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## AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF SEX FOR GRADES IN NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA REACTIONS TO THE 2019 BBC AFRICAN EYE REPORT BY KIKI MORDI

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### **ABSTRACT**

Through its watchdog role, the media has given a voice to all social actors, and it has maintained an objective stance in addressing vices that degrade public morale and supporting those that strengthen the country. The BBC African Eye Documentary Channel has over time become a legacy medium that has continuously reflected the realities of our time. The study relies on the frame of exemplification theory to stipulate the nature of mass media audience judgement to the BBC African Eye Documentary about 'Sex for Grade' which the social media seems to sustain. The study addressed the topic of "sex for grades" as presented in the 2019 BBC African Eye documentary by Kiki Mordi on relationships between female students and male lecturers. The documentary citation was investigated as a medium assisting in reducing the scourge of "sex for grades" in Nigerian higher institutions using discourse analysis elicited qualitatively through an assessment of community of social media comments sustained over time. This study revealed that commenters expressed their opinions on the BBC broadcast on sex for grades on its social platform repositories which has a way of sustaining responses and reactions for the social discourse.

**Keywords:** *Audience, BBC African Eye, comments, lecturers, universities*

### **Introduction**

The topic of sexual harassment in Nigeria's higher education institutions occasionally comes up in the media. However, it is frequently unreported and covered up as soon as it occurs. The latest British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Africa Eye explosive documentary on Sex for grade reports on the University of Lagos, Nigeria and University of Legon, Accra, Ghana, however, has drawn attention from all across the world. Ibekwe (2019) claims that Boniface Igbenegbu's case, a senior lecturer at the University of Lagos' Faculty of Arts, was the most shocking of the four sexual harassment incidents shown in the documentary. Dr. Igbenegbu, who claims to be the pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church, a denomination with more than 8 million members worldwide, was identified as a

recognised sexual predator on campus. He left no one in doubt about his notoriety as he started having sexual conversations with the undercover reporter during their first meeting, and they tried to manipulate the undercover reporter into believing she was a 17-year-old girl applying for admission to the university (Kiki Mordi). He was asking the reporter questions about her during their second encounter.

Unaware that he was being recorded, he also described how professors would bring female students to the "Cold Room," a sort of sanctum in the Senior Staff Club of the university. The "Cold Room," as described by Dr. Igbenegbu, is a dimly illuminated space where instructors engage in unguarded sexual activity with students. Even by turning off the light and asking the undercover reporter to kiss him, Dr. Igbenegbu tried to recreate what happened in the chilly room in his office. Two University of Ghana lecturers were also interviewed for the entire hour-long documentary. Professor Ransford Gyampo and Dr. Paul Kwame Butakor both insist they did not engage in any covert communications in which they offered "sex for grades" (Mordi, 2019)

The University of Lagos has suspended Dr. Igbenegbu, and his Church has also denounced his behaviour. The documentary generated a lot of discussion on social media. The development of the internet has pushed media organisations to expand their reach and has made it simpler for viewers to access media content. With the help of platforms like news blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Skype, traditional media outlets may now distribute news and other materials to a larger audience for little to no money (Ezegwu, et al., 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The airing of BBC Africa Eye documentary sex for grade on October 6, 2019, brought to light the burning issue of sexual harassment in higher institutions across West African. The documentary titled Sex for grade focused on two conspicuous Universities, the University of Lagos (Nigeria) and the University of Ghana where some covert journalists posing as students stealthily filmed their discussions with some lecturers that have harassment allegations trailing them.

Dr Boniface Igbenegbu, a former sub-dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos was one of those caught in the scandal. He was also a pastor of a local Church, Foursquare Gospel Church. He was caught on tape making sexual advances at a covert journalist disguised as a 17-year-old secondary school graduate seeking admission into the Department of European Languages and Integrated Studies where Igbenegbu lectures. The release of the tape on the BBC Facebook account has met with tons of comments and mixed reactions on social media. The agenda-setting role of the media can develop the audience knowledge level and attitude regarding a particular issue. It could also increase or decrease the level of prominence given to items on sexual harassment.

