

AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION INTO HOW NIGERIAN SKIT MAKERS PORTRAY CROSSDRESSING ON FACEBOOK AND ITS IMPACT ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

ABSTRACT

The study focused on public perception of the depiction of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook. The study was guided by four research objectives. Based on the nature of the study, survey research method was adopted as the research design and Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory was the theoretical framework for the study. The instrument for data collection was an online Google form questionnaire that was distributed to Facebook users online who were randomly selected from three comedy skit making group on Facebook. Taro Yamane's formula was used for sample size selection of 400 Respondents from a population of 46,061,400 Facebook users in Nigeria. However, 385 responses were received; representing 96.3% out of whom 36.9% were males and 63.1% were females. Findings from the study showed that the public perceive cross dressing by Nigeria skit makers on Facebook as hilarious; also, social recognition was found to be the major factor that motivates cross dressing skits on Facebook and the viewership of cross dressed skits on Facebook does not influence the viewers' offline sense of dressing and behaviour. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended the need for public enlightenment about cross dressing skits on Facebook and other social media platforms, so that the public becomes aware that such skits are basically for entertainment and for social recognition by the skit makers. Also, skit makers should include in their contents/skits issues challenging our society and how the society can be free of these vices, even while being entertained.

Keywords: Public perception, Cross dressing, Nigeria, Skit makers and Facebook

1. INTRODUCTION

Several definitions have been attributed to cross-dressing. However, scholars and other professionals (4); (5); (13); (1) have described cross-dressing as basically wearing items of clothing and other accouterments commonly associated with the opposite sex within a particular society.

Based on the above, one would say that the rate at which cross dressing is evolving is quite alarming and of course giving cause for serious concerns especially in this part of the world (Nigeria); where culture and religion hold sway and clearly disapproves and contradicts this way of behaviour and dressing. (1) however stated that “it is evident that cross dressing is not alien to Nigeria history and that there is little documentation on the trajectory of the act from historical to present time”.

According to Sociologist, Stephen Onaolapo, the rising trend is “disturbing and shameful.” He described the situation as a reflection of how much morals and values Nigeria as a society had lost to westernization and all its accompanying elements. He added that cross dressers are slowly but boldly coming out from their closets to challenge our collective values and views as a people (2).

Although cross dressing has been in existence for so long a time now, its impact has greatly improved and being felt globally as a result of technological advancement.(3) pointed out that scholars have overstated the connection between female-to-male cross dressing and deviant sexual activities during the first decades of the 20th century. In Nigeria, like every other part of the world where technology is thriving, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, twitter, WhatsApp etc, coupled with the availability of cheap smart phones and data has given rise to young men and women using their phones to create contents or make short skits that sometimes promote bizarre activities and controversial trends, notably cross dressing.

(4) explained that cross dressing among male comedians appears to be one of the best-selling contents in recent times in Nigeria. While it is viewed as creativity by some, other people see it as sending wrong signals and connotations about the female gender.

No doubt, comedy in Nigeria has greatly improved and social media holds a higher percentage of this credit. A visit to social media most used and populous platform “Facebook” displays a lot of contents showcasing cross dressing almost on daily basis. Many of these comedians as mentioned by (4) are male comedians taking on female personalities by dressing as women.

According to (6) cross dressing is one of the basic approaches adopted by male comedians to achieve audience preference, likeness and grow their entertainment business. The major reasons for cross dressing according to them include to introduce unique identity to their brand, attract audience unique attention, enjoy attention and acceptance from male and female audience among others. (6) sees cross dressing as strategies deployed by comedians. According to them “in an effort to make their audience happy and well entertained, many professionals in entertainment industry, especially male comedians adopt different strategies.”

Undoubtedly, the internet has proved to be very useful over the years as it has helped promote and contribute immensely to the growth of the global economy and helped societies and individuals achieve their collective and individual aspirations. As beneficial as this may seem, (4) argued that the internet even as effective as it is to humans make it seamless to alter gender identities.

Whether it is intended for comedy or an adopted lifestyle displayed on Facebook, this study is focused on finding out how Nigeria skit makers portray cross dressing on Facebook and its impact on public perception.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Cross dressing in Nigeria has become a household trend and known phenomenon in the social media space, especially here in Nigeria. Skit makers and other content creators on social media

like Facebook seem to enjoy dressing pattern that showcases the attribute of the opposite sex, especially the female sex. Unfortunately, this bizarre trend of women dressing like men and men dressing and behaving like women seem to be on the rise. While some applaud this as creativity, others seem indifferent and show little or no concern about this trend. Either ways, the effects is felt in the offline space as we see today, youths and other young adults trying to dress and behave like the personalities they “like” and “follow” on Facebook. Unfortunately, the popularity of cross dressers on Facebook seems to be on the rise as this is credited to the number of followers, likes and comments they receive through their pages; making them not only popular, but also financially empowered.

