

Online Newspaper Readers' Comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's Assault of a Female Sales Representative in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was initiated to analyse the online newspaper readers' comments on the Facebook pages of three select newspapers on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria. In conducting this study, the Convergent Mixed Design was adopted. Quantitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis were used to generate quantitative and qualitative data for the study. Three hundred and ninety (390) comments were proportionately drawn for an equal distribution across the three select Facebook pages: *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch newspapers*. After the analysis, the findings revealed that the highest likes (59%) on stories of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault were from *Punch Newspaper* because they had a more interactive audience. The result equally showed that the tone of comments used by the online newspaper readers were the praise, attack, disapproval, ethnic, religious, gender-based, political and neutral tones. It was further identified that the dominant tone of comments used was the attack tone (49%) followed by the disapproval tone (26%). The least used tone was the neutral tone (2%). The hypothesis tested revealed that there is no significant relationship between the gender of the online newspaper readers and their tone of comments on the *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch* Facebook pages. It was also found that males constitute more of the online newspaper readers of the select newspaper Facebook pages. Based on these findings, it was recommended that there should be laws against gender-based assaults perpetuated by politicians and there should be an awareness to enlighten women that they can also air their views on social media platforms.

Keywords: Online Newspaper, Facebook Comments, Elisha Abbo and VGW

Introduction

Violence against women occurs through physical, verbal, sexual or psychological, (including threats, intimidation and isolation) abuse by the male gender on the opposite sex. The World Bank (2019) reveals that Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a pandemic affecting 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide as they experience either physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner in the course of their life. Macaulay (2016) estimated that in parts of the third world and West Africa, particularly, domestic violence is prevalent, justified and condoned in some cultures.

Violence against women is perpetrated across all spheres of humanity, irrespective of educational level, religion, socio-economic class and marital status as well as age (Aihie, 2009; Bazza, 2009; Agene, 2017). Violence against women is among the tenacious violations of human rights in the world and Bazza (2009) observes that initial results from a World Health Organisation (WHO) global study on women's health and domestic violence indicate that in some countries, one-half of women have experienced violence perpetrated by the opposite sex. United Nations as cited in ANROWS Landscape (2015, p.3) states that the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The Nigerian societal structure knowing and unknowingly harbours violence against women perpetrators. There has been an upsurge in violence against women cases in Nigeria often perpetrated by men, although it has taken a new dimension in recent times as politicians and lawmakers seem to be the main perpetrators. Most of these cases have been reported through various channels of the mass media thus provoking different reactions from the audience. The newspaper is among the largest conventional tools of mass communication and has never failed in reporting societal issues, including cases of violence perpetrated against women. Irrespective of wide readership, permanent nature and other features of the newspaper, there is a limitation which is that it does not allow for an open display of the readers' comments on certain news contents. Different media organisations have seen social media as a forum to propagate information on issues of human interest. Ekeanyanwu & Kalyango as cited in Ekeanyanwu (2015, p. 49) reveal that social media networks are classified as the ninth wonder of the world because such media platforms are becoming increasingly interactive, integrative, ubiquitous and digital.

Business Insider by Pulse (2019) publicised a report by a social media marketing platform, Hootsuite, which states that the Global State of Digital in 2019 report discovered that there are 98.39 million netizens in Nigeria with 78% being active Facebook users. Facebook has evolved into a very important social networking site for reading and commenting on news around the world. Facebook users who follow news channels can "like" posts, comment on contents, thereby, interacting with the media channel and other followers, and share the channels' content with a network of friends.

The strength of Facebook has made it possible for most societies like the print media to tap into the digital world to aggregate, convey and produce their own news and other pertinent information. Online interactivity creates a public sphere where users communicate and debate on issues of general concern like politicians who perpetrate violence against women in Nigeria.

Laws against gender-based violence have been enforced by the lawmakers and politicians in Nigeria. Some of these lawmakers seem to get involved in the act of perpetrating violence against women. Among such people include Senator Elisha Ishaku Abbo, who is not the first politician to commit an assault. In 2015, Senator Dino Melaye sponsored the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (Amendment) Bill amongst 15 bills and 20 motions in the 8th national assembly after beating his former wives, Tokunbo Melaye and Alero Falope in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Isaac, 2014). In 2016, Dino Melaye also threatened to hit and impregnate Senator Oluremi Tinubu.

On the 2nd of July, 2019, a video of the youngest Nigerian Senator and a lawmaker representing Adamawa-North Senatorial district, Senator Ishaku Elisha Abbo, physically assaulting a lady in a sex toy shop in Abuja surfaced on social media through *Premium Times* (*Premium Times*, June 02, 2019). The security camera footage of the incident is believed to have occurred on March 11, 2019, before he took up his seat in the parliament in June 2019. The assaulted woman, a nursing mother, was treated for eye inflammation and other injuries she sustained at some point of the attack. The emergence of the video caused massive outrage, with many Nigerians calling for the lawmaker to be suspended through the Senate, and prosecuted by the Police coupled with a hashtag trend on Twitter, #SenatorStepDown and #MeToo. Gender-based violence is an illustration of inequality between the male and female gender. The differential access to prestige and power is part of the rationale of why women are more at risk from violence than men in all sectors of society (Bazza, 2019). It is against this background the study examines online newspaper readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The assault of a female sales representative who was a nursing mother in March 2019 by Senator Abbo has generated diverse opinions in the media and public spheres. This act triggered condemnation from his former political party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and on social media with hashtags like #SenatorStepDown. It also sparked a series of protests by a group of female activists at the National Assembly complex. The assault by the lawmaker indicated that politicians and those in authority seem to get away with acts of violence towards family members, constituents and other citizens like Senator Dino Melaye in 2016.

