amazement of her friends and family at the fact that she was having a second set of twins:

The people that know me know that I have 7-year-olds already, but another thing that made it “oh my God Oh my God” was that I had another set of twins.

Anticipation and expectations are high emotions expressed by participant 5 upon sharing news of the baby's birth with thoughts such as:

I expected the reactions, I knew that a lot of calls will come in, I knew that lots of congratulatory wishes and all will start coming as soon as I posted, so I waited till the day after when I felt I had enough energy for the calls and messages that kept rolling in.

By posting the announcement, they signal their openness to receiving reactions, and waiting until they feel ready for anticipated calls and messages shows awareness of their emotional and physical capacity to handle the reactions. Congratulatory messages and calls upon safe delivery are not limited to one geographic region. Social media platforms and digital communication tools have enabled global connectivity, facilitating easy sharing of news and updates globally with people connecting by actively circulating, remixing, and reshaping stories in participatory online cultures (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Reasonings / Rationalisation

This section examines the rationale behind sharing pregnancy photos on social media, focusing on the motivations, methods, and timing of such reveals. It analyses platform choices, highlighting the distinct audiences and features of each: Instagram's visual appeal, and Facebook's capacity for detailed interaction.

In using multiple platforms, Participant 5 notes:

I posted the photo on Instagram first, then shared it to Facebook.

The choice to share the photo across multiple platforms reflects a desire to reach a diverse and broader audience as well as convey the message in a rich and impactful manner.

The transient nature of social media is also invoked in the way the information is shared. Some respondents who aim for an immediate and temporary experiences, desiring the created content to be consumed at a rapid pace, opt for immediacy and temporariness.

It was posted on Instagram story, so it will disappear after 24 hours.

Content on Instagram or Facebook stories are considered ephemeral content because the platforms are designed to provide a temporary glimpse into a user's life or experience. This creates a sense of urgency and immediacy for viewers. Once the 24-hour period elapses, the content disappears, emphasizing the fleeting nature of the experience.

Though memories on Facebook and Instagram stories are short-lived, long-lasting memories can be created in the process of the pregnancy reveal by engaging close family members says participant 2:

Photo shoots most times are for memories and even at that, I tried to invite very close friends and family.

The objective of involving close family and friends is to create an emotionally rich experience surrounded by loved ones. Their presence enhances the event's emotional resonance, making it memorable and cherished as well as providing opportunities for documenting moments with photographs to revisit and relive those experiences in the future.

Motivation / Reason for the reveal

The decision to have a pregnancy reveal is intentional, often driven by specific motives. Some expectant mothers announce online due to peer influence or trends, while others, particularly those with children, seek closure. Key reasons from participants discussions include:

a. Celebrating milestones and preserving memories

Participant 8, whose baby was born on her birthday, said:

I had already done a photoshoot; it was only natural for me to post it for my friends to actually see what it looked like. Also, because we share the same birthday, I had the baby on my birthday.

She prioritized sharing the pregnancy photos on the child's birth date, feeling a strong bond sharing the same birthday as her new baby.

b. Creating closure and completeness

This was also expressed by participants 9 and 10 who lacked photos from previous pregnancies, as quoted:

I feel this will be my last child, so I thought, you know what, let me do it, if it's the last,

and,

I just thought that this would be my last chance to do a photoshoot, so I did it.

The decision to do a photoshoot for what they perceived as their "last chance" reflects a desire to provide meaning, significance, closure, and completeness in their life narrative.

c. Personal memories

This resonates with participants 1 and 4, especially because they were particular about their individuality.

I just felt I needed this memory of pregnancy, how my belly bump was before I put to birth, so I just had to do it,

and,

I wanted to keep a memory of the whole process because pregnancy is a process, it is actually a journey... I want to look at myself, maybe when I get old, I can look at the photo and say oh it was this child that was in there baking and all that.

Documenting the pregnancy journey through photoshoots reflects a desire for self-reflection and self-awareness, preserving memories as a reminder of personal growth and transformation, and creating lasting autobiographical memories.

d. Infertility

This was a difficult realisation as 3 participants had faced challenges with infertility, underscoring its significance as a driving force behind the decision to reveal the pregnancy on social media. One participant commented:

For me, I had a delay taking in – (conceiving), so it was such a big deal to have that memory.

The participant's choice to document her journey through publicly shared photos online reflects a desire to create a narrative of struggle, perseverance, and triumph, celebrating joy while acknowledging challenges.

Timing of the reveal

Cultural beliefs, traditions, and superstitions influence the practice of delayed or post-birth pregnancy reveals on social media among expectant mothers of Nigerian descent. Despite wanting to share pregnancy news, cultural norms discourage pre-birth reveals due to fears of miscarriage or evil attacks on the unborn child and mother. Participant 2 shares that,

There is a lot of witchcraft in Nigeria, there is a lot of evil, there are a lot of bad minds, so people just try to keep their pregnancies to themselves, when I give birth, you see my baby,

and participant 3 reiterates some of the beliefs held within their community,

In my place we believe that when you get pregnant, in the first trimester, you don't need to tell anybody because they might change the sex of your baby.