However, considering the ‘newness’ of cross dressing as a trend in Nigeria, few works/literatures exist in this area based on the findings of the researchers. Hence, the need for this study.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1. To ascertain public perception of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook.
2. To ascertain public reaction to the representation of the opposite sex through cross dressing by skit makers on Facebook.
3. To determine factors that motivates cross dressing among skit makers in Nigeria.
4. To find out if the viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook influences the viewers’ offline sense of dressing and behaviour.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the public perception of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook?
2. How do the public react to the representation of the opposite sex by Nigeria skit makers on Facebook through cross dressing?

3. What factors motivates cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook?
4. Does the viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook influences the viewers' offline sense of dressing and behaviour?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Cross-Dressing

Cross dressing, also called transvestism refers to wearing the clothes and the ornaments related to the opposite sex in a particular society, thus switching the gender symbol quickly by changing the clothing and replacing the gender identity at the level of the signifier in an attempt to gain the public recognition of their cross dressing image. So the wearer who wears the clothes of the opposite sex is named “cross-dresser” or “transvestite” (7).

(1) defined a cross dresser as “anyone of a particular gender, who intentionally embraces the dressing of the opposite gender, thus portraying his/herself to look like, by virtue of dressing, the opposite gender.” They went further to differentiate between a cross dresser and a celebrity cross dresser. They operationally defined a celebrity cross dresser as “someone who is well known for putting on the dressing of the opposite gender and using this to portray his/herself to look like that gender.” Explaining further, they describe such an individual as “someone who may not be known for anything in particular other than the cross dressing act, which they added opens opportunities for social influencing, endorsement and other celebrity-related activities, including guest appearances at events.”

(4) explained that “cross dressing has been on the increase across the globe with variations in purpose for adopting the practice by the individuals. Cross dressing is a matter of comfort or style, or personal preference for clothing associated with the opposite sex to shock others or challenge social norms.”

Buttressing further,(4) pointed out that “cross dressing among comedians appears to be one of the best-selling contents in recent times in Nigeria...we have seen a massive upturn and a constant influx of more Instagram comedians on a day-to-day basis, many of whom are male comedians taking on female personalities by dressing as women.”

However, it should be clearly stated here that cross dressing does not mean ‘gayism’ or transgender, although it might be related. (7) emphasized that the term cross dressing does not necessarily indicate the radical change in transgender identity. The term they added refers to an act or a behaviour and does not attribute to or imply any specific cause of the act. Generally, the transsexual behaviour is automatically associated with transgender identity or sexual orientation, fetishism and homosexual behaviour, but the term itself does not imply any motivation.

2.1.2 Skit Making

A skit is a short performance in which the actors make fun of people, events and types literature by imitating them. (8) stated that the emerging reach of skits in the age of social media has brought about a change in audience media consumption habit, expectation and content production for entertainment. They added also that the audience now have access to global social media platforms where skits all over the world can be viewed, leaving them with unlimited array of entertainment.

In the Nigeria entertainment space, several skits have been created by different entertainment personalities and others alike to drive home their point or message. (8) further explained that “Nigerian skit makes have been seen to be active in dedicating certain episodes of their skits to address issues around domestic and sexual violence, cultural values, insecurity, police brutality and COVID-19. Some others they added “are known for theme-based skits and specific comedy styles which provide entertainment on certain identified situations or issues in the society.”

(9) stated that “production of this entertainment format is cheaper and easier compared with producing standard comedy shows, movies or broadcast entertainment programs. With as little as a smart phone and internet connection to upload videos, skits can be produced as not much editing or aesthetics is needed. Thus, an average audience or user of social media can easily produce skits by capturing humorous events that happen.

Skit making has become one of the most lucrative jobs in Nigeria and has moved a number of youths out of the unemployment bracket. In March, 2022, Dataleum listed skit making as the third largest entertainment industry in Nigeria with a net worth of about N50 billion, which goes to show that skit makers earn a lot of money (10).

2.1.3 Perception of Cross-dressing as a Skit-making Tool on Facebook

The media plays an important role in information conveyance and shaping of people’s views/perception on issues of both national and international and sometimes those relating to personal involvements and activities. (11) argued that media portrayal can shape how people perceive events and issues and how it can influence their attitudes and beliefs.

