



Breaking The Silence: Digitalising Female Abuse in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* Through Smartphone Technology

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Date of Submission: 12-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 24-04-2026

Abstract

Female abuse remains a persistent global challenge operating at societal, structural, and individual levels. In many African societies, cultural norms and patriarchal values enforce silence around women's experiences of abuse, thereby sustaining oppression and protecting perpetrators. Drawing on Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982), this study examines how literary representations of female abuse: sexual, emotional, academic, and institutional can be reimagined through the lens of smartphone technology and digital feminism. Anchored in feminist literary criticism, postcolonial feminist theory, and feminist technology studies, the paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on close textual analysis and hypothetical digital reconstruction. It argues that smartphones and digital platforms offer new possibilities for documenting abuse, amplifying silenced voices, and mobilising collective advocacy, while simultaneously generating new forms of digital surveillance and victimisation. The study concludes that digitalisation functions as a double-edged phenomenon: it disrupts enforced silence but also reproduces patriarchal power in virtual spaces, creating what may be described as a "digital yoke."

Keywords: Female Abuse; Digital Feminism; Smartphone Technology; Patriarchy; African Women's Writing

I. Introduction

Female abuse remains a pervasive and multifaceted challenge worldwide, manifesting physically, emotionally, sexually, academically, and institutionally. Despite legal frameworks, social policies, and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality, women continue to experience systematic oppression across multiple domains of life. The World Health Organization (2005) reports that between 13% and 61% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical abuse at least once in their lifetime, highlighting the global scale of this issue. In

African contexts, the persistence of abuse is often reinforced by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, cultural taboos, and societal expectations that demand female silence in the face of oppression. Such silence, whether enforced through socialization, fear of stigmatization, or institutional complicity, serves to protect perpetrators while further marginalizing victims.

Contemporary digital innovation has introduced new avenues for challenging these entrenched structures. Smartphones, in particular, have transformed the ways in which individuals communicate, engage socially, and mobilize resistance. These devices serve as powerful tools for documenting lived experiences, sharing testimonies, and creating virtual spaces for advocacy and solidarity. Digital platforms allow for the dissemination of personal narratives beyond the limitations of physical and institutional boundaries, providing marginalized voices with opportunities for visibility, collective engagement, and social action. There's no gainsaying the fact that this age is increasingly shaped by the digital innovation, social justice and technology shows an exhibition of an amazing intersection which enables the postulation of solution to deep-rooted issues such as gender-based violence. Due to traditional and cultural taboos, female abuses are often swept under the carpet and forever silenced. With the fusion of technology and digitalization, a new form of engagement is emerging to challenge societal expectations in creating a new narrative. In this sense, smartphone technology is not merely a communication tool but a mechanism through which power dynamics can be contested, experiences can be authenticated, and communal support networks can be established.

Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982) offers a compelling literary framework for exploring the intersections of gendered oppression, institutional authority, and societal expectations. The novel follows Nko, a female undergraduate navigating a highly patriarchal university and broader societal environment. Through Nko's experiences of sexual,



emotional, academic, and institutional abuse, the text illuminates the ways in which silence is maintained, perpetuated, and internalized. The university, a space traditionally envisioned as a site of empowerment and intellectual liberation, is revealed to operate paradoxically as a site of surveillance, coercion, and gendered subjugation. Figures such as Professor Ikot and Ete Kamba embody the intersection of personal, institutional, and cultural power that reinforces female marginalization, demonstrating how systemic oppression operates within both public and private spheres.

This study seeks to interrogate the experiences of Nko in *Double Yoke* alongside contemporary digital practices, exploring how smartphone technology could hypothetically serve as a tool to document, amplify, and challenge her silenced experiences. In a similar vein, this quest inquires how the smart phone applications such as social media platforms and reporting tools can empower the female to express their plights and be supported across the digital spaces for solidarity. The connection between technology and literature can be well harnessed here to provide succour to the endangered females who are oppressed, yet remains silence. By bridging literary analysis with digital feminist perspectives, the study highlights the potential of technology to create counter-narratives, provide evidence-based advocacy, and foster solidarity among women in similar contexts. Therefore, technology becomes a viable tool to liberate the oppressed and silent. Furthermore, it interrogates the double-edged nature of digital spaces, acknowledging that while smartphones can empower, they may also expose women to new forms of surveillance, cyber-harassment, and digital victimization.