Scholars around the world have kicked against domestic violence by publishing articles and conducting studies. Many studies have been carried out on domestic violence and women's rights in Nigeria. For example, Aihie (2009); Oladepo, Yusuf & Arulogun (2011) and others have investigated media reports on gender-based

violence. Amongst the works of violence against women in Nigeria, there is limited empirical evidence that identifies the audience reaction to this violence, especially when a lawmaker who is supposed to make laws against such, is involved. However, there appears to be no study that looks at online newspaper readers' perception on gender based violence. Therefore, this study examines the online newspaper readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria by ascertaining the gender, frequency of likes, tone of comments as well as the dominant comments of the online newspaper readers.

Research Questions

The following questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What is the gender of the online readers of the select Facebook pages that commented on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria?
2. What is the volume of likes on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault published in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?
3. What is the frequency of comments of the online newspaper readers on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?
4. What are the tones of comments used by the online newspaper readers on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault?
5. What is the dominant tone of comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault on the Facebook pages?

Research Hypothesis

H₀. There is no significant relationship between the gender and tone of comments used by online readers' of the select Facebook pages on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a sales representative in Abuja.

Violence against Women and Gender-based Violence

Violence against women constitutes a violation of women's human rights as it is based on the social structure and driven by patriarchal arrangement, or class and gender stratification. Seimeniuk, Krentz, Gish & Gill as cited in Oluremi (2015, p.24), state that violence against women includes "physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects) or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect; and economic deprivation." This act also breaches the fundamental rights provisions of the right to life and all the basic civil and political freedoms (freedom of association, assembly, expression and freedom from discrimination) as contained in the constitution. There is sadly a deep cultural belief in Nigeria that it is socially acceptable to hit a woman as a means of punishment (Oluremi, 2015; Macaulay, 2016).

It is a typical pattern in Nigeria and other African nations that beating a woman is endorsed as a method of discipline. Males beat the females to encourage discipline most especially when a man is superior in socio-economic class, educational level and

marital status. The male gender is tagged significantly in society and women's place decidedly inferior (Aihie, 2009). Oladepo, Yusuf & Arulogun (2011) affirm that the gauge of gender-based violence shows that between 8-70% of women worldwide have been physically and sexually assaulted by a male accomplice in any event once in their lives. According to Oladepo *et al* (2011), liquor was a critical benefactor in 10.1% of determinant cases.

Nigerian Politicians Accused of Violence against Women

Power and control were regarded by Oluremi (2015) and Macaulay (2016) as the causes of violence against women. As stated by Macaulay (2016), violence against women is actually on the increase in Nigeria because the long arm of the law is not catching up with the perpetrators of this deadly act.

Senator Elisha Ishaku Abbo: Assault of a Female Sales Representative

Ishaku Elisha Cliff Abbo is a Nigerian legislator that hails from Muchalla Ward, Mubi North Local Government Area of Adamawa State. He represents the Adamawa North Senatorial District in Adamawa State at the Nigerian 9th National Assembly. He is a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC). Before his political decision, he was the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Saice and Wright Group, Abuja, a worldwide political consultancy firm. He is the most youthful Senator in Nigeria at 41 years old and was at one time the 'Substance of the Youth' in Nigerian legislative issues.

The latest instances of violence against women by Senator Elisha Abbo happened on the 2nd of July, 2019, when a video of the Senator turned into a web sensation for attacking a woman in a sex toy shop in Abuja surfaced via web-based media. The surveillance camera film of the incident is believed to have happened on March 11, 2019, before he took up his seat in parliament in June 2019. He blamed the retailer for offending him, saying she considered him an alcoholic. The spilled video prompted inescapable shock, with numerous Nigerians requiring the suspension of the legislator by the Senate, and indictment by the Police. In his reaction to the video, Senator Abbo disclosed to Channels Television that the account was doctored to accomplish a plan against him, as he claimed that specific pieces of the video were removed. Senator Abbo gambled suspension and a five-year prison term as he was bailed for five million naira (₦5,000,000). The attacked lady, a nursing mother, was treated for eye aggravation and different wounds sustained during the attack. Toromade (2019) detailed that the Senator did not foot the hospital expense of the victim. On February 6, 2020, the Nigerian Police shut its body of evidence against Senator Elisha Abbo in the wake of calling two because the police have not had the option to establish a prima facie case against Senator Abbo. The court dismissed the attack case on August 1, 2020, because the police neglected to demonstrate that Senator Elisha Abbo attacked the female sales representative. On September 28, 2020, the Federal Capital Territory High Court requested Senator Elisha Abbo to pay fifty million naira (₦50,000,000) to the female salesman he attacked.