Facebook is a very powerful and influential social media platform that has captured millions of subscribers around the world. Current statistics show that Facebook currently boast of about 3.

049 monthly active users globally and 68.38% of the monthly users log in daily on mobile devices or desktop (12). With statistics such as this, one would understand why it is the most famous social media platform and why social media users are taking advantage of this media due to its impact, flexibility and availability. The ubiquitous nature of social media platforms like Facebook has made communication more seamless and an all comers affair. No wonder people are trooping to take advantage of Facebook to showcase their talents.

According to (13), the Nigerian comedy scene has experienced a remarkable surge in popularity with the emergence of talented comedians who have taken to social media platforms, particularly Facebook to showcase their creativity.

(11) clearly pointed out that “media portrayal of cross-dressing has varied over time, but it has generally been framed in a way that sensationalize and stigmatizes the behaviour.” No wonder people are taking advantage of Facebook to display their talents as this is less stigmatized. Unlike the mainstream media that are regulated, social media platforms like Facebook has little or no regulation at all. So skit makers and other content creators leverage on this to promote their ideas and behaviours.

Overall, Facebook portrayal of cross-dressing can have a significant impact on how this behaviour is perceived by the society. One of the most well-known cross-dressers in Nigeria is Idris Okuneye, who goes by the name Bobrisky. Bobrisky has been the subject of numerous news articles, social media posts and even documentaries. Some media portrayal has been positive, with some outlets celebrating Bobrisky’s confidence and individuality (11).

Since there are restrictions and lots of financial involvements in using the mainstream media, a lots of people have diverted to using Facebook and other social media platforms to let their voices heard and as well promote their personal agenda and behaviours.

In Nigeria, skit making on Facebook and other social media platforms has provided jobs for most teeming youths. However, some top Nigeria's favourite Facebook skit makers making waves in the entertainment industries include: Mama Uka, Josh2Funny, Mr. Macaroni, Aloma Isaac Junior (ZicSaloma) and Broda Shaggi,(13). Surprisingly, many youths in Nigeria are toeing this line.

Moreso, due to the competitive nature of this new “money well” in Nigeria, different strategies are deployed by skit makers to ensure they win the heart of users to their posts. One of such strategies is cross-dressing. According to (5), cross-dressing is one of the basic approaches adopted by male comedians to achieve audience preference, likeness and grow their entertainment business. The major reasons for cross-dressing include to introduce unique identity to their brand, attract audience unique attention, and enjoy attention and acceptance from male and female audiences among others.

2.1.4 Perception of Cross dressing in Nigeria

Cross dressing is often stigmatized and frowned upon in Nigerian society and media portrayal can either reinforce or challenge these attitudes (11).

(6) reiterated that “in line with the Nigerian or African cultural value system, cross dressing is perceived by many as an unacceptable way of life” and (14) affirms that “the societal reaction

towards cross dressing in most parts of the world is negative and connotes a sense of disapproval.”

According to (4) “cross dressers are sometimes viewed with contempt in Nigeria given the perception by some that cross dressers are either gay, transgender or lesbians. It is compounded by the Same-Sex Marriage Act in Nigeria which prescribes 14 years jail sentence for homosexuals.” However, they added that “tolerance is increasingly noticeable in the Nigerian society given advancement in time and the growth of social media which serves to promote gay culture and acceptance.”

From the above, it is clear that the Nigerian society is against the act of cross dressing. So whether it is intended for comedy/content creation or adopted as a life style, there are still indications and reactions from Nigerians that this form of behaviour may not be accepted or adopted into the larger society.

2.2 Empirical Review

(6) conducted a study on Perception of Owerri residents towards the adoption of cross-dressing by male comedians/male content creators. Findings revealed that the level of awareness of Owerri residents towards crossdressing by male comedians/male content creators is high; Owerri residents perceived cross-dressing by male comedians/male content creators as positive; and firm, unique recognition and social identity are the major factors influencing male comedians/male content creators to adopt cross-dressing.

Another study by (4) focused on women perception of cross-dressing among male comedians on Instagram. The objectives of the study was to ascertain the extent of female audience opinion of cross-dressed male Instagram comedians, determine how the comedy skits represent the

female gender, find out factors that motivate cross-dressing among male comedians and ascertain how the female audience reacts to the representation of women by male-cross dressed comedians on Instagram. Findings from their study revealed that women do not appreciate male cross-dressed comedians, cross-dressed male comedians debase women by projecting them as dependent, unfaithful, gossips etc. Also, male comedians cross-dress because the female gender has diverse characteristics that could pass for rich comedy content and women are indifferent to their representation.