In positioning *Double Yoke* within both literary and digital feminist frameworks, this study contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of female abuse, emphasizing the evolving possibilities for resistance in contemporary society. It underscores the need to reconceptualize silence not merely as a personal or cultural phenomenon but as a socially mediated condition that can be challenged, disrupted, and transformed through innovative technological interventions. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how literary narratives and digital technologies can intersect to produce new forms of visibility, empowerment, and collective action against entrenched patriarchal systems.

II. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* as its primary text. The

analysis is literary and theoretical rather than empirical; it does not include interviews, surveys, or digital ethnography. Consequently, the findings are interpretive and cannot be generalised across all African societies or digital contexts. Nonetheless, the framework developed here is transferable and may be applied to other African literary texts that explore gender-based violence and silence. The study is also limited by its hypothetical engagement with smartphone technology, which is used as an analytical tool rather than an empirical intervention.

III. Literature Review

Buchi Emecheta's literary corpus has long been recognized for its incisive critique of patriarchy, gender inequality, and the systemic oppression of women in African societies. Scholars such as Lewis and Mills (2003) argue that her works consistently foreground the social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms that enforce female marginalization. Emecheta's narratives, including *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *The Bride Price* (1976), and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), interrogate the ways in which women navigate restrictive social expectations while confronting sexual, emotional, and economic exploitation. These works highlight the pervasive influence of traditional norms, male dominance, and institutional complicity in perpetuating women's subjugation.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta presents a society where women's identities are largely defined by their reproductive roles and domestic labour, limiting personal autonomy and subjecting them to systemic oppression. Similarly, *The Bride Price* reveals forced marriage and cultural commodification of women as mechanisms that reinforce patriarchal control. *Second-Class Citizen* extends these critiques to the diaspora, illustrating how women encounter intersecting forms of racial, economic, and gender-based discrimination. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Emecheta's works offer rich insight into the social construction of gender and the ways in which cultural and institutional structures operate to silence female voices.

Beyond literary scholarship, feminist and technology studies have interrogated the role of digital tools in shaping power dynamics and resistance. Wajcman (2010) contends that technology is not neutral but socially constructed, often reflecting and reinforcing existing gender hierarchies. Within this framework, digital tools, ranging from social media platforms to reporting applications, can simultaneously reproduce power imbalances and provide marginalized groups with



opportunities to challenge oppression. Risam (2019) extends this argument to postcolonial digital humanities, demonstrating that digital spaces offer platforms for subaltern voices to contest silencing practices, archive marginalized histories, and engage in transnational activism. Laricchia (2022), observes that there are more smartphones on the globe than the people in the world. It has become a necessity in the lives of people in the world. Through the internet, smartphones are connected globally for communication, interaction and they function using diverse applications. There are different types as Hew et al.(2015) identifies three types of smartphones applications, Hybrid, Native and web applications. These can further be divided into two ways; The backend and the front end. Biochak (2019), explains further that these applications help the users to attain specific goals in their daily activities such as posting of videos, photo tweet updates and status update on their social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

To show how vase the digital the world has become, between 2019 to 2021, COVID 19 pandemic made the digital space a broad term used to engage social and public engagement as Rehman(2014), Foka and Viktor(2014) opines that smartphone applications were the space that all communications and interactions took place. In fact, through the smartphone applications, basic needs were achieved. The use of these digital handles cut across different ages and gender.

Empirical studies on smartphone usage further illustrate the gendered dimensions of digital engagement. Laricchia (2022) observes that smartphones have become integral to global communication, connecting individuals across social, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Furszyfer et al. (2021) note that smartphone applications not only facilitate social networking and activism but also mediate gender norms, offering spaces for women to assert autonomy while remaining vulnerable to surveillance and digital harassment. These studies collectively highlight the dual nature of digital spaces as sites of empowerment and risk.

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a significant gap in integrating digital feminism with African literary analysis. While Emecheta's works have been widely studied for their feminist critique, limited scholarship explores how her narratives of female oppression can intersect with contemporary digital technologies to produce new forms of advocacy, visibility, and resistance. This study addresses this gap by applying a digital feminist lens to *Double Yoke*, examining how smartphone technology could hypothetically mediate

the silenced experiences of Nko, the novel's protagonist, and transform private suffering into publicly recognized and digitally supported narratives of empowerment.

