



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Views in Facebook Comments on Ritual Killings in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines gender views expressed in Facebook comments on ritual killings in Nigeria. The study is anchored on gender schema theory which was propounded by Sandra Lipsitz Bem in 1981. Quantitative and qualitative content analyses were employed to analyse 34 Facebook comments from three Nigerian newspapers (The Nation, The Punch, and The Guardian Newspapers). The findings show that ritual killings are often linked to gender, with society and the media usually portraying women as the victims and men as the ones committing the crimes. These perceptions are rooted in deep-seated cultural norms and perpetuated by media representations and social media discussions. The study concludes that balanced narratives and stricter law enforcement are crucial to addressing ritual killings. The study recommends that the media should utilise the convergence of traditional and social media to portray more accurate and balanced representations of ritual killings. The study also recommends that the government at all levels should ensure rigorous enforcement of extant laws against ritual killings.

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INTRODUCTION

Ritual killings have seen a significant surge in numbers and have become a prevalent occurrence among young individuals in Nigeria (Oyewole, 2016). This menace has become a common phenomenon. It is now a regular event where Nigerians lose their lives to ritual killers, whom Igwe (2004), cited in Aghawenu (2020), addressed as "Head Hunters". The ritual killers look for human parts like breasts, private parts, eyes, and other body parts to carry out this act. According to Shujaa (2009), cited in Saka-Olokungboye et.al. (2021), this behaviour constitutes prescribed patterns, rules, and instructions for carrying out religious rituals. Ritual killing, according to Ayegboyin (2009), cited in Oyewole (2016), involves sacrificing something valuable for something more useful. This

points out that for ritual killings to take place, something has to be received in return. The perpetrators carry out this menace intending to receive something in return.

Oyewole (2016), identified two broad reasons for ritual killings to involve faith and materialism. He believes that under the guise of faith, people commit ritual killings because of tradition, religion or superstition. He added that under the guise of materialism, people commit rituals because they want fame, favour, protection, power, success and wealth. The foundation of ritual killings committed for this reason is the idea that the victims' needs are met. As a result, ritual killing is becoming increasingly common in Nigeria amid severe poverty, inequality, and instability.

The issue of ritual killings and gender has become a point of discussion as there are a lot of imbalances as to who to blame when a ritual killing occurs. Although both genders can be perpetrators and victims of this act, studies like Nwakanma and Abu (2020), have shown that the female gender has always borne this menace.

Ritual killings are carried out in Nigeria to harvest human body parts, particularly those of women, to make charms, according to reports from the arrest of suspected ritualists (Falayi, 2017; Usman & Sessou, 2014). According to reports, ritualists are also apparently very interested in the body parts and bodily fluids of virgins and children because they think they have the power to extend the user's life and strengthen them against spiritual attacks.

All of these point to the fact that the culture and beliefs of society influence how people view the female gender. Even the media is not left out in gendering people from childhood. The media portrays content that influences the gender schemas of people.

Nigerian movies are also not left out in how people view ritual killings and how they stereotypically look at both genders. Most Nigerian films portray the male as the perpetrator of the act while the female is the victim. Even Nwuneli et.al. (1993), cited in Olanrewaju et.al. (2021), predicted that people's perceptions of social life would closely match the realities of mass media because people will internalise and accept the media's depictions of the world as a true reflection of social life. Furthermore, Nollywood's dramatisation of this situation has exacerbated these problems. There is a definite correlation between the rise in domestic violence against women and ritual killings committed in Nigeria for an unjustified life of prosperity. The objectives of the study are to identify various views *Facebook* commentators have about ritual killings; and examine the peculiarities in discussions among the male and female genders on ritual killing stories on *Facebook*. Media place an important role in the society (Adaja et al, 2017; Talabi, 2017; Adaja & Talabi, 2017; Olanrewaju et al, 2023) therefore, most of the stories on ritual killings are amplified through social media, especially the Facebook.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ritual Killings in Nigeria

A ritual, as defined by Wikipedia, is a sequence of events that involve gestures, words, actions, or objects carried out in a particular order and guided by religious or cultural traditions. A ritual is an established pattern of symbolic repetition of a cultural value or belief. Since its primary objective is to align an individual's beliefs with those of the group, rituals usually improve social cohesion. In contrast, murdering is the art of putting someone to death or causing their death. Having joined the two definitions, ritual killing may simply be defined as the rights or forms that pertain to the execution of a person. Ritual killing, which includes the killing or severing of human body parts, is done, often by young people, to win favour, renown, power, protection, and ritual money. According to Oyewole (2016), ritual killing has become a significant security concern in Nigeria, and the fate of the victims of this crime is drawing increasing attention. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2013) states that over 4,000 ritual killing instances have been reported to the police in the last ten years. In a more recent discovery, statistics of ritual killings generated from Nigeria Watch and WANEP's National Early Warning System between 5th January and 28th December 2021, revealed that there were over 168 deaths in 80 incidents across 20 states in Nigeria.

