



Media and Gender Identities in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This article delves into the intricate connection between media and gender identities in Nigeria. It analyses how gender identities are portrayed in different forms of media, such as television, film, advertising, and social media. Moreover, it investigates the difficulties that people and communities encounter in defining and expressing various gender identities within the media context in Nigeria. The research emphasises the importance of precise and all-encompassing media representation in creating a fair and tolerant society for all genders.*

Keywords: *Media, Gender Identities, Nigeria, Representation, Stereotypes, Inclusivity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens are guaranteed by the law, but there is no provision for gender identity or sexual orientation. Sadly, the government's position on this matter has forced many young people to conceal their true selves. Gender identity is primarily about attraction to one or more individuals. It refers to a person's preference for romantic partners. Sexual orientation can be fluid, and a person's gender identity may not align with their assigned sex at birth. For instance, someone may be born female but identify as male (Greenberg, 2000). Despite this, Nigeria's laws and religious beliefs prevent any recognition of gender identity, and the media and policies reinforce this stance. The argument that acknowledging identity freedom will lead to damnation is baseless. This article focuses on the media's role, gender identity, and the government's position, and critically examines the Nigerian Policy 2022. Ultimately, the article proposes recommendations and conclusions on how young people can express their gender identities without fear.

2. MAPPING THE PROBLEM: MEDIA

The media encompasses newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet, which Edmund Burke referred to as the Fourth Estate of the Realm or the fourth branch of government (McQuail, 2006). Watson (2003) suggests that the media creates stories that express attitudes towards social order. While Nigeria boasts having a relatively free press compared to other African nations, its media has consistently been targeted by past governments. Even the current government has not completely eased off on media restrictions. Numerous Nigerian journalists have been arrested, exiled, or murdered. In 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed for treason by then-military president Sani Abacha, resulting in Nigeria facing federal sanctions from countries including expulsion from the Commonwealth Nations.

On November 18th, Aminu Ahmed, a senior student at Federal University Dutse, was arrested by the Nigerian First Lady. The 20-year-old had tweeted, "Mama has eaten poor man's food and is now full" on his Twitter account. After pleading not guilty in court, he was remanded at Suleja Prison in Niger State. Ahmed was released on December 4th, 2022, according to GoldmyneTV.

According to Egbon (1999), the media has a responsibility to serve the political system by providing discussion, debate, and sufficient information about public affairs. It should also aim to enlighten the public to enhance their self-governance and bring together buyers and sellers of goods and services through advertising. Additionally, the media should safeguard the economic rights of the public, provide entertainment, and maintain financial independence to avoid external influences.

The Nigerian media has been influenced by several factors since its inception, including the strong influence of media owners. Many news outlets are established by owners to boost their own egos and sway public opinion to serve their intended purposes, according to Shuaibu (2014). Another significant challenge is economic, as Murdock and Golding (1973) argue that financial pressures force journalists

to tailor information to suit the needs of those who bribe them or offer the highest bid. Due to these factors, the government has utilized the media to tackle issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation in Nigeria. The Punch Newspaper (January 2019) reported that Mrs. Dolapo Badmos, the Zone 2 Police Command Public Relations Officer, warned that anyone who is LGBTQI-inclined should exit the country or face the consequences of the law. She also called on Nigerians to provide evidence against LGBTQI individuals. This news made headlines for several days and instilled fear in many people.

LAW

It is true that several laws have been created in Nigeria, but not all of them have been fully implemented. Some laws were enacted as a political manoeuvre, but the Criminal Code Act is not one of them. According to Legalnaija.com (2014), a well-known Nigerian blog, Chapter 21, Section 214 of the 'Offences Against Morality' in the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 clearly indicates this.

“Any person who (1) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or (2) has carnal knowledge of an animal; or (3) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature; is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for fourteen years.”

According to the Same Sex Prohibition Act passed in 2013 by the House of Representatives and the Senate, and signed by the President in January 2014, free sexual identity is also prohibited. Chukwu (2018) confirms this by stating:

“A marriage contract or civil union entered into between persons of same sex: (a) is prohibited in Nigeria; and (b) shall not be recognized as entitled to the benefits of a valid marriage.”