Facebook and News Organisations Usage

Facebook started out as a site for sharing pictures and chat among college students, but has evolved into a significant platform for businesses. Facebook provides a way for families and friends to stay in touch and share their daily lives and pictures. It also allows you to create business pages that are separate from your personal page (Edegoh, Asemah & Ekanem, 2013). Facebook is an online web-based media and systems administration site where individuals can make profiles, share information, for example, photographs and statements about themselves, and react to the information posted by others. Online newspaper users can share uploaded news content to their Facebook feed and this disperses information to a wider audience other than the followers of the newspaper Facebook page.

In Nigeria, news organisations have followed the pattern of having social media pages, particularly Facebook. A few organisations set up online papers without the printed version while the dominant ones have both. A few instances of newspapers with online versions are *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times* and *Punch* newspaper among others. Online newspaper comments is a positive advancement as it supports interaction and instant feedback yet the unfiltered comments of users have changed readers' viewpoints on popular assessment, media impact and genuine beliefs, consequently affecting their impression of the real world (Dashti, 2013). As quoted in Al-Rawi (2017), news organisations made interactive media platforms in which the news experience is described by three primary highlights: convenient, personalised and participatory, characterising it as a 'demassified forms of feedback. 'Online newspaper readers are allowed to access and express their views on news content instantaneously and anonymously' (Auwal, 2017, p. 4).

Empirical Review

A few studies have been conducted on online readers' comments and public issues. Ajiboye (2013) investigated the elements of readers' comments on reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria utilising critical discourse analysis. The investigation inspected comments from ten Nigerian online news sites and found that newsreaders use discourse to shape the perspectives and worth decisions of different readers. This was accomplished using philosophical methodologies, for example, polarisation, speculation, lexicalisation and exaggeration among others. This investigation further settled that interactions on news feedback gatherings are to a great extent dependent on shared information on the social setting and that socio-political crises offer ascent to lexical decisions and discourse designs that are constrained by effectively procured philosophical decisions of language clients. Concentrated conversations on these practices made the exploration to presume that philosophical contrasts are likely going to keep on highlighting inside intelligent feedbacks on online reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria.

Adejoye (2014) dissected the remarks of online paper readers' on the Chibok secondary school girls' capture. Public deliberation theory, a branch of Habermas' idea of the 'public sphere' was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The Mckeess post-structuralist approach was utilised. Online versions of two newspapers,

Daily Trust and *Vanguard* were utilised for the study. Data for the study were arranged for more than three weeks through the purposive sampling technique. Discoveries uncovered that online comments are frequently impacted by ethnic, religious and cultural affiliations. Additionally, platitudes, disappointment and antagonism were available during the tones of analysts.

Ezegwu, Obichili & Addeh (2020) analysed Facebook comments on BBC documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities. The objectives of this study were: to find out the frequency of the comments on BBC documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities on *BBC news Africa* Facebook page, to identify the tone of the comments on sex for grade in two famous universities and to ascertain the dominant mood of the comments on *BBC* documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities. This study adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods. The researchers found that the commentators used the Facebook medium to express their views on the BBC documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities, especially after the documentary was posted on *BBC Africa* Facebook page. It was further discovered that comments posted on the release day of the BBC documentary had 37 (54.40%) items, while comments posted after Dr. Igbenegbu's suspension had 31 (45.50%) items. The dominant tone of the comments was positive. The study recommended that media organisations should sustain the online platform as it enables commentators to react to online news and provide an avenue for them to interact with one another and express their opinions on the contents of the article or news events.

Ikushika, Bankole & Ekweme (2017) inspected Facebook gatherings and the depiction of brutality against women. The objective of the study was to discover content on Facebook groups with violence against women. Uses and gratifications as well as symbolic interaction theory were utilised as the hypothetical structure. Content analysis was adopted and it found that there are contents on Facebook groups depicting violence against women. It was additionally indicated that there are various types of violence against women and it comes in different structures. It, thusly, suggests among others, that Facebook ought to firmly censure gatherings and posts on violence against women and offer conspicuousness to and advance addresses that advocate women's privileges and course, regardless of whether such speeches contain portrayals of women's bodies as long as these depictions are not fierce.

Ezegwu *et al* (2020) analysed Facebook comments on *BBC* documentary on sex for grade in two famous universities. While Adejoye (2014) dissected the remarks of online paper readers' on the Chibok secondary school girls' capture. Although, the both articles looked that online comments, Ezegwu *et al* (2020) narrowed their study down to Facebook comments alone. In addition, Ikushika *et al* (2017) inspected Facebook gatherings and the depiction of brutality against women while Ezegwu *et al* (2020) were more interested in sex for grade. All these works are different from the current because the studies looked at a specific case of gender-based violence by a high ranking politician and readers' comments.

Theoretical Framework

In giving theoretical backing to this study, technology determinism theory and public deliberation theory were utilised.

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism is the ability of technology to be the sole cause of changes in society and a fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organisation. This theory helps explain in this study that technology determines how the audience members respond to news items because technology gave the means. This theory was originated by Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).