The tradition of ritual killing can be traced back to pre-colonial times in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. A few African societies before colonisation occasionally included human sacrifice in their ritual offerings to their gods. Depending on the context of the sacrifice and the community, different victims are used in ritual killings. The victims chosen for the ritual vary from society to society. In some communities, a person who violates a curfew set in place to maintain ritual order becomes the target of that ritual. Additionally, the execution of slaves was a sort of ritual sacrifice in several civilisations. Ayegboyin (2009), cited in Oyewole (2016), asserts that during times of tragedy, society often used human sacrifice as the ultimate and most expensive ritual sacrifice to please particular gods and purify the populace. It is believed that the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria had a ritual practice that included utilising human people, the majority of whom were slaves, for sacrifice before any military outings during the Yoruba interstate conflict between the 11th and 19th centuries.

The use of humans in rituals, according to Ayegboyin (2009), cited in Oyewole (2016), was not driven by a disrespect for the value of human life but rather by a personal conviction that it is preferable to sacrifice one life for the good of the community rather than allow that community to be destroyed. It is believed that in all of colonised Africa, juju, witchcraft, sorcery and human sacrifice were prohibited. These crimes were banned by Nigeria's penal code since 1916 as a means of aiding the colonial masters in constructing a beneficial political, economic, and social order in Africa. However, when the need for specific protection and monetary sustenance among business elites and other economic elites, as well as among some of the masses who aspired to improve their wealth, rose, private ritual blossomed at the expense of communal ritual. Ritual practices, particularly money rituals, have advanced in sophistication in Nigeria over the past few decades as they have gone from killing human beings alone to using female underwear for money rituals. The age of the victims is no longer a factor because organised groups, particularly among young people, and methods for stealing, purchasing, and selling women's underwear have evolved to finance ritualist activities. This development is supported by the rise of private ritualist consultants and practitioners skilled in employing people or human body parts for money rituals.

Media and Gender Views

Various media studies have revealed a relationship between gender views and the media. The media's portrayal of the tasks and responsibilities that men and women should assume in society is a major contributor to how gender views continue to impact the roles and positions that people hold in society. Scholars believe that the media's portrayal of both women and men has a negative impact on how people view human potential. Castillo-Mayen and Montes-Berges (2014), observe that men are shown as independent, assertive, self-efficient, powerful and achievement-oriented, whereas women are portrayed as affectionate, warm, kind, sex objects, dependent, frequently inept and dumb and others-oriented. For instance, researchers discovered that the cartoons produced for young boys, which make up the majority of child-targeted television, were considerably different from those produced for their female peers. In contrast to the cartoon created for young boys, which included superheroes and quasi-military characters, the cartoon made for young girls featured princesses, domestic and motherly characters. Even though there are now more cartoons aimed at appealing to both genders, such as *Dora the Explorer* and *Maya & Miguel*, and female action heroes like *Mulan*, *Kim Possible*, *The Powerpuff Girls*, etc., the majority of children's media is still very obviously gendered, such as *Disney Princess*, *Batman*, *Spiderman*, *Frozen*, etc.

According to Kumari and Joshi (2015), women's issues only occasionally appear on the first page of the print media, such as when they are involved in rape cases, crimes, sexual harassment, abuse cases, etc. The print media, which includes newspapers, journals, newsletters, and magazines, is considered one of the oldest forms of media and is relied upon by readers as a reliable source of information. Films also portray stereotypical content. Olanrewaju et al., (2021), affirm that Nollywood movies also largely portray women as lower and, in some cases, higher than they ought to be. Uchenne et al., (2015), continued by stating that women are frequently depicted as invisible, and even when they are, they are often portrayed as sex objects or as docile, inconsequential characters.