“A marriage contract or civil union entered into between persons of same sex contracted in another country, even with certification will not be recognized in Nigeria.”

“Same sex marriage shall not be contracted in church or any other place of worship in Nigeria”.

“The only marriage that would be recognized in Nigeria would be between man and woman.”

It is important to note that the Sharia law in Northern Nigeria prohibits same-sex acts, as revised between 1999 and 2006. The International Lesbian and Gay Association (2016) has listed the corresponding punishments for these acts in the table below.

State	Authority	Liwat (sodomy)	Sihaq (lesbianism)
‘Bauchi	Sharia Law (2001), Bauchi State	Death by any method deemed fit	50 strokes and 5 years prison term
‘Borno	Borno Sharia law Homosexuality and prostitution (2000).	Stoned to death.	12 strokes and 6 months prison term
‘Gombe	Sharia Law (2001)	unmarried: 100 lashes plus 1 year prison term. married: stoned to death.	50 strokes and 6 months prison term.
‘Jigwa	Sharia Law (Law No. 12 of 2000) since year 2000	unmarried: 100 lashes and prison term 1 year. married: stoned to death	50 strokes and 6 months prison term.

POLICY

In 2019, the Nigerian government created an updated Youth Policy called "Enhancing Youth Development and Participation in the Context of Sustainable Development (2019)" by Ibrahim and Audu (2020) in hopes of gaining the approval of the country's young population. Despite its intention to address the needs of youth, it appears that the policy primarily benefits the government, as evidenced by its language and portrayal of young people. We will focus on these issues in our analysis.

The policy in question claims to be "all-inclusive and participatory" by involving all stakeholders in data collection and formulation, except for the youth themselves. However, the supposed inclusivity only includes the Director General and other directors who are at least 55 years old, leaving out various youth organizations. The Nigerian Minister of Youths and Sports, Sunday Akindare, was born on May 29, 1966, making him at least 56 years old and one of the younger stakeholders. The writer only acknowledges the contribution of the "teaming youths who gave credibility to this document by linking up online" as an afterthought towards the end. This implies that the writer is not a youth themselves.

The government has created a Policy in an effort to find a solution to the issue at hand. This Policy establishes guidelines and a framework for youths to positively contribute to their community and take advantage of the available opportunities. Essentially, the Policy implies that the government will continue with their current methods and does not mention any new opportunities. Moreover, the Policy explicitly states that the government aims to empower youths to maximise their contributions to national development. This implies that youths are currently viewed and portrayed as unproductive. To support this view, the Policy categorises youths into three target groups: low-risk youth, vulnerable youth, and the most at-risk youth, which the government hopes to address. (Page 9)

The government policy outlined five strategic thrusts for improving the lives of young people. The most noteworthy thrust is centred around providing equal opportunities for all youths to participate in civil and political matters. This is especially important given the inequality that exists in our educational system. Despite this, stakeholders are committed to ensuring that young people receive a comprehensive education from primary to university level. The policy specifies that youth engagement in political matters should be constructive, meaningful, and not involve any form of political thuggery. This ensures that everyone can participate in a safe and fair manner (P.10).

The Nigerian government is committed to empowering the country's youth in various areas. However, before initiating any plans, there is a need to re-evaluate who qualifies as a youth. As a result, the government has revised the age range from 15-29 to 15-35. This is necessary because the Nigerian education system is unreliable, causing most young people to graduate from university only around age 26. This change ensures that the government does not exclude a significant portion of young people who could contribute positively to society.

A Different Viewpoint: A government agricultural programme for graduates may not be as beneficial as it seems, while the *Npower* project may serve the government's interests more.

This Policy talked about gender in simple terms of male and female as it clearly and tactfully left out gender identity. This policy also spoke about the re-orientation of the youths repeatedly. And by this, they mean that where they identify as anything other than male or female, the youths are either taken to church for deliverance or beat gays out of them.

