



PERCEPTION OF NEW MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION BY ISOKO WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The work was design to find out the perception of Isoko women on new media representation of Female Genital Mutilation. The study was anchored on Perception and Technological Determinism theories. The study adopted the survey research design to generate quantitative data with the questionnaire as instruments. The data generated were analyzed using Likert scale (weighted Mean Score). The study population comprised all female residents of Isoko Local Government Area; a sample size of 382 was drawn from the population using the Krejcie & Morgan sample size determination table. Multi- stage sampling technique was used. Result showed amongst others that: Isoko women are largely exposed to Female Genital Mutilation contents and other related issues on new media platforms. The result further revealed that the new media platforms with high frequency of issues on female genital mutilation are Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp and Instagram. It also found out that new media platforms present FGM as harmful and uncivilized cultural and traditional practice that needs to be eradicated. The study recommended that health organizations should adopt a means of disseminating information about female genital mutilation. Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp and Instagram should be employed more in the campaign against female genital mutilation by government health agencies such as; WHO, FMOH, NGOs and other stakeholders in health as well as more robust campaign targeted at the cultural practices of the Isoko's in order to change their perceptions and beliefs.

Keywords: Female genital mutilation, new media, perception, Isokos

Introduction

Cultural practices vary from one culture to another, and what may be accepted and validated by some cultures may be termed a taboo in another culture. Across the globe, there are different cultural practices that are considered inimical to the health and wellbeing of individuals. In some cultures, different laceration is done to the human body ranging from tribal marks for identity to the mutilation of some vital and sensitive organs in the body, like female genital mutilation (FGM).

Female genital mutilation represents the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical purposes. The partial or total removal of the labia minora alone, or the clitoris and labia minora, with or without the excision of the labia majora is referred to as excision Infibulation, the most pervasive type of FGM, which involves the suturing of the labia minora and or the labia majora to create a covering seal that narrows the vaginal orifice.

FGM is a traditional practice that has been found very harmful, as it involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO, 2021). World Health Organisation, further states that female genital mutilation is disproportionately high in the developing countries of the world. The act which is said to have become one of the most common forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV), violence against women and girls in the developing countries is

estimated that three million girls are at risk of undergoing FGM every year, and majority of them are forced to undergo the procedure before the age of 15 years (UNICEF, 2020).

This tradition is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and perceptions of the people which have been passed to the practicing communities from one generation to the other and have lasted for decades making it difficult for its eradication (UNICEF, 2020). An estimated 200 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation, a human right violation that can lead to health consequences that affect girl's and women's physical, mental, sexual health and well-being.

Statement of the Problem

The subjection of women and girls to the harmful traditional practice of female genital mutilation is common in Nigeria, particularly in Isoko local Government Area of Delta State. This practice has been widely condemned as a violation of human rights but despite its condemnation, the practice is still deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and norms of the Isokos which have been passed down to them from one generation to another.

As it is said, the perception people hold about something hitherto determine their attitude and actions towards that thing even in the case of female genital mutilation. Against this background, the necessary question that this study seeks to answer is what has been Isoko Women's perception of new media representation of female genital mutilation.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What is Isoko women perception of new media representation of the cultural practice of female genital mutilation?
2. What is the overall attitude of Isoko women on the portrayed implication of female genital mutilation by new media?

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on two theories. They are the perception and technological determinism theories.

Perception Theory

Perception theory emanated from the works an American Psychologists, James Gibson who introduced the concept of direct perception in the 1950s and 1960s. The theory suggests that perception is a direct result of the information available in the environment, without the need for internal representations or interpretations. This implies that for humans to receive information from their environment it is aided by the sense organs, the eye, ear, nose and these organs are part of the sensory system that receives sensory inputs(information), and transmits it to the brain. These inputs are transmitted as sights, sounds, smells, taste and touch experiences.