By bridging literary scholarship with digital feminist theory, this study situates African literary texts within contemporary discussions of technology, social activism, and gendered power. It underscores the potential of digital tools to reframe silenced narratives, document abuse, and mobilize collective action, while acknowledging the persistent structural and cultural forces that continue to constrain women's autonomy both offline and online. This literature review thus establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining *Double Yoke* as a site for interrogating female oppression and exploring the transformative possibilities of digital interventions.

IV. Conceptual Framework

4.1 Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates female abuse, digitalisation, and smartphone-enabled social advocacy to explain how silence is produced and contested. It provides the lens through which *Double Yoke* is analysed alongside contemporary digital realities.

4.2 Female Abuse

Female abuse is conceptualised as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, academic, and institutional violence. These forms of abuse intersect to sustain women's oppression and silence, as illustrated through Nko's experiences in *Double Yoke*.

4.3 Digitalisation

Digitalisation refers to the use of digital tools—especially smartphones—to transform communication, visibility, and social interaction. Smartphones collapse the boundary between private and public spaces, enabling new forms of narrative circulation.

4.4 Smartphones and Social Advocacy

Smartphones function as tools for storytelling, reporting, and activism. Through audio-visual recording, social media, and anonymous reporting applications, they enable documentation, solidarity, and resistance, while also exposing users to digital risks.

V. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in **feminist literary theory, postcolonial feminist perspectives, and digital feminism**, providing a multidimensional lens to



examine female abuse in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and its potential mediation through smartphone technology. The combination of these theoretical approaches allows for an integrated understanding of how gendered power, sociocultural context, and digital interventions intersect to shape women's experiences of oppression and resistance.

Feminist Literary Theory serves as the first theoretical pillar. Feminist literary criticism interrogates the ways in which literature represents gendered power dynamics, patriarchy, and female silencing. According to Moi (1985), feminist theory examines both overt and subtle mechanisms of domination, including narrative structures, characterization, and language, to reveal how societal norms and institutional hierarchies are reproduced in texts. In *Double Yoke*, feminist literary theory illuminates how Nko's experiences of sexual, emotional, and institutional abuse are embedded within broader societal expectations that demand female compliance and silence. This approach enables the study to critically analyze the novel's portrayal of female vulnerability, resilience, and strategies of survival, highlighting both the personal and systemic dimensions of oppression.

Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives constitute the second pillar of the theoretical framework. Postcolonial feminism situates women's oppression within historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts shaped by colonial legacies and indigenous patriarchal structures (Mohanty, 1988; Nnaemeka, 2004). It emphasizes the ways in which African women's lives are regulated not only by contemporary social norms but also by historical inequalities and inherited systems of power. In *Double Yoke*, the intersection of tradition, modernity, and educational hierarchies exemplifies this duality: Nko experiences marginalization both from traditional expectations of female behaviour and from institutionalized patriarchal power within the university setting. Postcolonial feminist theory enables the study to situate Nko's experiences within broader cultural and historical forces, showing how her silence is not simply personal but structurally enforced.

Digital Feminism forms the third pillar of the framework, examining how contemporary digital technologies can create new spaces for resistance, storytelling, and advocacy. Digital feminism explores the role of online platforms, social media, and mobile technologies in amplifying marginalized voices, creating counter-publics, and fostering solidarity among women (Baer, 2016; Risam, 2019). Within this study, digital feminism provides a lens to hypothesize how smartphones and reporting

applications could mediate Nko's experiences, transforming her silenced narrative into an evidence-based, publicly accessible story that challenges patriarchal authority. This perspective also acknowledges the ambivalent nature of digital spaces, recognizing that while technology can empower, it can simultaneously expose women to cyber-surveillance, online harassment, and digital victimization.

By integrating these three theoretical approaches, the study situates female oppression in *Double Yoke* within both **literary and contemporary technological contexts**. Feminist literary theory decodes the textual representation of gendered power and silencing; postcolonial feminism provides a historical and cultural understanding of the systemic forces at play; and digital feminism explores the transformative potential of technology to disrupt these structures. This combined framework allows for a **nuanced analysis** that examines both the persistence of patriarchal oppression and the opportunities for resistance offered through digital interventions, highlighting the complex interplay between literature, culture, and technology.