Participant's experiences of miscarriage influence their choice to prioritize privacy in later pregnancies, this is further driven by a need for emotional healing. Here is an experienced shared by participant 9

"When I was pregnant and I lost the baby, the pregnancy... I (had) shared the news of the pregnancy with all of my friends, so you can imagine having to go back and tell them I am not pregnant anymore. I had to literally go back and tell everyone I had told I was pregnant, that I was not pregnant anymore. So, this one, I decided not to share."

The deliberate decision to withhold information about her pregnancy and subsequent loss reflects her intentional management of privacy boundaries to protect her emotional well-being. she continues to say that;

"I was not ready to share because people will react knowing you suffered loss, they would be that sense of care, checking up on you and the place I was mentally, I didn't want that... I just wanted to go through that phase just by myself and my family".

Her reluctance to share pregnancy updates on social media stems from a desire to avoid triggering reminders of past loss and the potential trauma associated with explaining the situation to others and dealing with their reactions. They also harbour a lingering fear of losing the pregnancy again;

"I just don't want a situation that will arise again that God forbid, I lose the baby again and I have to start telling people again that oh it's not there".

Some expectant mothers choose to share pregnancy reveal photos only after the baby has been born, as they feel more confident about the safety of the pregnancy at that point. Similarly, concerns about reopening old wounds led some expectant mothers to refrain from revealing their pregnancy until later.

A participant recounted the painful experience of losing her baby after previously sharing the news of her pregnancy with

friends and family. Two months later, she receives messages asking about the baby's well-being, which triggered feelings of grief, sadness, and vulnerability. Participant 6 shared her emotional journey of being pregnant again after experiencing a miscarriage. "All through my pregnancy, I was scared. Every time I go to the hospital, I'm scared because I don't know what I'm going to hear, I don't know what will happen, so rather than telling people again that I'm pregnant only for them to now start asking again "how is baby?" I just decided to keep it to myself, my husband, and my mother".

The superstitious fear of being attacked by evil is another reason for the delayed pregnancy reveal according to participant 6 "Fear of being bewitched.... I didn't put up the photo before the child was born, it was after the child was born that I did. That's just my reason, for fear of being haunted or any special attention while I'm pregnant, so I just kept it till my child was out (born)".

There is an underlying fear among many individuals of being targeted by witches or experiencing harm if they disclose their pregnancy. Consequently, to safeguard themselves, individuals of Nigerian descent often opt to withhold the news of their pregnancy until after the child is born.

Additionally, the belief in the "evil eye" is prevalent. Participant 6 reveals that she delayed announcing her pregnancy until after the child was born to keep it away from the "evil eye" of people who can either change the sex of the child (if they know what gender the expectant mother desires) or prevent a safe delivery of the baby. Parents, especially mothers also advice and encourage their daughters not to share the news of their pregnancy with outsiders.

Surprisingly, these fears, particularly regarding witchcraft, resonates not only with expectant mothers residing in Nigeria but also with expectant mothers residing in America and Canada who participated in the survey.

In the aftermath of a miscarriage, the incident may become intertwined with superstitions and witchcraft within Nigerian culture, regardless of whether the loss is directly linked to sharing information on social media.

Social media dynamics also play a role in the delayed pregnancy reveal. Individuals may strategically choose what and when to post to control how they are perceived by others. Ultimately, the decision to delay a pregnancy reveal or share it after the birth is deeply personal and influenced by a myriad of factors. All 10 participants in this study took reveal photos during pregnancy but posted them after birth, with posting times ranging from the same day to a month later. The earliest post coincided with the mother's birthday and the baby's birth, while another participant's post came immediately after the birth due to her husband's early announcement.

Findings

Following a detailed analysis of data from semi-structured interviews with ten female participants, the study explored what post-birth pregnancy reveals entail, how they are carried out, and

the motivations and meanings attached to this practice on social media.

The findings reveal that expectant mothers of Nigerian descent are increasingly open to documenting their pregnancy journeys and sharing these images on social media. Despite lingering fears tied to cultural superstitions, particularly beliefs about spiritual harm or negative consequences associated with early pregnancy disclosure, participants still expressed a strong desire to share their experiences publicly. This hesitation was not limited to those residing in Nigeria; even participants living abroad reported similar cultural concerns, demonstrating that these beliefs persist across geographical contexts.

Despite fears and concerns, social media remains a vital tool for pregnancy reveals. Participants leverage platforms like Facebook and Instagram, to share their stories with loved ones worldwide. With deliberate decision as to when the pregnancy reveal photos are posted, some participants while pregnant continue to post old photos of themselves, giving no hint of being pregnant. This brings to bear the social comparison theory, which posits that individuals engage in online identity curation as a means to present varied potential selves (Johnson & Ranzini, 2018). This implies that individuals can control the narrative and present themselves in a positive light or how they want to be seen or perceived.

Social media also plays a role in how some expectant mothers decide to do the reveal as one respondent notes that people on social media like to do what is trending. Another observes that people don't need to create things from scratch, as they can just adopt what has already been done and posted on social media, to suit them. The urge to conform to these trends stem from the aspiration to meet presumed standards and anticipations associated with pregnancy and parenthood as showcased on social media.