The print, broadcast and new media changed society as the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology and new technologies transform society including its social interaction and individuals. According to McLuhan in Ekwenchi, Chiaha & Abuah (2015), the medium is the message meaning that the medium influences the mind of the receiver. The advent of mass media and new media coupled with technological advances has an impact on the society in which we live. With the internet, everyone can now be an equal sender and receiver of information (Ekwenchi *et al* 2015). Relating this theory to this study, it shows that social media users used a social networking site like Facebook to reflect their view on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria.

Public Deliberation Theory

The public deliberation theory evolved from the concept of the "public sphere" by Jürgen Habermas in 1989, where it gave room for freedom to engage in the communication and information spaces prevalent in cosmopolitan Europe in the eighteenth century. Through the internet, individuals form a public body as they engage in a deliberation where they share their opinions, facts and falsehood on a subject with the freedom of association and expression to give their takes on matters of general interest.

The freedom to engage in the deliberation of an issue signifies the opinion of the public on an issue of general interest. This theory is relevant to this study because it explains how social media platforms create an avenue for the discussion and criticism of issues that interest the public. Through the tone of comments, like section reaction and dominant comments, this study identified the online readers' comment on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative.

Methodology

To analyse the online newspaper readers' comments of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative, the researchers used the convergent mixed methods design to simultaneously analyse quantitative and qualitative data. The researchers adopted critical discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis methods to generate qualitative and quantitative data respectively, for this study. Critical discourse analysis was considered to study the communication pattern in the comment section of the select newspaper Facebook pages. Ajiboye (2013, p. 131) states that 'discourse plays a fundamental role in the daily expression and reproduction of cognitive and social ideologies.' This method allowed the researchers to evaluate the comments made by online readers to establish their tones.

The population of the study consists of all the online readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative from July-September 2019. Based on the calculation of online readers' comments on the Facebook pages of

three select newspapers, the population is 14,304. This comprises of 2,322 from *Premium Times*, 10,742 from *Punch* and 1,240 from *Daily Trust* were obtained as the sampling frame. In this segment, the subset which would represent the entire population of study (14,304) were selected to produce valid result. In order to determine the sample size for this study, the Taro Yamane formula was adopted with 0.05 as the error margin. The sample size of the study was 389.

The sampling techniques adopted in this study were the proportionate and purposive sampling method because the population of the study was divided into subpopulations and the researchers' discretion was applied to select comments for analysis. To select the 390 comments, the discretion of the researchers was used for each of the online newspapers to pick the comments, which resulted in selecting 130 from *Premium Times*, 130 from *Punch* and 130 from *Daily Trust*.

In this study, the unit of analysis was the online newspaper readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria. Gender of Commenters: Volume of likes: Frequency of comments: Tone of comments: Praise tone; Attack tone; Dispositional tone; Ethnic tone; Religious tone: Gender-based tone; Political tone; Neutral tone;

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Facebook Pages * Gender of Commenters Cross Tabulation

			Gender of Commenters		Total
			Male	Female	
Facebook Pages	<i>Premium Times</i>	Count	120	10	130
		% of Total	30.8%	2.6%	33.3%
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Count	122	8	130
		% of Total	31.3%	2.1%	33.3%
	<i>Punch</i>	Count	119	11	130
		% of Total	30.5%	2.8%	33.3%
Total	Count	361	29	390	
	% of Total	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%	

The data in the table 1 shows the gender of the commenters of *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch*. The males were 361 (92.6%) and females were 29 (7.4%). The males constituted more of the commenters across the three select Facebook pages and this could be because majority of women in Nigeria do like getting involved in public discussions.

Table 2: Volume of Likes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<i>Premium Times</i>	2804	26.0	26.0	26.0
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	1573	14.6	14.6	40.7
	<i>Punch</i>	6387	59.3	59.3	100.0
	Total	10764	100.0	100.0	

The data in the table above show that a total of 10,764 online newspaper readers of the three select Facebook pages liked the stories of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a

female sales representative in Abuja within the period under review. The stories of the assault on *Premium Times* had 2804, *Daily Trust* had 1,573 and *Punch* had 6,387 likes. This means that *Punch* have a more interactive readership, followed by *Premium Times* while *Daily Trust* had the least readership.

Table 3: Frequency of Comments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<i>Premium Times</i>	130	33.3	33.3	33.3
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	130	33.3	33.3	66.7
	<i>sPunch</i>	130	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

The table and figure 4.1.3 above shows that a total of 390 online newspaper readers' comments of the three select Facebook pages were analysed based on the stories of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja within the period under study. Based on the analysis of the story,

Table 4: Facebook Pages * Tone of Comments Cross Tabulation

		Table of comments								Total	
		Praise	Attack	Dispositional	Ethnic	Religious	Gender- based	Political	Neutral		
Facebook Pages	<i>Premium Times</i>	Count	10	58	42	3	2	2	11	2	130
		% of Total	2.6%	14.9%	10.8%	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%	2.8%	0.5%	33.3%
		Total									
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Count	2	60	35	3	4	15	9	2	130
		% of Total	0.5%	15.4%	9.0%	0.8%	1.0%	3.8%	2.3%	0.5%	33.3%
		Total									
	<i>Punch</i>	Count	4	75	24	4	4	7	8	4	130
		% of Total	1.0%	19.2%	6.2%	1.0%	1.0%	1.8%	2.1%	1.0%	33.3%
		Total									
Total	Count	16	193	101	10	10	24	28	8	390	
	% of Total	4.1%	49.5%	25.9%	2.6%	2.6%	6.2%	7.2%	2.1%	100.0%	

The table 3 above shows that a total of 390 online newspaper readers' comments of the three select Facebook pages were analysed based on the stories of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja within the period under study. Based on the analysis of the story, *Premium Times* had 130 comments, *Daily Trust* had 130 and *Punch* had 130 comments.