VI. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive research design**, employing a combination of **research design, close textual analysis, and hypothetical digital reconstruction** to explore female abuse in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and the potential mediation of such abuse through smartphone technology. The approach is interdisciplinary, integrating literary studies, feminist theory, and digital humanities to situate the research at the intersection of textual interpretation and contemporary technological engagement.

6.1 Research Design

The research is **exploratory and interpretive**, aiming to understand complex social phenomena rather than generate quantitative generalizations. The design is grounded in **qualitative methods**, emphasizing meaning-making, contextual understanding, and critical analysis of textual and hypothetical digital data. By using an interpretive framework, the study foregrounds the experiences of the female protagonist, Nko, and examines how societal, institutional, and technological forces shape her oppression and potential pathways for resistance. This design allows for **interdisciplinary inquiry**, linking literary representation with digital feminist praxis and postcolonial theory to investigate how smartphone technology might hypothetically disrupt patterns of silence and abuse.

6.2 Textual Analysis



Primary data are drawn from *Double Yoke* (Emecheta, 1982), with key scenes depicting sexual, emotional, academic, and institutional abuse systematically identified and analyzed. These scenes are examined for narrative structure, characterization, and thematic content, focusing on mechanisms of female silencing and societal reinforcement of patriarchal norms. Close reading is employed to uncover underlying power dynamics, patterns of oppression, and strategies of resistance within the text.

6.3 Hypothetical Digital Reconstruction

Following the textual analysis, the study undertakes a **conceptual reconstruction of Nko's experiences within contemporary smartphone-mediated contexts**. This involves exploring how digital tools—such as social media platforms, audio-visual recording applications, blogs, and reporting apps—could potentially allow Nko to document abuse, amplify her voice, and engage in collective advocacy. The analysis considers both empowering possibilities and potential risks, including cyber-surveillance, online harassment, and digital victimization, aligning the literary analysis with digital feminist and digital humanities perspectives.

6.4 Interdisciplinary Analytical Framework

The study draws on **feminist literary theory, postcolonial feminist perspectives, and digital feminism** to guide analysis. Feminist literary theory is used to decode representations of gendered power, silencing, and resistance. Postcolonial feminism situates Nko's experiences within cultural, historical, and institutional forces, including the legacies of colonialism and entrenched patriarchal norms. Digital feminism provides a lens for conceptualizing the transformative potential of smartphone technology, highlighting how digital spaces can enable women to challenge oppression, construct counter-narratives, and mobilize collective action.

6.5 Data Analysis

The data are analyzed thematically. Emerging themes include sexual coercion, institutional complicity, societal expectations, silence, digital visibility, and technological risk. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of patterns in both literary representations of female abuse and the hypothetical impact of digital interventions. This provides insight into the interplay between literature, societal structures, and technological possibilities, highlighting the dual role of smartphones as instruments of empowerment and sites of vulnerability.

VII. Results and Discussion

The analysis of *Double Yoke* reveals that **silence functions as a central mechanism of oppression**, enabling both sexual and institutional abuse within patriarchal African society. Nko's experiences illustrate how societal expectations, cultural norms, and institutional complicity work together to suppress female voices. Her encounters with Professor Ikot's sexual coercion and Ete Kamba's emotional manipulation are conducted in private spaces—offices, secluded hostels, and intimate domestic settings—where patriarchal authority remains largely unchallenged. The lack of witnesses, the fear of social stigma, and the internalization of cultural norms compel Nko into silence, effectively sustaining cycles of abuse.

From a literary perspective, Emecheta employs narrative techniques such as **first-person reflection**, internalized fear, and restricted perspective to emphasize the isolating effects of silence. By foregrounding Nko's private suffering, the novel exposes the complex interplay of societal, institutional, and individual factors that enforce subjugation. Silence, therefore, is not simply a personal choice but a **structural tool of oppression**, highlighting the ways in which women's bodies, voices, and experiences are regulated in both public and private spheres.

The study's **hypothetical digital reconstruction** demonstrates how smartphone technology could disrupt this enforced silence. Digital tools, including social media platforms, blogs, audio-visual recording applications, and reporting apps—offer avenues for transforming private suffering into **public testimony**. For example, Nko could hypothetically document instances of abuse through voice or video recordings, share her story via social media, or engage in online campaigns to seek solidarity and justice. This process aligns with the principles of digital feminism, which emphasize the capacity of technology to amplify marginalized voices, create counter-publics, and foster collective advocacy (Baer, 2016; Risam, 2019).