Purvis (2025). Summarized the key tenets of the Perception theory this; the way we perceive objects, individuals, events, and our environment can have a significant impact on our mood, emotions, and behaviours. In some cases, our perceptions can be distorted, which can lead to distressing feelings or even symptoms of mental health condition like depression or anxiety. That we recognize people by their perceptions and that people's perception about an issue, object differ from others, that individuals can respond to an object by that we recognize people by their perceptions and that people's perception about an issue, object differ from others, that individuals can respond to an object by people's perception about an

issue, object ideas differ from others; that individuals can respond to an object by making new responses to it.

The foregoing demonstrates that there can be a change in perception of an object by giving it a new definition. This implies that there can be a new respond to old stimulus, all it takes is to have a redefinition of the old stimulus and form a new opinion about it. Schultz (2019) viewed perception as the process by which the brain interprets and organizes sensory information from the environment to produce a meaningful experience of the world.

The act of perceiving involves various cognitive processes such as attention, sensation, and memory, that allow us to recognize, understand, and interpret our surroundings. Perception can be influenced by personal experiences, emotions, motivations, and expectations, and can sometimes lead to perceptual illusions and misinterpretations of reality.

Thus, when cases of female genital mutilations are presented as acceptable norms in practicing communities, people will be compelled to uphold it. In relation to this study therefore, because female genital mutilation is not presented as harmful traditional practice with negative health implications, hence, the knowledge, experiences, beliefs, opinions and practice of the people largely influenced their perception about the practice.

The Technological Determinism theory as propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1964, explains the impact of information and Communication Technology in how messages are consumed, retrieved and disseminated in contemporary society. This theory is relevant to this study.

Female Genital Mutilation: An overview

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It can also be referred to as the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical purposes. The practice has no health benefits for girls and women and cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths (Wafa et al., 2023).

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a human rights violation and a form of violence against women and girls. Thus, FGM is seen as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (World Health Organization, 2018).

Female Genital Mutilation is practiced in over 30 countries, primarily in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. According to UNICEF, approximately 200 million girls and women have undergone FGM worldwide (UNICEF, 2020). There are four types of FGM: Clitoridectomy, partial or total removal of the clitoris. Excision, partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora. Infibulation, narrowing of the vaginal opening by cutting and repositioning the labia. Other forms, including pricking, piercing, or scraping of the genital area (World Health Organization, 2018).

However, FGM has serious physical and psychological health consequences including; Pain and bleeding, Immediate complications during and after the procedure, increased risk of infections, including HIV and other STIs. It can also cause Childbirth complications, Increased risk of obstructed labour, fistulae, and maternal mortality. Some of the Psychological trauma associated with FGM are; Long-term psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), (World Health Organization, 2018).

FGM is often performed as a cultural or social practice, believed to Preserve a girl's virginity until marriage, ensure marriage ability by Increasing a girl's chances of marriage, maintain family honour and it is reputation as well as social status. This is viewed as a human rights violation and a form of violence

against women, efforts to eliminate FGM should require a comprehensive approach, including legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and community engagement.

Wafa, et al (2023). View Deinfibulation, as a minor surgical procedure, that involves making a vertical incision in the Scar tissue to expose the urethra and vagina. They maintained that the procedure is recommended for infibulated Women who are pregnant or experiencing long-term complications such as dysmenorrhea (Painful menstruation), dyspareunia (Painful coitus), apareunia (inability to perform sexual Intercourse), or chronic vaginal and urinary infections to alleviate or resolve these issues

It is important to note that tight infibulation can pose significant risks to both the mother and the fetus. In cases where infibulation is present, deinfibulation is often necessary to allow for the safe passage of the fetal head during childbirth.

UNICEF (2022) asserts that Nigeria has the highest number of cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) worldwide, due to its large population. According to UNICEF, approximately 19.9 million survivors of FGM reside in Nigeria, making it the country with the third-highest number of women and girls who have undergone FGM globally.

A significant proportion of Nigerian women, about 27%, aged 15-49, have undergone FGM, with the practice being more prevalent in certain regions. The prevalence of FGM varies across states, ranging from 62% in Imo to less than 1% in Adamawa and Gombe.