In table 4, the researchers established the tone of online newspaper readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria. Based on the analysis, 16 comments (4.1%) out of the 390 had praise tone, 193 (49.5%) had the attack tone, 101 (25.9%) had the disapproval tone, 10 (2.6%) and 10 (2.6%) had ethnic and religious tone respectively, 24 (6.2%) had the gender-based tone, 28 (7.2%) had the political tone while 8 (2.1%) had a neutral tone. The implication

of the data presented above is that the online newspaper readers used the praise, attack, dispositional, ethnic, religious, gender-based, political and neutral tones to react to Senator Elisha Abbo’s assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 5: Facebook Pages * Tone of Comments Cross Tabulation

		Table of comments									Total
		Praise	Attack	Dispositional	Ethnic	Religious	Gender- based	Political	Neutral		
Facebook Pages	<i>Premium Times</i>	Count	10	58	42	3	2	2	11	2	130
		% of Total	2.6%	14.9%	10.8%	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%	2.8%	0.5%	33.3%
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Count	2	60	35	3	4	15	9	2	130
		% of Total	0.5%	15.4%	9.0%	0.8%	1.0%	3.8%	2.3%	0.5%	33.3%
	<i>Punch</i>	Count	4	75	24	4	4	7	8	4	130
		% of Total	1.0%	19.2%	6.2%	1.0%	1.0%	1.8%	2.1%	1.0%	33.3%
	Total	Count	16	193	101	10	10	24	28	8	390
		% of Total	4.1%	49.5%	25.9%	2.6%	2.6%	6.2%	7.2%	2.1%	100.0%
		Total									

The table shows that the researchers established the dominant tone of online newspaper readers’ comments on Senator Elisha Abbo’s assault of a female sales representative in Abuja. Therefore, 193 (49.5%) comments had attack tone and 101 (25.9) had dispositional tone and these were the dominant tones across the Facebook pages of *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspaper. The implication of the data presented above is that majority of the online newspaper readers used the attack tone, followed by dispositional tone while the least used was the neutral tone.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Newspaper Readers’ Comments

Social media discourse, particularly on Facebook, on the said issue, has attracted lots of controversies. The research findings present an overview of the tone and narrative of comments prevalent in the comments sections of the select Facebook pages on Senator Elisha Abbo’s assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria. As earlier defined, comments from the select online newspapers have been coded for in the categories of praise, attack, dispositional, political, religious, ethnic, gender-based and neutral tone.

Comments that show Praise of Senator Elisha Abbo

Comments that had the **praise tone** were supportive in nature. These comments praised Senator Elisha Abbo for taking certain actions around the assault. Such comments constituted 4% of the total sampled comments. Examples are:

1. “I was emotional mad when I heard the story but for now I say kudos to him and am so much in love with him for tendering his apology” (*Punch*, July 2019).

2. "I stand with Senator Abbo, he apologised" (*Punch*, July 2019).
3. "You earned my respect, not because you did such a disgusting thing but because of your humility of apologising to the victim and to all Nigerians. We are waiting for the Kano State Governor and the Deputy Senate President to learn from your maturity and apologise. As a young person, I'm proud of you. This is a legacy for even the older politicians who are always too big and powerful to respect Nigerians" (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

As evident from the above, the comments supported Senator Elisha Abbo after he apologised and when he was probed at the Senate ad-hoc committee by Senator Oluremi Tinubu. These comments manifest in such expressions as: "I am proud of you;" "I still stand with my youngest senator;" "I like his boldness and confidence;" "I stand with senator Abbo;" "Kudos to him."

Comments that show Attack on Senator Elisha Abbo

However, comments with the praise tone ignited further comments that were tilted towards condemning the perpetrator. Such comments had the attack tone and they revealed the online readers' anger and opposition. These comments were aggressive and they constituted 49% of the total sampled comments. Few examples include:

1. "All this is happening because the lady in question is Mrs nobody. Imagine if it was Saraki's daughter, Atiku's daughter or Dangote's daughter? Apologies should be on tape since the crime was on tape. The mad man and the police dog on the scene should be charge to court. Sorry alone isn't enough" (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. "This guy is not a senator but garage boy. Please we need to scrutinise his academic records if any" (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
3. "How did he become Senator!?! Look at his face, weed planter" (*Punch*, July 2019).

Being the youngest Senator in Nigeria, the online readers saw Senator Elisha Abbo's action as a mockery of the "Not too young to Rule bill". Some provocative expressions were used by commenters to attack the personality of Senator Elisha Abbo. They were aimed at demeaning the character and personality of Senator Elisha Abbo as a result of his perceived unruly behaviour.