It is noteworthy that the media has a big impact on revealing society's many problems. After establishing some of the traditional media's coverage stances on the topic of "sex for grades," this study effort aims to examine how documentary films have provided a visual representation of the stories that are frequently heard, read about, and, in some cases, experienced by some. The awareness that the perspectives highlighted by the legacy media (newspaper, television, and radio) are valid is

based on the different variations to the issue of "sex for grades" shown in the study's chosen documentary.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The Specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To determine the nature of comments on the BBC documentary on 'sex for grades'.
2. To identify the style of comments represented by the commenters
3. To determine the social media platform with most recent reactions between the year 2021 and 2022.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is on analysis of social media comments on BBC documentaries on sex for grade in two famous Universities. It is restricted to BBC African Eye Facebook, twitter and Youtube pages.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Social Media**

Social media has become one of the most important channels for communication. It exists to make it simpler for people to communicate with one another, regardless of distance, by enabling them to effortlessly exchange information, files, photographs, and videos, as well as to write blogs, send messages, and have in-person conversations. These systems are considered to be social simply because they make it so simple and efficient to communicate with friends, classmates, teachers, project managers, lecturers, etc. A collection of online platforms known as social media allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content and are based on the philosophical and technological underpinnings of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Jumbo et al, 2023).

Statistics from the Global Digital Report (2014) show that media organisations worldwide are increasingly using social media. For instance, 1.19 billion people used the social media network to access Reuters Breaking News. Daily Facebook users number around 727 million, and 260 billion people visit the Facebook page each month. 100 million of these people use their mobile phones to view their Facebook page. It is strange that 4.3 million of these data from Reuters Breaking News are Nigerians, up from 400,000 in 1999. As a result, a sizable share of the nation's mobile web traffic was generated (Akinreti, 2013).

Because there is a continuing desire to consume current information, journalists now need to know how to market their stories and seek to gather current information. Due to the ongoing demand for current information, journalists now have to learn how to advertise their stories in order to encourage readers to click on and share them. Online news consumers, like those who watch news on television, have unique motivations for following particular news sources and disseminating their material.

## Review of Related Empirical Studies

Otikor&Otikor (2018) looked at the trends in online comments on the electronic versions of the *Vanguard* and the *Punch* between April 1 and June 30, 2017. The study's objectives were to count the number of readers who posted comments on the news stories' comment threads in the electronic versions of the *Vanguard* and *The Punch*.

Determine how frequently each type of comment appears in newspaper news articles. With a sample size of 126, the study's population comprised 182 electronic editions of the two newspapers.

The content analysis study design was employed by researchers. 3,189 people commented on the news pieces in the two newspapers, with *The Punch* receiving less comments than *The Vanguard*, according to the findings. According to the study, 52.56% of responses were positive, 43.17% were negative, and 4.33% were silent.

The researchers recommended that *The Punch* enhance its comment area to draw in more contributors and that electronic newspapers retain their online presence to allow for more contributors to participate in conversations, which is a crucial role of the mass media in any democratic system.

Degarr, BO, and Tine (2020) examined and studied reader responses to internet news stories regarding corruption and hate speech in Nigeria. The critical discourse analysis method was specifically used in the study to examine comments on four significant corruption stories from 2016 that appeared in the national newspapers *Vanguard* and *Punch*. The results showed that these debates occasionally turn into hate speech directed not just at the commentators but also at the central figure in the corruption story as it has been reported in the media. These vicious comments are specifically addressed towards the entire tribe and region where the big news people are from. The researchers suggested that readers carefully check their comments to avoid saying something that could be interpreted as hostile.

The outcome also showed that there were no appreciable differences in responses from respondents in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education about the frequency of sexual harassment of female students. The study made a recommendation for the management of tertiary educational institutions to implement adequate safeguards to prevent teachers from disclosing exam questions to students.

After the British Broadcasting Corporation's sex-for grades scandal, Ayinla and Adesola (2019) looked at stakeholders' responses and the crisis management plans of Nigerian postsecondary institutions. They used a qualitative research approach. The study analysed 13 press releases from institutions that were acquired from certain schools' websites and surveyed 20 stakeholders—parents, students, and lecturers—in an in-depth interview to get their thoughts.

The study found that institutions typically utilised a denial with lessen response method to blame societal decadence, make female students the scapegoat, and minimise the seriousness of institutional sexual harassment incidents. Even more so, everyone involved is skeptical of the local

media's ability to accurately report on sexual harassment situations. The researchers advised against using a denial reaction technique for sex scandal instances in Nigerian higher educational institutions.