To some participants, social media serves as a driver for embracing novel cultural customs like gender reveals, which, though originated elsewhere, are now gaining traction in diverse cultural settings like Nigeria.

Individuals learn through observing the behaviours and actions of others, particularly those who are perceived as role models or influential figures (Akpan & Kennedy, 2020). Given that some known celebrities and social media influencers document their pregnancy journey by posting the scan process, putting out their scan results, sharing the gender of the unborn child and generally keep their followers and fans updated, some fans have been inspired to do the same if they have the opportunity of having another child.

While the predominant trend in pregnancy reveals among Nigerians has been delayed or post-birth announcements, there are indications of a potential shift, with signs suggesting a gradual change, particularly influenced by celebrities. Observing celebrities engaging in this behaviour could set a precedent and lead to the normalization and acceptance of timely pregnancy announcements among this group of people.

Additionally, social media serves as a platform for community support and advice for pregnant women. It allows them to connect with others, seek guidance, and receive support from fellow mothers, healthcare professionals, and experts.

Individuals often use social media to compare their pregnancy experiences with others, seeking validation, reassurance, and information about typical milestones and expectations during pregnancy. The inclination to document their pregnancy journey from its preliminary stages to childbirth underscores their desire to witness their body's transformation and the child's growth over time, thus emphasizing the importance of individual choice and personal fulfilment irrespective of societal norms.

Contrary to what occurred in the past, there is a noticeable shift towards greater openness in sharing pregnancy experiences online. This change is influenced by factors such as widespread access to social media platforms, growing societal acceptance of online sharing, and the influence of celebrities and influencers who openly document their pregnancies without apparent negative consequences. Nevertheless, participants of this study still advocate for caution.

Acknowledging the inherent uncertainty of pregnancy outcomes underscores the risk involved in sharing such personal information online. The Privacy Calculus theory, suggests that individuals weigh the perceived benefits against potential negative consequences when deciding to disclose personal information. Thus, the responsibility for the outcome rests with the individual who choose to reveal their pregnancy" (Cain & Imre, 2021). Ultimately, every person's decision to share their pregnancy journey reflects their unique risk assessment process and priorities.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the emerging phenomenon of post-birth pregnancy reveals among women of Nigerian descent, examining how cultural beliefs, personal motivations, and digital communication intersect in shaping this evolving practice. Through the perspectives of ten participants, the research illuminates how pregnancy which was once strictly private and culturally concealed, now finds new expression in the digital age through carefully curated post-birth announcements.

The findings reveal that while expectant mothers increasingly embrace social media as a space for creativity, self-expression, and memory-making, deep-rooted cultural superstitions continue to influence the timing of these announcements. Concerns about spiritual harm, miscarriage, or "evil eyes" still shape disclosure decisions, leading many to delay sharing until after childbirth. Even among women living outside Nigeria, cultural norms remain powerful, demonstrating the persistence of heritage across geographical boundaries.

The study further shows that pregnancy reveals on social media serve multiple functions like emotional healing, celebration of milestones, and social validation. This aligns with broader literature suggesting that digital platforms shape how individuals present themselves, negotiate privacy, and manage social expectations.

Importantly, the rise of post-birth reveals signals a cultural shift. As global digital trends mingle with local traditions, pregnancy that was once shrouded in secrecy is increasingly becoming a public, aesthetic, and celebratory experience. Social media platforms are not only reshaping communication practices but are also quietly challenging long-held cultural beliefs, even though many women continue to navigate these changes with caution.

Overall, this research contributes meaningfully to the understudied area of pregnancy disclosure practices among Nigerians. It demonstrates how digital globalization interacts with indigenous cultural frameworks, creating new hybrid forms of expressing identity, womanhood, and motherhood.

Limitations / Challenges of the study

With no known existing literature on post-birth or delayed pregnancy reveals on social media, this research relied solely on data from semi-structured interviews. Some participants were reluctant to share their pregnancy experiences due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Challenges include internet connectivity issues, particularly with participants in different continents. Variations in video interview technology affected audibility, making transcription difficult.

Time zone differences, combined with participants' work schedules, baby routines, and other responsibilities, further complicated interview scheduling.

Recommendations for future studies

To build on the insights gained from this research, future studies could consider Pregnancy Reveals in other West African Countries or other continents with strong cultural / traditional values. Expanding the scope of research could provide a comparative analysis and deeper understanding of cultural influences on pregnancy reveals.

Other research could also investigate the various media content such as videos, social media posts, and other digital platforms used for pregnancy reveals, offering a broader perspective on how technology and modern communication tools are shaping these traditions.

Additionally, utilizing different methodologies, such as a more participatory ethnography could provide a more immersive and detailed exploration of the subject through "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). Ethnographic studies could offer a more nuanced view of values, beliefs, cultural choices, collective memory and social structures.

As social media continues to evolve, further research may explore how younger generations reinterpret these traditions and what these shifts mean for cultural continuity in an increasingly digital world.

Future research can further deepen our understanding of the cultural dimensions and evolving practices surrounding pregnancy reveals beyond Nigeria and on new and emerging social media platforms.

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