Comments that show Dispositional Sentiment/Tone on Senator Elisha Abbo

Following the comments that attacked Senator Abbo, some comments disapproved certain decisions made by the government as regards the assault of a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria. These comments fall under the category of dispositional tone and they constituted 26% of the total sample size. Some examples of these comments are:

1. "The **same Senate who made a Mace snatcher their Deputy President** is threatening a man who has admitted his wrong doing and tendered an apology publicly, with a suspension. Isn't that **hypocrisy**? May God deliver Nigeria" (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

2. “What of a **senator in Rivers State House of Assembly that use mace to hit his fellow colleague to death** during Jonathan what happen, have you people all forgotten that which is more wicked and callous” (*Daily Trust*, July 2019).
3. “What's the essence of all these? The matter is already before a Magistrate Court. How does his private life concern senate?” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

Based on the above comments, the comments showed dispositions based on past occurrences involving public office holders. During the Senate Ad-hoc meeting, Senator Remi Tinubu, who slapped her male colleague, was leading the meeting. This is portrayed in terminologies like: “hypocrisy,” and “A house full of hypocrites.”

Comments that show Ethnic Sentiment/Tone on Senator Elisha Abbo

Ethnic sentiment is a display whether verbal or non-verbal use of language that shows ethnic colouration and bias. It is usually unhealthy in a heterogeneous society with multi-ethnic groups. Senator Elisha Abbo hails from Adamawa State in the North-Eastern part on Nigeria. Some comments used against him have ethnic colourations and they constituted 3% of the total sampled comments. Examples:

1. “Point of correction, he is **not Nigerian Senator but Adamawa Senator**. Now continue” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. “The man is a **compound fool** and a disgrace to his father and his fatherland. He should be pursued to the RUGA ranch in Adamawa, I hear there's one there already, let him be hitting cows since that is all he knows - hitting and slapping” (*Punch*, July 2019).
3. “My own point is that the Senator is not sober, meaning that he is rude, brash, harsh and uncultured. None of the people in the committee is clean either. But He has descended to the level of the Ant by beating a woman in public. He must learn from the Ants before he can climb up. The **Northern ego and stubbornness in him** is still peeping out via his Babariga. **Cow!!!**” (*Punch*, July 2019).

Most online comments linked the assault to the ethnicity of Senator Elisha Abbo. Some believed that as a Northerner, the senator is probably in support of the RUGA settlement. The comment in example 22 above condemned Senator Elisha Abbo as a senatorial senator; not a Nigerian or national senator.

Comments that show Religious Tone/Sentiment on Senator Elisha Abbo

Explicitly, some comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of the female sales representative had **religious tone** because Senator Elisha is a Christian and perpetrator of gender-based violence. They constituted 3% of the total sampled size and the comments below fits into this category:

1. “Because he is a **Fulani Christian**, I can see how this people that haven't seen anything bad about themselves is now shouting crucify him crucify him. Smart Fulanis, outsmarting the I too knows” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. “**Ambassador of Christ buying dildo** to propagate the gospel” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

3. “**Ambassador of Christ in a sex toy shop.** Was he ministering or patronising?” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

Some comments are either direct attacks against government’s proposed actions against Senator Elisha Abbo or mockeries against Christianity. For instance, example 28 and 29 are subtle mockery of Christianity. “Ambassador of Christ buying dildo to propagate the gospel” and “Ambassador of Christ in a sex toy shop” are expressions that mock Senator Elisha Abbo as a Christian.

Comments that show Gender-based Tone/Sentiment on Senator Elisha Abbo

Another category of tone used by the audience is the **gender-based tone**. The online readers used this tone to rebuke Senator Elisha Abbo’s for assaulting a female sales representative. These constituted 6% of the total sampled size and manifest in comments like:

1. “If not for CCTV by now we would have been hearing stuffs like: The story does not add up; Are you sure it is a sex toy shop? She slapped him first and he retaliated; She must have said something horrible; He just raised his hand and mistakenly hit her; What was another girl doing inside the counter? BlaBlaBlaBlaBlaBla... Mehn...Nigerian women should be declared "species in constant danger" based on the quantity of **political barbarians** we've got out there” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. “The apology is not complete, **he must pay for assaulting someone's wife and nursing mother** for that matter. I wonder how his wife will feel now because she said her husband is innocent” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
3. “He apologised and pled not guilty in court. Which one do we believe? **He is just a woman beater and has no respect for the feminine gender**” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).

The manifest comments above condemned Senator Elisha Abbo for disrespecting the female gender. These manifests in expressions like: “he is just a woman beater and has no respect for the feminine gender;” “Nigerian women should be declared species in constant danger;” etc. Some of these comments also used the **gender-basedtone** to blame the female sales representative for being in the sex toy shop or provoking Senator Elisha Abbo. Examples of these comments are:

1. “Don't insult him pls... He remains the best... Moreover, we **women do act stupidly**” (*Daily Trust*, July 2019).
2. “This thing is nonsense **what is a nursing mother doing in sex toy shop if she is not an ashawo**” (*Daily Trust*, July 2019).

The comments that blamed the female sales representative were manifest in expressions like: “Moreover, we women do act stupidly;” “what is a nursing mother doing in sex toy shop if she is not an ashawo;” “What of women who assault men;” “See women killing their husbands u guys are here nagging;” “When a woman over

run her mouth what did she expect ‘slap’ slap slap;” “nobody is talking of what the lady said that prompted the action of the slapping Senator.”