FGM is often performed on young girls, with an estimated 86% of females being cut before the age of 5. The practice is deeply rooted in cultural and social norms, with many families believing it is necessary for a girl's eligibility for marriage.

Efforts to eliminate FGM in Nigeria have been ongoing, with the federal government banning the practice in 2015 through the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP). However, despite these efforts, FGM has remained a significant challenge, with UNICEF warning that the practice is on the rise among young Nigerian girls.

Review of Empirical Study

In a study by Meghan, (2015) which investigated Female genital cutting in the news media: A content analysis. The study analyzed 15 years of newspaper coverage surrounding the launch of the Millennium Development Goals, framed female genital cutting in four countries with varying prevalence levels of female genital cutting: the United States, Ghana, Gambia, and Kenya.

The study adopted quantitative content analysis. It found out that female genital cutting is consistently portrayed as a problematic and thematic topic, largely tied to cultural rituals. However, coverage is minimal and inconsistent over time and does not appear to have been influenced by the increased international initiatives aimed at combating the practice.

Meghan's Study shares similarity with the current study, because they both dealt with female genital mutilation, although, the earlier study dealt with the coverage of female genital mutilation by news media, while the current study limited itself to the Isoko women perception of new media representation of female genital mutilation.

Although, Meghan's study differs in methodology with the present study, while Meghan employed quantitative content analysis as the research design, the current study adopted the survey research design. Nevertheless, the results of both study shared similarities in terms of representing FGM as a harmful traditional practice.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design to generate data from respondents. The population of the study is 378,706. This comprised all residents of the two Isoko Local Government Areas (Isoko South and Isoko North), which make up the Isokos in Delta State. A sample size of 382 was drawn using the Krijcie& Morgan sample size determination table. A multistage sampling technique was adopted.

Firstly, the purposive sampling was employed to select only residents with internet-enabled mobile phones. The reason for this selection was because the study deals with the perception of new media and this cannot take place when there is no exposure to it. The study further adopted a cluster sampling technique where they were grouped according to their political wards.

At this point, the researcher further employed a systematic sampling where respondents were chosen at intervals using the INEC voter register. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered and about 382 copies were retrieved and analysed using Four-point Likert Scale (Weighted Mean Score).

Data Presentation

Data gathered is presented below.

Table 1: Responses on Isokowomen's perception of new media representation of culture and tradition in the practice of female genital mutilation.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
1.	New media presents FGM as necessary Cultural practice that should be sustained.	20	30	250	50	720	2.0	Disagreed
2.	FGM is portrayed as a harmful traditional practice that should be stopped.	150	90	60	50	1040	2.97	Agreed
3.	It is presented as a personal choice of the individual	280	282	112	130	804	2.2	Disagreed
4.	The practice is also carried out by civilized cultures	80	50	120	100	810	2.3	Disagreed

Analysis: The result presented on Table 1, indicates that the perception of Isoko women on social media representation of FGM is that it is a harmful traditional practice that should be abolished. This is evident in the weighted mean score of 2.97 in item 2 of the instrument administered on the respondents. The table further shows that new media represents FGM as an unnecessary cultural and traditional practice that should not be sustained, which is forced on individuals, against their will carried out by uncivilized cultures.

Table 2: Responses on the overall attitude of Isoko women on the new media framing of female genital mutilation.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
1.	After exposure to new media frames of FGM, I feel it is harmful and should be abolished	130	94	70	56	998	2.8	Agreed
2.	After my exposure to new media contents about FGM, I feel it is our traditional practice that must be sustained	50	70	100	130	740	2.1	Disagreed
3.	I now realized that FGM has no medical benefit	120	100	80	50	990	2.8	Agreed
4.	FGM is not an evil practice	110	120	70	50	990	2.9	Agreed

Analysis: Data from table 2 above reveals that Isoko residents expressed negative disposition towards new media framing of FGM as a harmful practice that should be abolished, though, acknowledging the practice has no medical benefit and should not be sustained even though it is not seen as evil because they see it as their culture and tradition.