In an increasingly sexualised media environment, social networking sites are places of risk and opportunity profoundly influenced by gender. One of the most well-known and quickly growing websites in the world, *Facebook*, provides users with various ways to express their personalities and maintain relationships. As a basic social media platform, the website offers numerous options to search and locate well-known people, communities, and organisations; once found, users can contact them directly or choose to keep their communications private by merely following their updates. According to Debatin et al., (2009), cited in Adakawa and Harinarayana (2022), through particular habits and rituals, individuals can make checking *Facebook* a significant part of their everyday life.

Unlike many other social media sites, *Facebook* provides new members with a template for building their profile pages. Users are asked questions about their name, date of birth, sex, and other demographic details, as well as their favourite television series, quotes, and other aspects of popular culture, as well as their relationship status. Taraszow et al., (2010), cited in Vranken et al., (2020), looked at user profiles of male and female users between the ages of 13 and 30. According to the study, both sexes had an equal likelihood of including basic profile details, including a name, profile picture, birthplace, and email address. The study also showed that women were less inclined than men to share private information, like their home addresses and phone numbers. Despite the illusion that men and women use *Facebook* in about equal numbers, Boyd and Hargittai (2010), cited in Tadic et al., (2022), found differences between how men and women use *Facebook*. Idemudia et al., (2017), suggest that men are likely to have greater time for social media use due to gender expectations and roles. In other words, men are typically favoured over women in society because men are supposed to handle the public sphere, which includes the social network, while women handle the private world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on gender schema theory. The Gender Schema Theory (GST), a cognitive theory, was created to explain how gender affects how meaning is ordered, both for oneself and others. Sandra Lipsitz Bem, a psychologist, first proposed the gender schema theory in 1981. It is founded on the idea that gender formation occurs in society at a young age and affects how people think and classify matters throughout their life. From a young age, children form gender schemas, which are concepts and beliefs as to what being a male or a female means. These ideas help children organise knowledge, form opinions, and manage their behaviour. According to the gender schema theory, children unknowingly form gender views due to society's extreme gender polarisation in both language and social structures. As a result, gender schematics encourage the development of sexist preconceptions among young people. This theory is relevant to the study since it clarifies how society views gender. The use of females as ritual sacrifices has become more prevalent in society. Not only is this the reality, in most cases, the female who becomes the victim of a ritual killing tale is held responsible.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Sana et al., (2021), looked at gender differences in social media usage and how it affects students' academic performance. The study's major hypotheses were that teenage boys utilise social media for various objectives and that social media use improves academic achievement. Data was collected using the quantitative survey research method from 152 respondents from four of Pakistan's top private-sector institutions. According to the study, *Facebook* is the most popular social networking site. According to the survey, teenage girls and boys use social media differently. The study also showed that students' use of social media improves their academic achievement. Further research is recommended to explore gender disparities in social media use, as it may uncover unique motivations driving usage patterns among boys and girls in countries beyond Pakistan.

Idemudia et al. (2017), examined the impact of gender on the uptake of social media in a similar study. The diffusion of innovation theory and the technology adoption model were the study's theoretical foundation. Data was collected using a quantitative survey method from 290 students enrolled at a prominent public institution in the United States of America. The study aimed to identify

gender variations in social media's usability, compatibility, simplicity of use, and satisfaction concerning continued use. The results of this study were able to show that there is a significantly higher proportion of female users of social media than there is of male users, which is in contrast to studies like Kayaoglu (2016) that claim there is no statistically significant association between gender and having a *Facebook* account. To determine why women use social media more frequently than men, however, this conclusion merits further scholarly research.

Devi (2018), conducted a similar study on gender stereotypes in the media in India. The study looked into gender stereotyping in Manipuri media to see how the media shapes ideas about gender and how hegemonic masculinity is portrayed there. The researcher examined five transgender films and dramas, three Manipuri feature films, three radio dramas, two periodic publications, two cartoons, and three Manipuri feature films to assess how traditional gender roles are portrayed by characters in media to reinforce traditional ideas about the place and role of women. The study's conclusions showed that women are still considered objects and tools devoid of feelings, autonomy, and self-determination. The survey points out that even while women in Manipur have carved out a place for themselves in every sector, they are still viewed as being solely responsible for taking care of the family before anything else. The lack of a theoretical foundation for this study is a flaw, as Alice Eagly's social role theory, which she proposed in 1987, would have made an excellent theoretical foundation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research that combines and integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies is referred to as mixed methods research. According to Mohajan (2018), the focus of qualitative research is on how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences to understand their social reality. Apuke (2017) states that the quantitative research approach involves quantifying and analysing variables to obtain findings. The quantitative and qualitative content analysis method was chosen for this study because it is a useful concept when handling a population that cannot be physically reached. Rose et al. (2014), note that content analysis is used or applied in describing communication content and comparing media content to the real world.