However, the findings also underscore the **complex and ambivalent nature of digital empowerment**. While smartphones can provide platforms for resistance, they simultaneously introduce new forms of vulnerability. Cyber-surveillance by abusers, online shaming, victim-blaming, and the potential dissemination of intimate materials can reproduce existing patriarchal power in the digital realm. The digital space, while offering visibility and evidence-based advocacy, also exposes women to **new forms of oppression** that mirror or even intensify offline abuse. Thus, the smartphone



functions as a **double-edged instrument**, capable of both liberation and subjugation.

This duality gives rise to the concept of a “**digital yoke**.” Just as traditional structures of power constrain women in *Double Yoke*, digital platforms—though empowering—may reproduce hierarchical control through monitoring, judgment, and social policing. Nko’s hypothetical engagement with technology illustrates that while digital interventions can amplify silenced voices and provide communal support, they do not automatically dismantle systemic patriarchy. Instead, they reconfigure power dynamics, creating a **new terrain of negotiation, resistance, and vulnerability**.

The analysis further identifies thematic intersections between **literary representation, societal structures, and technological possibilities**. Patterns of abuse in the text—sexual coercion, emotional manipulation, and institutional complicity—mirror real-world gendered power dynamics, making the hypothetical application of smartphone technology both relevant and instructive. Digital tools could serve as mediators for justice, enabling victims to preserve evidence, share experiences anonymously, and mobilize collective advocacy. At the same time, these same tools introduce new ethical and social challenges, underscoring the importance of **digital literacy, privacy protection, and supportive networks** in ensuring that empowerment does not inadvertently lead to further victimization.

In summary, the Results and Discussion reveal that:

1. **Silence is central to oppression**—both culturally and institutionally enforced.
2. **Smartphone technology offers hypothetical empowerment**, transforming private suffering into public testimony and enabling collective action.
3. **Digital vulnerabilities emerge** alongside empowerment, including surveillance, online shaming, and victim-blaming.
4. **Digitalisation creates a “digital yoke”**, highlighting the ambivalent nature of technology as both liberatory and constraining.
5. **Integration of literature and digital feminism** provides a nuanced framework for understanding how technology mediates oppression, visibility, and resistance in contemporary contexts.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that while digital interventions cannot entirely dismantle patriarchy, they **reshape possibilities for resistance**, offering new forms of advocacy and visibility for silenced

female voices in African literary and real-world contexts.

VIII. Conclusion

This study explores how smartphone technology can break silence and challenge patriarchal structures, though it does not fully dismantle them. Through analysis of Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke* and hypothetical digital interventions, it shows that private suffering can be transformed into public testimony, enabling solidarity, evidence-based advocacy, and amplification of silenced female voices like Nko’s.

Digital empowerment, however, is ambivalent. While online platforms facilitate expression and collective resistance, they also introduce vulnerabilities such as cyber-surveillance, online shaming, victim-blaming, and misuse of personal data. This duality—the “digital yoke”—demonstrates how patriarchal power can persist and adapt in virtual spaces, reshaping rather than eliminating gendered power relations.

Rereading *Double Yoke* through a digital feminist lens highlights the relevance of literary narratives to contemporary debates on technology, gender, and social justice. Technology, when applied thoughtfully, can support advocacy, document oppression, and foster communal support networks. Yet, digital tools require careful attention to privacy, safety, and social dynamics to prevent replicating offline hierarchies.

Integrating literary analysis and digital feminism provides a framework for understanding persistent female oppression and the potential of technology. Smartphones and digital platforms can enable visibility and empowerment, but their effectiveness depends on context-sensitive, ethical, and interdisciplinary approaches that balance opportunities with risks.

IX. Future Work

While this study focuses on hypothetical digital reconstruction, future research could extend the analysis to **empirical investigations**. For instance, studies could examine how actual smartphone-mediated interventions, reporting applications, or social media campaigns function in African university or community settings. Researchers could investigate user experiences, effectiveness in breaking silence, risks of digital harassment, and the ways digital activism interacts with cultural norms and institutional structures. Such empirical work would complement the present literary and conceptual analysis, providing a more holistic understanding of how technology can mediate female



oppression and amplify marginalized voices in real-world contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of sexual and gender-based violence, this study adopts a victim-centred ethical stance. It avoids sensationalising abuse and acknowledges the risks associated with digital exposure, including retraumatisation and cyber-violence.

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