Comments that show Political Tone/Sentiment on Senator Elisha Abbo

Following the assault of the female sales representative, comments also made use of the **political tone**. It was believed that the assault had so much interrogation because Senator Abbo is a member of the opposition party. These comments constituted 7% of the total sampled sized. Few examples of these comments include:

1. “**Could this happen to an APC senator?**” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. “**PDPig is a party of impunity**. Thank God for those of us that made sure PDPig is voted out of power” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
3. “**Never too young to Fuckup**. Welcome to PDP 101” (*Daily Trust*, July 2019)

The above comments implies that some online newspaper readers believed that if the Senator was a member of the ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC), the interrogation would have been over. The commentators also made reference to past events involving APC politicians but was ignored. These manifests in such expressions as: “Could this happen to an APC senator?” “You know you are not in APC, you went and committed this kind of crime;” “Kangaroo panel;” “Just decamp to APC;” “APC sycophants and Pharisees;” etc.

Some commentators also believed that the PDP is not a credible political party. This also manifests in expressions like: “PDPig is a party of impunity;” “Never too young to Fuckup.”

Comments that show Neutral Sentiment/Tone on Senator Elisha Abbo

Comments with the **neutral tone** revealed the online readers’ non-sentimental stand on Senator Elisha Abbo’s assault of a female sales representative in Abuja. These comments were objective and they constituted 2% of the total sampled size. Few examples include:

1. “This case and that of COZA buttresses the power of social media. I look forward to revolution day” (*Premium Times*, July 2019).
2. “It was never so rather the gangster senator Mr. Tinubu was trying to show him that her husband controls the senate. I love the courage of the senator as he didn't hesitate in confronting her. But Mr Senator, I don't like the way the nursing mum was beaten by you. You need to face the real men in the street if you are a good fighter” (*Daily Trust*, July 2019).

Some comments had neutral opinion on some events around the assault of the female sales representative by Senator Abbo. These online newspaper readers did not use the attack, praise, dispositional, ethnic, religious or political tone. Following the reactions from the online newspaper readers, a photojournalist reported that he was also assaulted by Senator Elisha Abbo in 2014.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀. There is no significant relationship between the gender and tone of comments used by online readers' on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of sales representative in Abuja.

Gender of Commenters * Tone of Comments * Facebook Pages Cross tabulation

Facebook Pages		Table of comments							Total	
		Praise	Attack	Dispositional	Ethnic	Religious	Gender- based	Political Neutral		
<i>Premium Times</i>	<i>Male</i>	Count 6	54	40	3	2	2	11	2	120
		% of 4.6%	41.5%	30.8%	2.3%	1.5%	1.5%	8.5%	1.5%	92.3%
	Total									
<i>Premium Times</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 4	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	10
		% of 3.1%	3.1%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%
	Total									
Total	<i>Male</i>	Count 10	58	42	3	2	2	11	2	130
		% of 7.7%	44.6%	32.3%	2.3%	1.5%	1.5%	8.5%	1.5%	100.0%
	Total									
<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 2	56	33	3	4	14	8	2	122
		% of 1.5%	43.1%	25.4%	2.3%	3.1%	10.8%	6.2%	1.5%	93.8%
	Total									
<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Male</i>	Count 0	4	2	0	0	1	1	0	8
		% of 0.0%	3.1%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	6.2%
	Total									
<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 2	60	35	3	4	15	9	2	130
		% of 1.5%	46.2%	26.9%	2.3%	3.1%	11.5%	6.9%	1.5%	100.0%
	Total									
Total	<i>Male</i>	Count 4	68	23	3	3	7	7	4	119
		% of 3.1%	52.3%	17.7%	2.3%	2.3%	5.4%	5.4%	3.1%	91.5%
	Total									
<i>Punch</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 0	7	1	1	1	0	1	0	11
		% of 0.0%	5.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	8.5%
	Total									
<i>Punch</i>	<i>Male</i>	Count 4	75	24	4	4	7	8	4	130
		% of 3.1%	57.7%	18.5%	3.1%	3.1%	5.4%	6.2%	3.1%	100.0%
	Total									
<i>Punch</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 12	178	96	9	9	23	26	8	361
		% of 3.1%	45.6%	24.6%	2.3%	2.3%	5.9%	6.7%	2.1%	92.6%
	Total									
Total	<i>Male</i>	Count 4	15	5	1	1	1	2	0	29
		% of 1.0%	3.8%	1.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	0.0%	7.4%
	Total									
<i>Punch</i>	<i>Female</i>	Count 16	193	101	10	10	24	28	8	390
		% of 4.1%	49.5%	25.9%	2.6%	2.6%	6.2%	7.2%	2.1%	100.0%
	Total									

From the cross-tabulation tables above, it could be seen that the male online newspaper readers of *Premium Times* newspaper used the attack (41.5%) and dispositional (30.8%) tone to comment on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault than the female online newspaper readers and majority of the female online newspaper readers used the praise (3.1%) and attack (3.1%) tone. This indicates that the females support the Senator

Elisha Abbo actions or decisions concerning the assault of a female sales representative and also turned their backs against the assault of a female sales representative by Senator Elisha Abbo and present the Senator in negative light. The implication of this hypothesis is that there is no significant relationship between the gender and tone of comments used by *Premium Times* online newspaper readers' on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja.