Shukla (2020), defines a population as a collection of all the units that satisfy the criteria for the variables and attributes being studied and for whom generalisable research results can be produced. This study adopted a non-human population for this study by focusing on the comments of social media users. However, due to the large number of different social media, the researcher was concerned with comments from *Facebook* users because, according to statistics released by Kemp (2022), *Facebook* is the most populated social media. *Facebook* is also the best pick for this research as it is a messaging application that allows its users more space to post opinions, unlike other social media like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc. Comments on ritual killing stories on *Facebook*, as regards gender views, were picked from 9th February 2021 to 9th February 2022. Comments were from newspaper pages on *Facebook*, and they were selected within one year before the House of Representatives in Nigeria asked the Federal government to declare a state of emergency on the social vice on 9th February 2022 (Vanguard Newspaper, 10th February 2022).

The selection of the comments for analysis was done using the multistage sampling technique. Taking a sample from a population in progressively smaller groups is known as multistage sampling. The first step was to choose comments using the composite week sampling. For the content analysis, the study used a composite week sample technique, taking one day from each week of the sampling period. According to Laar (2010), referenced in Sanusi et al. (2022), the composite week sampling strategy is a tried-and-true approach. The start date for the composite week sample was Thursday, February 11, 2021, and it ended on Thursday, February 10, 2022. Mondays through Wednesdays were not included in the composite week sampling since most Metro stories are published by newspapers on the weekends or around the conclusion of the workweek. As a result, a total of one hundred and fifty-six comments about ritual killing, with fifty-two comments from each of the three newspapers, were then analysed.

To obtain a manageable number of comments to analyse, the research adopted the use of survey monkey, an online sampling calculator, to arrive at a manageable sum of thirty-four (34) comments from the one hundred and fifty-six (156) comments that were arrived at using the composite week sampling technique. At a confidence level of 95% and a 15% margin of error, the calculator arrived at thirty-four (34). The thirty-four (34) comments were purposively selected by the researcher from three Nigerian newspaper *Facebook* pages. The newspapers selected were *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers. These papers were purposively selected based on having a Metro column, and, undoubtedly, they have national recognition.

The research instrument adopted for data collection was a coding sheet. A self-designed coding sheet was developed using the emergent coding technique to fit the study. The emergent codes were created after the researcher conducted a pilot study. The content categories for this study were various views on ritual killings, views peculiar to the genders, and the gender status of *Facebook* commentators. For this study, the units of analysis were sentences and *Facebook* user's gender. The face validity of the content coding sheet was carried out. The Holsti formula for Inter-coder reliability (ICR) was adopted. Nili et al. (2017), note that the formula is most suitable for two coders. Hence the study used two independent coders. The pilot study recorded 1.00, which falls in the almost perfect range of the benchmark of agreement, meaning that both coders agreed to a high degree. The results obtained from the coded data were analysed and presented in pictures and tabulation using frequency counts.

RESULTS

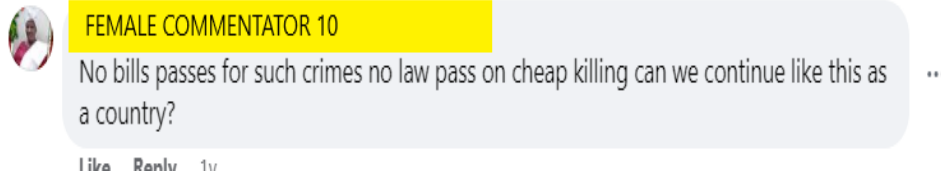
One of the objectives of this study was to identify the various views derivable from *Facebook* commentators on ritual killing stories. To achieve this, 34 comments were quantitatively and qualitatively content analysed. The findings are hereby presented and analysed.