Discussion of Findings

This study found out that the new media presents FGM as a harmful, unnecessary cultural and traditional practice. This aligns with the findings of the study of Meghan (2015) who analysed fifteen (15) years of newspaper coverage on FGM in four countries and found that FGM is consistently portrayed as a problematic and thematic topic tied to cultural rituals.

The findings this study also coincides with the assertions of WHO, on the health implications of FGM. WHO, posited that FGM has no health benefits and can lead to serious, long-term complications and even death. The study's results confirm that Isoko women express negative attitudes towards new media framing of FGM as a harmful practice that should be abolished.

The result of this study further affirms the position of American Academy of Pediatrics (2020) published in their clinical report reaffirming that FGM has no health benefits and can lead to severe physical and emotional harm. The report emphasized the importance of pediatrics being aware of the practice and its consequences, and providing sensitive and non-judgmental care to affected girls and women.

The findings of the study further correspond with the position of McMenemy, (2013) and Alexa, (2019) that female genital mutilation is primarily framed as a barbaric practice bred from cultural rituals, with Western media discourse often pinpointing it as a non-western culture. Information on the practice of Female Genital mutilation, including interviews or testimonies from members of practicing communities, health education, anti-FGM campaigns, and news are found on various new media platforms such as YouTube.

The findings of the study is also in line with the key tenets of the perception theory and technological determinism theory. Perception theory posits that people's perceptions of reality are shaped by their individual experiences, cultural background, and social environment. In the context of this study, the findings suggest that Isoko women's perceptions of FGM are influenced by their exposure to new media representation of the practice.

The study found that new media presents FGM as a harmful and unnecessary cultural and traditional practice that should be eradicated. This portrayal of FGM in new media shapes the perceptions of Isoko women, who expressed negative attitudes towards the practice.

Technological determinism theory suggests that technology shapes society and human behaviour. In relation to this study, the findings suggest that new media technologies have played significant role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of Isoko women towards FGM. The study further, found that new media platforms such as YouTube provide a wealth of information on FGM, including interviews, testimonies, health education, and anti-FGM campaigns.

This information shapes the perceptions of Isoko women, who are increasingly exposed to new media. Thus, it can be safely said that perception theory and technological determinism theory are interrelated as the exposure to new media representation of FGM shapes the perceptions of Isoko women, who are increasingly influenced by the information they receive from new media platforms. This, in turn, shapes their attitudes and behaviours towards FGM.

Awareness and knowledge are mostly acquired through the exposure to the media of communication like new media or interactive media which triggers perception. The perception people hold about something as hitherto stated determine their attitude and actions towards that thing even in the case of female genital mutilation.

New media form the largest and richest collection of information about society today, providing dynamic views from around the world on variety of topics. It can have a powerful influence in shaping perceptions and community opinion on social norms and practices. The manner in which issues are framed and represented on new media platforms shape people's opinion and perception.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlighted the imperative of considering the role of new media in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards FGM. The results of the study suggest that perception theory and technological determinism theory provide a useful framework for understanding the composite relationships between new media, perception, and attitudinal change.

Based on the findings of the study, one can safely state that new media presents Female Genital Mutilation as having serious negative health implications. Despite this portrayal, the Isoko women hold strong belief that sees FGM as their culture and should be sustained, frowning that new media coverage of FGM is geared towards terminating their indigenous cultural practice which aims at reducing sexual immorality among women.

It can be said that Isoko women are largely exposed to Female Genital Mutilation contents and other related issues on new media platforms and the new media platforms with high frequency of issues on female genital mutilation are Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp and Instagram.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the study recommends that:

1. There should be a more robust campaign on new media targeted at Sensitizing Isoko women against FGM practices in their locality in order to change their perceptions and beliefs about FGM.
2. FGM is an age long cultural practice in Isoko land. It is important for the elites in the area to carry out a scientific and cultural analysis of the practice to weigh the gains and losses of the practice for a total eradication of the practice.

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