For *Daily Trust*, the test showed that males used the attack (43.1%) and dispositional (25.4%) tone and the females used the attack (3.1%) and dispositional (1.5%) tone to comment on Senator Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja. From the test, it is clear that gender has no influence on the tone of comments. The test also showed that there is strong evidence that the gender of the online newspaper readers does not determine their tone of comment.

The test above showed that *Punch* had 52.8% of men used the attack tone and 5.4% of women used the attack tone as well. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the gender of *the Punch* Newspaper online readers and their tone of comments.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed the gender of the commenters of *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch*. The males were 361 (92.6%) and females were 29 (7.4%). The males constituted more of the commenters across the three select Facebook pages and this could be because majority of women in Nigeria do not like getting involved in online discussions. The essence of analysing the volume of likes was to evaluate the amount of Facebook online newspaper readers that clicked the like button on stories about Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja. Quantitative data generated showed that the stories of the assault on *Punch* newspaper had 6,387 (59%) likes. However, *Premium Times* had 2804 (26%) and *Daily Trust* had 1,573 (15%). The implication of the data is that majority of online readers liked *Punch* newspapers' stories of Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in Abuja. *Punch* newspaper had a more interactive readership, followed by *Premium Times* while *Daily Trust* had the least interactive readership.

A total of 390 online newspaper readers' comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female sales representative in the three select Facebook pages were analysed and it was revealed that *Premium Times* had 130 comments, *Daily Trust* had 130 and *Punch* newspaper had 130 comments. The implication of this finding is that 390 comments were selected and they were evenly distributed among the three select Facebook pages for equal analysis.

The quantitative data generated presented that 49.5% of the comments had the attack tone, 25.9% had the dispositional tone while 7.2% had the political tone but the gender-based tone had 6.2%, praise tone had 4.1%, ethnic and religious tone had 2.6% and 2.6% respectively and the neutral tone comments had 2.1%. The use of the attack and dispositional tone showed that Nigerians were against the ugly act exhibited by

Senator Elisha Abbo on the assault of the female sales representative in Abuja. It is evident that the comments linked the assault to his political party, religion and ethnicity. The implication of the data above is that Nigerians showed a negative attitude towards Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of the female sales representative in Abuja.

Based on the tone of the comments used especially attack, dispositional, political, ethnic and religious tones, the findings may have an effect of the unity of Nigeria. Social media platforms could also be used as effective tools not only for intensifying existing conflicts among different ethnic, religious, sexual identities but also reproducing them in daily life (Özarslan, 2014). This is similar to the findings in a study by Konnikova (2013) in Jubril & Simon (2018) also found that most of the online readers' comments particularly, anonymous ones are usually uncivil, aggressive and negative in nature. The quantitative data generated revealed that in *Premium Times*, the attack tone was 14.9% and dispositional tone was 10.8%, *Daily Trust* had attack which was 15.4% and dispositional was 9% and *Punch* also had attack as the dominant tone with 19.2% and 6.2% were dispositional. Therefore, majority (49.5%) of the online newspaper readers of the select Facebook pages used the attack tone and dispositional tone was 25.9% and these were the dominant tones across the Facebook pages of *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspaper. In all, the analysis showed that the least used tone (2.1%) was the neutral tone. This entails that the neutral tone was used people that were neither in support nor against Senator Elisha Abbo for assaulting a female sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria.

The implication of the data presented above is that majority of the online newspaper readers used the attack tone, followed by dispositional tone while the least used was the neutral tone. This agrees with the study by Ende & Dzurkogi (2012) on the relationship between verbal terror and online news readers' comments. The study discovered that comments deemed as offensive employed hate speech, threats, abusive language and assassination of character on the social media to vent anger, frustration and register their dissatisfaction about political, economic, religious, security and social issues in the society. Ajiboye (2013, p. 131) further states that 'discourse plays a fundamental role in the daily expression and reproduction of cognitive and social ideologies.' The audience on the social media platforms hardly think about the implications of their comments which can increase the disunity among Nigerians (Dauda *et al*, as cited in Auwal, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Facebook as a social media platform gives people the opportunity to interact and air their views on a subject of interest. The researchers also conclude that the Nigerians were at rage concerning the assault of a female sales representative by Senator Elisha Abbo. This explains why majority of the online newspaper readers' comments used the attack tone and made hateful comments about the Senator Elisha Abbo. More so, the dispositional tone was used to show the online readers' level of disagreement with most

decisions the government made as regards the assault by Senator Elisha Abbo. Following the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. First, there have been cases of gender-based violence perpetuated by politicians, both male and female. Several politicians have assaulted an opposite gender like Dino Melaye, Adams Oshiomole and Senator Oluremi Tinubu. Therefore, there should be laws against gender-based assaults perpetuated by politicians.
2. Another challenge is that social media users inflict hateful statements while commenting on subjects they disagree with. There is a need for self-inflicted social responsibility on the part of social media users rather than passing opinions based on one's religion, ethnicity or social class as evident from the numerous comments.

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