Table 1: Various Views on Ritual Killings

VARIOUS GENDER VIEWS ON RITUAL KILLINGS	M	F	TOTAL
Females are always the victims of ritual killings	10 62.5%	6 37.5%	16
Males are the perpetrators of ritual killings	3 100%	0 0%	3
There are no strict government laws to catch perpetrators of ritual killings	6 85.7%	1 14.3%	7
Males are sometimes the victims of ritual killings	1 50%	1 50%	2
Females are materialistic, which is why they are victims of ritual killings	15 93.7%	1 6.3%	16
Males are greedy that is why they are the perpetrators of ritual killings	4 80%	1 20%	5
African culture promotes ritual killings	2 100%	0 0%	2
TOTAL	41 80.4%	10 19.6%	51

Source: Field Survey, 2023

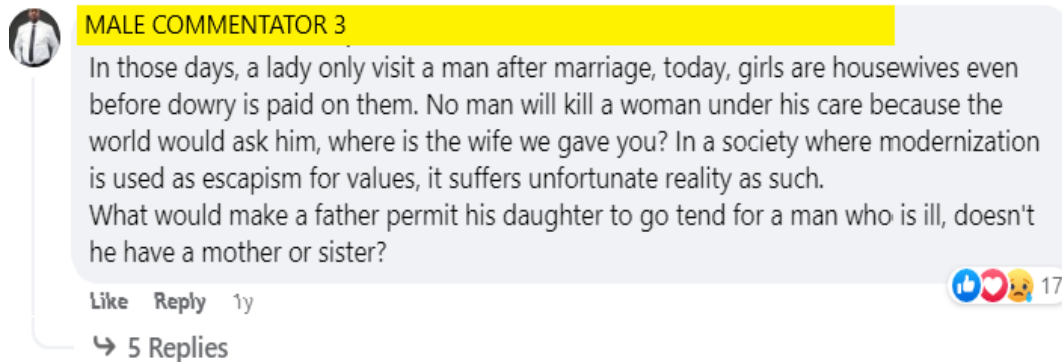
The result of the analysis done for the various gender views on ritual killings in 34 comments from *Facebook* in Nigeria shows several commentators had the same gender view on the ritual killings in Nigeria, while few had completely different perspectives. Most commentators believed that in any ritual killing case, females are always the victims, and males are always the perpetrators. Some commentators opined that ritual killing is thriving in Nigeria because there are no strict government laws to catch perpetrators.



Source: Facebook, 2023

Few commentators maintained that though most people believed that females are always the victims of ritual killings in Nigeria, males are also victims sometimes. Most commentators felt that the greed of males lead them to perform ritual killings, while the materialism of females made them fall prey to ritual killers.

Others thought that the African culture promoted ritual killings.



Source: Facebook, 2023

The various views derived from *Facebook* commentators on ritual killings are listed below.

- i. Females are always the victims of ritual killings, while males are always the perpetrators.
- ii. Males are sometimes victims of ritual killings.
- iii. There are no strict government laws to catch perpetrators of ritual killings.
- iv. Females end up as victims of ritual killings because they are materialistic.
- v. Males are usually the perpetrators of ritual killings because of their greed.
- vi. African culture promotes ritual killings.

The second objective of this study was to highlight the peculiarities in discussions among the male and female genders on ritual killing stories on *Facebook*. To achieve this, 34 comments were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings are hereby presented and analysed.

Table 2: Gender Status of The Facebook Commentators

GENDER STATUS OF THE COMMENTATOR	TOTAL	PER (%)
MALE	24	70.6
FEMALE	10	29.4
TOTAL	34	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The first peculiarity discovered is that more males commented on ritual killing stories than females. The dominant peculiarity in the trend of discussion among male commentators on ritual killing stories on *Facebook* is that most male commentators believed that the urge to get material possessions from males makes females fall prey to ritualists.

Other peculiarities found in the trend of discussion among male commentators on *Facebook* as regards ritual killings are:

1. The majority of the male commentators believed that females are always the victims.
2. Most male commentators opined that the greed of men pushes them to seek faster ways to make money. This peculiarity can be linked to the African belief that men must always provide for their families.
3. Most male commentators believed that the lack of strict government laws to catch perpetrators of ritual killing in Nigeria makes the crime unstoppable.
4. Another peculiarity worthy of noting in the trend of discussion among male commentators on ritual killings on *Facebook* is that some male commentators tilted from the whole gender war and blamed the menace of “ritual killings” on religion.