In all, the policy would benefit the youths if its agricultural recommendations were fully implemented or its employment recommendations. But like every other policy in Nigeria, what is left to be seen is its full implementation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the complex relationship between media and gender identities in Nigeria. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to gender identities in the Nigerian media landscape.

Data Collection

- a) Literature Review: A comprehensive review of existing scholarly literature, academic journals, reports, and relevant sources is conducted. This review provides a foundation of knowledge on media representation, gender identities, and the Nigerian context.
- b) In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including gender-diverse individuals, media professionals, policymakers, and activists. The interviews provide insights into their experiences, perspectives, and challenges regarding media representation of gender identities in Nigeria. The sample is selected using purposive sampling to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented.

- c) **Media Content Analysis:** A systematic analysis of media content examines the representation of gender identities. Television programs, films, advertisements, and social media platforms are analysed for their portrayal of gender, stereotypes, and inclusivity. A representative sample of media content is selected using random sampling techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines are followed throughout the research process. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before interviews, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. The research adheres to ethical guidelines for human subjects' research, protecting participants' rights and privacy.

Data Analysis

- a) **Interview Transcriptions:** The interviews are transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. The data is coded to identify key themes, patterns, and sub-themes related to media representation and challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals.
- b) **Media Content Analysis:** The collected media content is systematically analysed to identify patterns, stereotypes, and themes related to gender identities. The analysis includes quantifying the frequency and nature of representation and identifying any underlying biases or problematic portrayals.
- c) **Findings and Interpretation:** The findings from the thematic analysis of interviews and media content analysis are interpreted and presented comprehensively. The interpretations highlight the key themes, challenges, and perspectives related to media and gender identities in Nigeria.

Validation

The results' validity and reliability were enhanced by triangulation, which included cross-referencing the perspectives collected from different data sources. Participants and subject matter experts were enlisted to use peer debriefing and member-checking approaches to examine and confirm the results.

Results and Discussion

The research was presented narratively and complemented with direct quotations from interviews to provide a complete and accurate picture of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Representation of Gender Identities in Nigerian Media

After analysing media content, it was discovered that there is a significant issue with the representation of various gender identities. The media tends to stick to traditional gender norms and stereotypes, and non-normative gender identities are barely visible (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015). Women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as being homemakers or objects of sexual desire, which only reinforces gender inequality. Non-binary and transgender individuals are either completely absent or portrayed inaccurately, which only contributes to their marginalisation and erasure within the media landscape (Vine & Cupples, 2016).

Furthermore, the interviews with key stakeholders provided insights into their experiences and perspectives on media representation. Many participants expressed frustration and disappointment with the limited representation of diverse gender identities in Nigerian media. One participant stated,

"I rarely see people like me represented in the media.

It makes me feel invisible and invalidated."

Another participant shared,

"The media often perpetuates harmful stereotypes and fails to depict the diversity of gender identities in our society accurately."

Stereotypes and Problematic Portrayals

The media content analysis highlighted the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and problematic portrayals of gender identities. Women were frequently objectified and hypersexualised, reinforcing the notion of women as objects of desire rather than autonomous individuals. Conversely, men were often depicted as dominant, aggressive, and lacking emotional depth (Serpe et al., 2020). These stereotypes not only reinforce harmful gender norms but also contribute to the marginalisation and discrimination

faced by gender-diverse individuals. Participants in the interviews expressed concerns about the negative impact of these stereotypes. One participant shared,

"Seeing women constantly objectified in the media reinforces the idea that our worth is based on our appearance. It can be damaging to our self-esteem and body image."

Another participant stated,

"Portraying men as hyper-masculine and devoid of emotions can lead to toxic masculinity and the suppression of men's authentic selves."

Challenges Faced by Gender-Diverse Individuals:

The interviews with critical stakeholders shed light on the challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals within the Nigerian media landscape. Participants highlighted the lack of representation, the fear of stigma and discrimination, and the limited access to supportive resources. Many shared experiences of social exclusion, bullying, and psychological distress due to societal rejection and the negative portrayal of gender identities in the media.