In order to confirm the prevalence of sexual harassment at the University of Lagos, ascertain its type and severity, document efforts to resolve the issue, and investigate the relationship between sexual harassment and the risk of contracting STDs like HIV/AIDS, Adedokun (2005) conducted a study. The study includes gathering qualitative information through focus groups and interviews with 30,000 male and female students (who had attended the university for at least one academic session) as well as academic and non-academic staff members. The study's findings demonstrated the prevalence of sexual harassment in the university because every participant and respondent had personal experience with it or knew of someone who did.

According to the literature review, sexual harassment at universities is common and occurs in most institutions. Additionally, social media posts serve as a repository that can sustain comments for a long time and this is the main research gap that the current study aims to close.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Exemplification Theory**

*Exemplification theory*, which contends that the ability to link events together has evolutionary benefits, is mostly based on reasoning. Humans accomplish this by sorting through experiences to identify those that appear to belong together and numerically coding the recurrence of occurrences, which enables them to make judgments about how frequently various events occur, most frequently unconsciously. The availability heuristic and the representativeness heuristic are two cognitive tools that are taken into account when making these decisions.

Since there is a fundamental need for knowledge to foster a sense of order, lessen uncertainty, and exercise control, the mass media is the main source of information for people in high-risk situations to return instructions (Schwarz et al., 2016 in Borah, 2017).

In order to influence how their audience receives information, communicators use exemplars.

According to exemplification theory, the main underlying routes in exemplification are the features in exemplars that attract attention, speed up processing, and trigger emotion, opening the door for later perception and persuasion. Information processing psychology theories, particularly cognitive views that rely on representativeness, quantification, and availability heuristics, are used to investigate exaggeration effects (Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000).

However, exemplification studies have demonstrated that despite detailed data being presented, people make judgments or predictions about a larger population based on an exemplar (Gibson & Zillmann, 1994). Although representativeness and quantification heuristics increase awareness of the exemplars one encounters, they may not have an impact on beliefs or attitudes towards future behaviour unless they are available in cognitive (Zillmann, 2002). Exemplars are seen to be simpler to remember than abstract and complex information as base rates when using the availability heuristic. In news reports, examples of several modalities, including text and visual, are

frequently used (Tukachinsky 2011; Bigsby 2019 in Borah, 2017).). There are discrepancies between the visual and the accompanying spoken statement in several information studies of visual and text exposure in television news (Bucy & Grabe, 2007; Grabe & Bucy, 2010). As a result, even though media consumers often form general judgements based on verbal and visual cues, some examples may be more significant than others. Pictorial visual information is processed more quickly than written communications when compared to spoken information, according to a number of theoretical models and empirical findings in communication, neurology, and cognitive psychology (Lang, 1995; McCarthy & Warrington, 2016 as cited in Borah, 2017).

### **Research Methodology**

For this study, online field observation as a qualitative approach was adopted to observe people behaviour represented through comments like texts, pictures or videos. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 132), "the researcher is an active contributor to the group under study and participates in chat rooms and posts on the bulletin boards. At the end, the observer would monitor, record and analyse the group's messages without taking part in any interactions."

Online participant observation can also be referred to as netnography. Among the social media platforms that let netizens communicate and share information whenever and wherever they choose are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Also, smartphones facilitate the use of social media platforms.

Netnography was first described by Robert Kozinets as "ethnography suited to the study of online communities" in 2002. (Kozinets, 2002). In the literature, the terms virtual, digital, and online ethnography are frequently used interchangeably. To adopt netnography, one must follow a series of rules and regulations (Kozinets, 2010). An essential component of netnography should always be online participant observation. According to Kozinets, "removing ethnography's participatory function from netnography also loses the chance to engage in embedded cultural awareness" (Kozinets, 2010). Without participation, the research is reduced to a flat, two-dimensional coding exercise.

This implies that the researcher, who is a member of BBC African Eye on the Facebook, Twitter and Youtube community platforms, observed comments from other members of the group and also participated in the 2019 post "Sex for Grades". However, as the study directs, the researcher wants to assess the contemporary nature and dimension of the post after two years in order to portray the relevance of the post and sustenance of comments it elicits.

The participants for this research are 150 (The last 150 randomly selected Commenters); 50 participants each for Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

### **Data Analysis**

To determine the nature of comments in the selected social media platforms, descriptive analysis was performed to examine the data. Prior to this, the data collected were grouped according to the nodes in Table 1. Simply expressed, the NVivo 12 software's Nodes were used to codify the distribution of

comments by males in Table 1. The data can be entered into the NVivo 12 program as Nodes to be processed using particular Nodes.