(15) researched on media portrayal of cross dressing in mainstream newspaper in the United States. They found that most articles framed cross dressing as deviant or abnormal behaviour. The authors argue that this type of behaviour reinforces negative stereotypes about cross-dressing and contributes to the marginalisation of those who engage in this behaviour.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism is the theory that a society's technology determines its cultural values, social structure and history. According to the theory, social progress follows an inevitable course that is driven by technological innovation (16).

This theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian communications theorist in 1962. He placed the main importance of a message in its medium or means of conveyance and not its contents Davie (2021) cited in (4).

A further look at the theory states that media technology shapes how we as individuals in a society think, feel and act and how society operated as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal-Literate-Print-Electronic) McLuhan 1962 (17).

The relevance of this theory to this study lies in the fact that Facebook as a social media is a new technology that has shaped the perception and attitude of people globally. The perception of social activities and behaviour like cross dressing has been altered, basically through skit making on Facebook which has almost taken over drama and other television-based shows, which hitherto requires lots of finance and time. The wave in technological advancement which has given birth to social media platforms like Facebook has affected even the way drama and other skits are presented. Also, the presentation of these skits through these technology is obviously affecting or reshaping how we feel, act and our perception of cross dressing and how our society is being operated generally.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted the survey research method. The choice of this design was informed by the fact that survey allows for the study of people's opinion on a given issue of public interest. Ihejirika & Omega (2013) in (18) explained that "Survey is one of the most popular methods used today to gain knowledge of things, people and events in their natural world." The purpose according to (19) is usually to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, events or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation.

3.2 Study Population

The population of the study are all Facebook users in Nigeria. Statistics as at October, 2023 showed that Facebook users in Nigeria stood at 46,061,400 (accounting for 20.3% of its entire population) (20). A sample size of 400 was arrived at using the Taro Yemeni's formula for sample size selection.

3.4 Sample size and Sampling Technique

The instrument for data collection was an online Google form questionnaire. The simple random sampling technique was used to purposively select three comedy skit making groups on Facebook (Aloma Isaac Junior page- Zicsaloma, Mama Uka and Broda Shaggi page). The generated questionnaire was randomly distributed among members of these groups. The questionnaire was accessible to the respondents from November 6th to December, 28th 2023. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, a total of 385 responses were received, showing a 96.3% return rate. Simple percentage and tables were used to analyse the data received.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of the 400 questionnaire distributed online, 385 responses were received; representing 96.3% response rate. Demographic analysis of data received showed that 36.9% (142) were male and 63.1% (243) were female.

In the age category, the following was found; 11.4% (44) were within the age category of 15-19; 22.3% (86) were with ages 20-24; 28.6% (110) were with ages 25-29; 9.6% (37) were with ages 30-34; 7.8% (30) were with ages 35-39; 13.8% (53) were within ages 40-44 and the remaining 6.5% (25) fell within 45 and above.

Data for the highest academic qualification showed the following: Junior Secondary Certificate 2.8% (11); Senior Secondary Certificate 16.4% (63); OND/NCE 21.3% (82); BSc/HND 26.8% (103); PGD 7.8% (30); Masters 10.4% (40); PhD 9.6% (37) and Others 4.9% (19).

4.1 Research question one: what is the public perception of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook?

Table 1: Public perception of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook.

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Pleasant	24	6.3
Unpleasant	114	29.6
Hilarious	128	33.2
Irritating	66	17.1
Annoying	53	13.8
TOTAL	385	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondents 33.2% perceive cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook as hilarious, closely followed however by 29.6% of those who perceive it as unpleasant.

4.2 Research question two: How do the public react to the representation of the opposite sex by Nigeria skit makers on Facebook through cross dressing?

Table 2: Public reaction to the representation of the opposite sex by Nigeria skit makers on Facebook through cross dressing.

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Laugh about them	134	34.8

Ignore	99	25.7
View with keen interest	90	23.4
Skip such posts	62	16.1
TOTAL	385	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Results from table two shows the respondents' reaction to the representation of the opposite sex by Nigerian skit makers on Facebook through cross dressing. A higher majority, representing 34.8% say they laugh about such posts, 25.75 ignore them, 23.4% view such posts with keen interest and the remaining 16.1% skip such posts.