One participant described the challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals, stating,

"We often face discrimination and judgment in our daily lives. The media's failure to accurately represent us perpetuates the idea that our identities are abnormal or invalid."

Another participant expressed difficulties finding supportive resources, saying,

"There are limited platforms where we can find positive representations and support. This lack of visibility makes it harder for us to feel accepted and understood."

These findings highlight the significant obstacles faced by gender-diverse individuals in Nigeria, further emphasising the need for inclusive and accurate media representation.

Impact on Society and Mental Well-being:

The discussion of media's role in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards gender identities highlighted its significant impact on societal beliefs and individual well-being. Problematic representations and stereotypes perpetuated by the media contribute to the stigmatisation and discrimination faced by gender-diverse individuals. This, in turn, leads to increased mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among gender-diverse individuals (Marcus, 2021). Participants in the interviews shared personal experiences of the negative impact of media representation on their mental well-being. One participant explained,

"Seeing distorted portrayals of gender identities in the media made me question my identity and led to feelings of self-doubt and isolation."

Another participant discussed the broader societal impact, stating,

"The media's reinforcement of harmful stereotypes contributes to a culture of discrimination and intolerance, affecting the well-being of the entire community."

These findings highlight the urgent need for more accurate and inclusive media representation to foster a healthier and more accepting society for all genders. In conclusion, the findings indicate that Nigerian media lacks adequate representation of various gender identities, perpetuates harmful stereotypes, and negatively affects the well-being of gender-diverse individuals and society. This emphasizes the significance of promoting accurate and inclusive media representation to combat societal prejudices and create a fair and accepting atmosphere.

Impact on the Youth and on Practice:

Gender Dysphoria was defined as inconsistency between an individual's gender identity and assigned gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The NHS website article reviewed Nov (2021) says People with gender dysphoria wish to ensure their gender identity has no conflict. Some change their characteristics and physical appearance to achieve this. Some go to the extent of using hormones and surgery to express their gender identity. Gender dysphoria is not a mental illness, but gender dysphoria can degenerate into mental health problems NHS (Nov. 2021). People with gender dysphoria may struggle to cope in school because of peer pressure and discrimination.

When this happens, it usually results in dropping out of school. Anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, substance abuse. Relationship difficulties are common. Youths who experience gender dysphoria without gender-affirming treatment may attempt suicide.

It is challenging for practitioners in Nigeria to connect with young people because they fear being judged by the government, church, or peers. Consequently, Nigerian youth are hesitant to express their gender identity or personal issues, making it difficult for practitioners to use theories such as Mead's theory of identity or the Joharris window to assist with their self-development. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a surge in the suicide rate in Nigeria, with a Guardian Newspaper report from May 21, 2019, indicating that the rate is estimated to be 9.5/100,000 and linked to depression and substance abuse. The rate is higher among adolescents aged 15 to 19 years, with suicide attempts among adolescents standing at 12%. SURPIN has discovered that one in five suicide cases in its affiliated institution involves 13-19-year-olds, and over half of the crisis calls received through its hotlines come from 13-29-year-olds, with 27.8% being students. These numbers are concerning for parents and Nigerians, especially since the Nigerian National Youth Policy (2019) and the African Youth Charter both define youth as those aged 15-35 years.

4. LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges certain limitations, including the qualitative nature of the research design, which may limit generalisability. The interview sample size may also be limited, affecting the breadth of perspectives represented.

Recommendations for Inclusivity and Representation

Increase Representation: Media organisations should actively strive to increase the representation and visibility of diverse gender identities in their content (Warren et al., 2019). This includes featuring gender-diverse individuals in various roles and contexts, showcasing their achievements, and telling their stories authentically.

Sensitivity Training: Media professionals should undergo sensitivity training to enhance their understanding of gender diversity and the challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals. This training should address unconscious biases and guide respectful and accurate portrayal of diverse gender identities (Pang et al., 2020).