Although there are not enough female commentators compared with male commentators, there are still some peculiarities in the discussion among female commentators on ritual killing stories in Nigeria. Listed below are the peculiarities observed in the trend of discussion among female commentators on ritual killing stories on *Facebook*:

1. Most female commentators believe that females are always the victims in ritual killing cases.
2. A female commentator believed that females are not the only victims in ritual killing cases. She mentioned that males sometimes fall into the hands of ritualists.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data gathered, the major view derivable from *Facebook* commentators on ritual killing stories is that females are always the victims of ritual killings. The data analysed also revealed that most of the commentators believe that males are the perpetrators of ritual killings. Commentators also noted that there are no strict government laws to catch perpetrators of ritual killings. Buttressing this view of the commentators is the comment made by female commentator 6:

Young ladies, you people should be very careful of the male gender because the rate they are trying to bring women down in their lives is alarming. How can a 15-year-old girl satisfy a man’s urge, for God’s sake? I am sure they must have slept with her countless times before getting rid of her.” Female commentator 6

Source-Facebook, 2023

This finding is consistent with Devi (2018), who found that women are still considered objects and tools devoid of feelings, autonomy, and self-determination and that patriarchal behaviours are still depicted in Manipuri media to its audience. This finding points to how media contents are so potent that the audience, particularly children and youths, are easily impacted by what they see around them. The audience’s notion of gender is strongly influenced by their frequent exposure to these stereotypical representations of gender. In line with the cognitive theory of Gender Schema, this study has explained how gender affects how meaning is ordered, both for oneself and others. The theory postulates that gender-schematic individuals are more prone to categorise their surroundings and control their behaviour according to gender. By concentrating on societal gender norms, this theory is consistent with the findings of this study that women are always the victims of ritual killings because they are materialistic. Interestingly, this study also revealed that males are sometimes victims of ritual killings, as expressed by one of the male commentators.

A man who took a girl to a hotel never came back home to his family, that was the case of Chidima and the Super TV CEO. Please let’s try and balance this story, because men are also an endangered species in this matter. Male commentator 22

Source-Facebook, 2023

Looking at the peculiarities in the trend of discussions among males and females on ritual killing stories on *Facebook*, findings show that the major peculiarity in the trend of discussions among males and females on ritual killing stories on *Facebook* is that more males commented on ritual killing stories in Nigeria on *Facebook* than females. Interestingly most male commentators re-echoed the view of women being materialistic as the reason for the ritual killings.

This present study supports the findings of Sana et.al. (2021), on social media use as it pertains to gender differentials. According to the researchers in Pakistan, *Facebook* is the most popular social networking site. Girls and boys use social media in different ways. Girls prefer social media for educational purposes, while boys use it for communication and entertainment. That explains why more male comments were found on *Facebook* than women. This is also supported by Idemudia et.al. (2017), who found that, in contrast to men, women perceive ease of use, compatibility, relative advantage, and risk when using social media more strongly and significantly than men. When utilising social media, men perceive pleasure and information quality higher than women. Men are also more carefree in online discussions than women.

Another dominant peculiarity in the trend of discussion among the male gender on ritual killing stories on *Facebook* is that females are always the victims. This brings out the insinuation that females are always the victims of bad happenings like rape, ritual killings, body shaming and so on in society. It also points to the fact that females in society have been reduced to ritual sacrifices since most commentators believed that in any ritual killing case, females are always the victims.

Although there are not enough female commentators like male commentators, there are still some peculiarities in the trend of discussion among female commentators on ritual killing stories in Nigeria. Prominent among the peculiarities is that most female commentators also believed that females are always the victims in ritual killing cases. Not only did they think that females are always the victims, but most of them believed that the victims brought the problem upon themselves.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that ritual killings in Nigeria are heavily gendered, with societal beliefs and media portrayals depicting females predominantly as victims and males as perpetrators. These perceptions are rooted in deep-seated cultural norms and are further perpetuated by media representations and social media discussions. The findings underscore the need for more balanced narratives and stricter enforcement of laws to curb ritual killings.

Based on the findings of this study and dwelling on the opinions of social media users on the issue of ritual killings with a detailed focus on the comments of *Facebook* users, the following recommendations are made: The media, both traditional and social media, must make use of the convergence of the media to portray a more balanced and accurate representation of ritual killings. The government at all levels should ensure rigorous enforcement of extant laws against ritual killings.

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