4.3 Research question three: What factors motivates cross dressing among Nigerian skit makers on Facebook?

Table 3: Factors that motivates cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook.

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Social recognition	193	50.1
Economic factor	82	21.3
Basic entertainment	110	28.6
TOTAL	385	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Data presented in table three above indicates that social recognition, representing 50.1% is the major factor that motivates cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook.

4.4 Research question four: Does the viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook influences the viewers' offline sense of dressing and behaviour?

Table 4: The viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook and its influence on the viewers' offline sense of dressing and behaviour.

Response	Frequency	Percentage %	
Yes	81	21.0	
No	283	73.5	
Not sure	21	5.5	
TOTAL	385	100%	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Based on the data in this table, 73.5% response rate, representing a higher majority indicates that the respondents’ viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook does not influence their offline sense of dressing and behaviour.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The first research question was to ascertain public reaction of cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook. The study found out that majority of the respondents, representing 33.2% of the population perceive cross dressing by Nigeria skit makers on Facebook as hilarious. This response indicates that cross dressing is simply a form of entertainment strategy. However, a safe ground to say that Facebook is indeed a social media platform, which most people run to for relief from stress. This finding agrees with the finding by (6) which showed a positive perception to cross dressing; stressing further that cross dressing by male comedians/content creators is done for the reason of entertainment and not for same sex. However, this finding contradicts the finding by (4) that majority of the people do not like comedy skits of cross dressed male comedians on Instagram.

Research question two sought to ascertain public reaction to the presentation of the opposite sex through cross dressing by skit makers on Facebook. Results showed that a higher percentage of the respondents 34.8% laugh about such cross dressed skits on Facebook. This goes to explain

the reason why one views more “likes” on such posts. However, being hilarious aligns with the statement by (8) that the audience now have access to global social media platforms where skits all over the world can be viewed, leaving them with unlimited array of entertainment. Therefore, it is only natural for people to laugh or feel amused when they watch or view what entertains them.

The third research question was to determine the factors that motivates cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook. Findings revealed that social recognition is the major factor that motivates cross dressing among Nigeria skit makers on Facebook. This was backed by a massive response rate of 50.1%. This however proves that most people in Nigeria go into cross dressed skit making comedies and shows just to get social recognition that may help them promote their other cause. This finding is in tandem with that of (5) that the major reasons for cross dressing include to introduce unique dressing for their brand, attract audience unique attention and enjoy attention and acceptance from male and female audiences among others. Also, the study by (6) that firm, unique recognition and social identity are the major factors influencing male comedians/content creators to adopt cross dressing.

Research question four sought to find out the viewership of cross dressing skits on Facebook and if such skits influences the viewers’ offline sense of dressing and behaviour. Finding here showed that majority of the respondents (73.5%) whose responses indicated “No” showed that their viewership of cross dressing skit on Facebook does not influence their offline sense of dressing and behaviour. The result of this finding aligns with the finding by (15) that this type of behaviour reinforces negative stereotypes about cross-dressing and contributes to the marginalisation of those who engage in this behaviour. This also supports the statement by (14) that “the societal reaction towards cross dressing in most part of the world is negative and

connotes a sense of disapproval.” This however implies that people’s senses of disapproval would naturally not allow them get influenced by trying such dressing or behaviour in the offline space, that portrays them in the ‘negative light’ or a sense of dressing that contradicts their cultural beliefs and values.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

No doubt the Nigerian entertainment industry is evolving and new strategies are being put in place to bring newness and freshness to the industry. As discovered from this study, cross dressing is one of such strategies, which obviously is gaining more grounds and acceptance and even recognition as a form of entertainment. Therefore, effective and more strategic ways of deploying cross dressing by skit makers on Facebook to tackle our prevailing challenges will go a long way to bring lasting solutions to some issues that challenge us as a people, even while being entertained.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The need for public enlightenment about cross dressing skits on Facebook and other social media platforms, so that the public become aware that such skits are basically for entertainment and for social recognition by the skit makers.
2. Need for enlightenment programmes by government and other concerned agencies on how best skit makers and other content creators can drive home their points without undermining the cultural importance people attach to dressing.

3. More of the skits should be channeled towards correcting the ills in our society like violence against women and other domestic violence.
4. Skits from the male folks should not only be targeted at portraying women in the negative light, but rather portraying women in the positive light, to help build confidence among women and girls.
5. Skit makers should also include in their contents/skits issues challenging our society and how we can get out of it.

COMPETING INTEREST

Authors have declared that no competing interest exist.

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