Collaboration with Communities: Media organisations should collaborate with gender-diverse communities and organisations to ensure authentic representation. Involving gender-diverse individuals in the creative process can help shape narratives, avoid misrepresentations, and promote inclusivity (Beckham, 2021).

Implement Diversity Policies: Media organisations should establish apparent diversity and inclusion policies that address the representation of gender-diverse identities. These policies should guide casting decisions and storytelling approaches and promote accountability for inclusive content creation.

Promote Positive Role Models: Media should actively promote positive role models from diverse gender identities, highlighting their achievements and contributions. Media can challenge stereotypes and inspire acceptance by showcasing diverse individuals as role models (Beckham, 2021).

Media Literacy and Education: Promote media literacy programs that teach critical thinking, deconstruct stereotypes, and promote inclusive media consumption. Educating the public about media biases and encouraging active engagement can foster a more discerning and inclusive media culture (Pang et al., 2020).

Advocacy for Policy Reforms: Advocate for policy reforms that protect the rights and identities of gender-diverse individuals, including decriminalising same-sex relationships, combating discrimination, and ensuring equal rights for all genders (Pang et al., 2020). Media organisations can use their platforms to raise awareness and advocate for policy changes that promote inclusivity.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This article highlights how the media in Nigeria plays a crucial role in shaping and questioning gender identities. It stresses the importance of having a media environment that is more inclusive and fair, which acknowledges and honours diverse gender identities. Through promoting accurate representation

and challenging stereotypes, Nigeria can cultivate a more tolerant society that respects the identities and experiences of every individual, irrespective of their gender.

In this report, we have explored the intersection of media and gender identities in Nigeria. Our research has revealed several significant challenges: the law, the government, religion, and the media. These obstacles have a detrimental effect on Nigerian youth and youth practitioners, leading to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These symptoms are indicative of gender dysphoria and could lead to mental health issues and, in severe cases, suicide.

Listed below are my recommendations.

- The government needs to recognise and acknowledge the existence of genders beyond the traditional male and female options. Such acknowledgement should be reflected in government policies and actions.
- The government has a responsibility to accommodate the LGBTQI+ community within its laws. Their votes and taxes should be valued equally to any other citizen, and all laws should be relaxed to ensure their inclusion and protection.
- Non-profit organisations supporting the LGBTQI+ community in Nigeria could benefit from partnering with social media influencers to educate the public and encourage greater tolerance. It's important to remember that having a different gender orientation is not a sign of demonic possession.
- In Nigeria, it is important that the media reports on LGBTQ+ issues in a fair manner. While they may face legal and ownership constraints, they can still strive for impartiality in their reporting. Research has shown that Nigerians can become more tolerant of these concepts if they are better understood. For instance, the TIERS (2019) study revealed that although negative attitudes towards Gender Identity and Sexual orientation persist, acceptance rates have gradually risen over time.
- It has been found that 60% of individuals do not approve of a family member having a different sexual orientation. However, this number is lower than the 83% reported in 2017, indicating a significant shift towards greater acceptance.
- In 2015, 90% of people supported the Same-Sex Marriage law. However, in 2019, the number decreased to 75%, resulting in a 15% reduction over a period of 4 years.
- The awareness of LGBTQ+ individuals has risen, as more people are realizing that their loved ones and even their favorite public figures identify as part of the community. These encouraging statistics suggest that the Nigerian LGBTQ+ community could benefit greatly if the recommended measures were put into action.
- To achieve long-lasting peace in Nigeria, it is essential for the government to arrange a town hall meeting with the youths. This meeting should provide them with an opportunity to voice their opinions and preferences on issues that affect them. Any resolutions reached during the meeting should be implemented immediately. The Nigerian government should adopt the "Nothing About Us, Without Us" approach regarding youth-related matters. It is crucial to give the youth a voice and create a conducive environment for them to participate in discussions about their future since they are the future leaders. The youths should be fully involved in all decision-making processes that concern them.

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Citation: Folajogun Akinlami "Media and Gender Identities in Nigeria" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 11, no. 7, 2024, pp. 30-37. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1107004>.

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