Figure 1 illustrates the result, which has been numbered, and is labelled "comments from females" NVivo 12 program displays the responses that respondents selected for each sub-indicator together with the result "Project Map." The results are then displayed in the output using Equation.

$$\frac{\text{No of commenters for each sub indicator}}{\text{Total number of commenters}} \times 100$$

**Figure 1: QR NVIVO Unit Code Analysis**

**Table 1: Codes for each sub-Indicator**

S/N	INDICATOR	SUB INDICATOR	CODE
1	Nature of Comments on Sex for grades	Lecturers' Support Students' Support	LS SS
2	Style of Comment	Text Picture Video Emoji Gif	T P V E G
3	Social Media Platform with recent reaction	Facebook Twitter Youtube	FB TW YT

Based on respondents' responses regarding the comments on sex for grades documentary by BBC African Eye, data was collected. The response was then entered into the NVivo 12 formed node. The output of the NVivo 12 software for each indication, which is addressed in order, served as the foundation for the results. The order is as follows: (1) Nature of Comments on the "Sex for Grades ; and (2) Style of Comment (3) Social media platform with the most recent reaction.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In response to the first research objective which is to determine the nature of comments in the BBC documentary on 'Sex for Grades', 7 (14%) from Facebook; 5 (10%) from twitter and 15 (30%),



making a total of 27 (18%) are supporting lecturers against students while 43 (86%), 45 (90%) and 35 (70%) in a total of 123 (82%) are supporting the students or against lecturers who engage in sexual malpractices in tertiary institution.

In the second research objective, the study resolved to find out the style of commentary by those who commented. On Facebook comments in text were 26 (52%), picture is 4 (8%) video is 2 (4%) emoji is 7 (14%) while gif is 11 (22%). For twitter, text is 41 (82%), picture 2 (4%), video 1 (2%) no emoji while gif is 6 (12%). For Youtube, the last randomly selected responses were all text. In total, text response is 117 (78%); picture is 6 (5%); 3 (2%) is for video responses; emoji accounted for 7 (4%) while it amounted to 17 (11%).

In the third research objective, the study tends to find out the social media with the most recent comments and the data elicited through QR Nvivo ascertain that facebook has 23 (46%) in 2021 and 37 (54%) in 2022; Twitter recorded 31 (62%) in 2021 and 19 (38%) in 2022 while Youtube registered 41 (82%) in 2021 and 9 (8%) in 2022. This result shows that Facebook recorded the highest number of new or recent comments prior to when the post was published in 2019.

## Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it can be said that the mass media has not been silent in performing its important role as society's watchdog by bringing to light behaviors that have been culturally accepted and are intended to violate the public's confidence. The purpose of this study was not just to restate earlier research on "sex for grades" or to emphasize how depraved it is to trade sex for academic credit. It's more to support the role and voice that the media has been using to lessen, if not totally remove, the prevalence of this threat in Nigeria's educational system.

The study works in the frame of exemplification theory to ascertain how audiences who share similar experiences react to news events. The documentary since its publication in 2019 has elicited various and numerous reactions out of many experiences by students in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Along these lines, administrators of postsecondary schools should encourage the establishment of helplines to provide fast assistance to anyone who may want it. Students who have been the victims of "sex for grades" should also receive psychological support.

In order to further illustrate the conditions surrounding instances of "sex for grades," mirroring it from an unbiased perspective, the academics advise the Nigerian film industry to develop more notable films like Citation. A thorough policy statement on sexual harassment, molestation, assault, transactional/free sex, and rape should also be created and distributed to all faculty (academic and nonacademic) and students in Nigeria's higher institutions of learning. Along with expressing harsh penalties for breaking the policy's regulations, this statement must emphasize the abhorrence of the practice of sex for grades. Along these lines, administrators of postsecondary schools should encourage the establishment of helplines to provide rapid assistance to everyone who calls.

The study recommends that media documentaries posted on social media can be reignited by the owner by posting new comments, hashtags, timeline sharing and pinning the post on the front page of the social network.

The legacy media is given an additional voice to elaborate on what "sex for grades" is, how it comes into play, variations to its exhibit, as well as methods to take to avoid it, thanks to film as a prominent media of the current millennium.

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